

Diocese Policy on Post-Marriage Continued Development

Introduction

Modern marriages face different dangers at various stages. Pre-marriage training is obviously a good starting point for a successful marriage, but post-marital continued development is equally important to allow the growth of a good marital life. In view of this, the Diocese needs to institute a policy for post-marriage continued development, to assist the laity to live the Christian faith in their married lives. Based on inspirations from John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation '*the Familiaris Consortio*' and a vision to build up a spirituality on marriage, Bishop Joseph Zen, S.D.B., after consulting the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, has approved the following policy on post-marriage continued development, formulated by the Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family (abbr. as "DPCMF"):

1. Inspirations from 'Familiaris Consortio'

'By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy: "This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity." This fact is explicitly recalled by the Second Vatican Council when it says that Jesus Christ "abides with them so that, just as he loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self bestowal ... (the spouses) are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God."

Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life. This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality that draws its inspiration from themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection, and sign,.....

Christian marriage is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church. the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a "spiritual sacrifice". (56)

2. Spiritual Development in Marriage

Spiritual development in marriage starts when the couple seeks common grounds while accepting existing differences, and learns to live the Way, leading onto harmonious co-existence in God's love.

Like new born babies, 0-6 years is an important period for growth. During the first 6 years of marriage, whether from the point of view of conditioning, resolution of conflicts, family formation and development of the married relationship, it is extremely fragile and any mistakes can prove to be grave. Intimate care, companionship and other such nutrients cannot be withheld. Thus, the Diocese, the parish and organisations providing marriage advisory services, all have extremely important roles and functions.

To stipulate the importance of 'family' as regarded by the Church, as well as the type of nurture, protection, education, support and co-operation to be given, is the basis of this pastoral policy.

Conjugal spirituality, developed around praying, sharing and bearing witness, must: 1. View challenges posed by the current living situation without bias; 2. Seek inspirations from the central Christian beliefs; 3. Use modern language to explicate the values. (please refer to appendix 1).

3. Recommendations

3.1 At the Diocese level, the ideal of 'learner type' marriage and families, and the general acceptance of the importance of post-marriage continued development should be urged. These require incorporating them into pastoral measures, such as the teaching of catechism, promotion of a life of prayers and liturgies and the training of the laity. The Marriage Commission should continuously encourage related organisations, laity groups and parish family groups to hold discussion meetings, so that findings on post marital development work can be shared, and experience gained, whether from successful or failed cases, can be made known to the public in general. This involves continuous advocacy work, done over a long period of time, since time is needed to allow the message to filter through and fundamentally change thoughts and beliefs.

We recommend the Diocese to hold annual wedding anniversary celebrations for the whole Diocese, to promote and give witness to the fundamental values of marriage. We also recommend the Diocese to appoint clergy, deacons or pastoral sisters who have had professional training in marriage pastoral counselling or spiritual guidance, to provide pastoral care to Catholic couples.

- 3.2 At the parish level, the parish family group is a permanent unit within the parish, and takes up an active role, to co-operate with related organisations or laity groups, to push forward different types of activities in developing post marital thinking at the base level; we further recommend the promotion of the couples' companions movement, where mature Catholic couples with spiritual Grace, through giving witness, lead, support and influence other couples within the parish, especially the newly wedded ones. In addition, we encourage Catholic spouses to bear witness to and spread the Gospel of Christ to their other halves who have yet to have found their faith, thereby creating more togetherness within the marriages.
- 3.3 For Catholic organisations and laity family movement groups, we recommend the development of resource services on marriage/family life (e.g. communications for the newly weds, information on the internet, multi-media productions, etc), support services (e.g. couples group, breast feeding support groups, etc) and counselling services (e.g. divorced Catholics self help groups etc). Organisations should indeed carry out surveys on the effectiveness of pre-marriage preparation activities and follow up on them, to correctly understand the needs of newly wedded couples, to strengthen the relationship network with them, and to promote the idea of the need for continued training after marriage, so that the ideal of successful couples, successful parents can be achieved.

Conclusion

Advocating post marital continued development is a lengthy and formidable pastoral task. It requires all within the Diocese to be of one heart and mind to effectively and actively carry out. The "DPCMF" firmly believes that the health of the laity's married and family lives is a concrete benchmark of the vitality and the spiritedness of the HK Diocese.

Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family
November 16th 2004

Appendix 1

Faith/Theology	Common View/Modern Language
Christian view of marriage as the horizontal axis	Current challenges as the vertical axis
* Vow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage is merely a paper contract: signed freely; whether to stay together or separate depends on one's wish? • Not change one's mind, until death do us part? • It is particularly precious not to falter as it is done out of free will: became one when there was love, became whole when there was detest; success requires absolute determination.
* Creation of the world: to serve life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life is a responsibility? A curse? • Life is also a blessing, is good, meaningful, worth to be continued; • Life touches other lives; • Loved before becoming a foetus, before out of mother's womb.
* The Cross and Resurrection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage is like being in shackles? The deathbed of love? • Marriage is a place for learning to grow, to trust, love and forgive; • A cocoon where man/woman undergo transformation?
* The journey of salvation; (already but not yet) Never ending purification, passover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage is a lie, a trap; how can there be 'living happily forever after'? • Growth is a process, cannot be reached in one step; • Difficult times are opportunities to further oneself; • Pain is a motivation for change.
* Two people become one; Christ as the Lord and the teacher ; Since this is the fact, it is also the goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two people becoming one: it means firstly the loss of self? Secondly the bearing of the burden? Why endure the pain? • To become one also requires a transitional process: to open up to the other, to serve and support one another, while giving consideration to personal freedom, the other's dignity and personal space as the fundamental principal, so that a democratic communal life of man and wife can be achieved. • The physical bodies becoming one is already sensational; surely the coming together of body, heart and soul is even more so?
* Love, Faith and Hope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believing that man strives not only for comfort and a full stomach?

<p>* Sunday: peace and leisure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The courage to bear with the danger of trusting another; courage to believe in the possibility of a new life• Trusting others, with hope for the future• Believing that sacrificing self for the love of others is not an useless task • Not only has there to be time for earning a living and bringing up the children, there should also be peaceful and leisurely time to be a couple, to allow oneself a break and just to be oneself.
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