

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Synod 2014

Background Paper:

“Salt of the Earth, Light of the World, Leaven of Society”

Marriage and Family as the Effective Sign of Christ in the World

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Introduction by

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The teachings of the faith on marriage is to be presented in an articulate and efficacious manner, so that it might reach hearts and transform them in accordance with God's will, made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Preparatory Document for the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops
“Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization”

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This section was written Bishop Donald J. Hying, the Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee, and it serves as the introduction for all eight Synod background papers. Bishop Hying presents “intentional discipleship” as our fundamental Catholic identity and the singular focus for all of our Synod considerations and challenges us to view all aspects of the Church in light of “formation for discipleship.”

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I. Introduction: Discipleship: Our Fundamental Catholic Identity

Introduction written by Bishop Donald J. Hying

In the Gospels, Jesus confronts us with a fundamental question: Who do you say that I am? As Christians and members of the Church, we answer with Simon, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In faith, we can add Savior, Light of the world, the Word made flesh, the Resurrection, the Prince of Peace. Through the saving activity of Jesus' Incarnation, life, death and resurrection, we become adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, all in the mystery, communion and sacrament of the Church. The relationship that Jesus enjoys with the Father by nature of who he is, we receive as a pure offer of grace.

Baptized into the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, we proclaim Christ's saving Gospel through a faith lived out in the words, actions, work, relationships and values of our lives. Our fundamental identity as disciples of Jesus Christ gives focus and method to the important activity of the new evangelization. As we painfully know, too many Catholics have not really been evangelized to know and experience the personal love of Jesus Christ, have been poorly catechized in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, and do not participate in the sacramental life of the Church in any meaningful way. If we seek to change this disturbing trend, parishes must continue to grow in their fundamental identity as dynamic communities of faith which form intentional disciples. If we are not focused on formation for discipleship, we are failing the mission of Christ.

What do intentional Catholic disciples look like? How do they act? What is qualitatively different about their lives and personalities? The answer is clear yet challenging. Disciples are ordinary people who have experienced the love, forgiveness, presence, consolation and challenge of God poured out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. They have fallen in love with the Lord and find their deepest identity in their relationship with him. They find God and the mission of his Kingdom to be the fundamental purpose of their lives and, having a strong **Catholic identity**, find the whole Catholic experience of the Scriptures, sacraments, moral life and prayer to be the transformative means of their ongoing conversion. As Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, they are people loved and forgiven by Jesus Christ.

Disciples instinctively **evangelize**, that is they naturally share their experience of God and their faith in him with others. The power of moral example itself evangelizes, as others intuitively sense that such a person lives from a very different center of meaning and purpose than secular society. In addition to witnessing by example, disciples are both courageous and articulate in their proclamation of Jesus and the difference he has made in their lives. They will freely pray with others, do volunteer work, witness to how the Lord has worked in their daily experience, offer moral advice when asked, share spiritual books, CDs and DVDs with family, friends and co-workers, all the while actively cultivating a discipleship response in those around them. The power of one Catholic who knows, practices and proclaims the faith is truly remarkable.

An intentional disciple is a good **steward**, knowing that everything in life is a superabundant gift freely bestowed upon us by the Lord, both to enrich us but also to bless and benefit others. This deep conviction of existence as a gift leads to a profound gratitude that pours itself out in deeds of mercy, love and healing. Like Mary who anoints the feet of Jesus with an extravagant costly perfume that cost 300 days' wages, we are compelled to break open and pour out the gifts of our lives in loving service of others and so fill the world with the sacred fragrance of Christ.

An intentional disciple is a Catholic maximalist, not asking what the minimum is that **must** be done in order to be saved, but rather asking what **can** be done for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Like St. Paul, a disciple has moved from the obligation of the law into the astonishing freedom of Christ, who liberates us to do every good work. In this context, the Blessed Virgin Mary is clearly the first and premier disciple who responds in total faith to the seemingly impossible proposal of the angel, places her entire being at the service of God and gives flesh to the Incarnate Word.

St. Augustine insists that when a Christian disciple places the whole mystery and gift of life at the service of God, the Lord Jesus takes flesh within that person and is offered to the world once again. For us as Catholics, in this critical moment in history, we cannot afford to proceed with business as usual. All over the world, millions of Catholics are asking the same questions:

- How can I have a deeper and more authentic relationship with Jesus Christ?
- How can I more effectively live out my faith in such a way that it actually makes a difference in the lives of others, especially my family and friends?
- How can we continue to insert Gospel values into the public square of politics, economy, health care and education?
- How can we bring back all of those Catholics who have fallen away from the practice of the faith?

In millions of different ways, intentional disciples are living out the exciting answers to these important questions. If the Gospel is the script of our lives, the new evangelization is the urgent challenge to act out with fresh enthusiasm and generosity the great drama of Christ's salvation.

Synod 2014 invites us to consider anew how to be intentional disciples, especially in the areas of Catholic Social Teaching, Cultural Diversity, Evangelization, Formation, Leadership, Liturgy, Marriage and Family, and Stewardship.

Introduction and Overview

The New Evangelization calls every Catholic to intentional discipleship that is lived out through the personal call and vocation of each and every person. For many Christians, theirs is a vocation to marriage. Pope Francis concluded his recent October 27, 2013 homily with a reflection on the joy of living as a Christian family. He shared that, “The family which experiences the joy of faith communicates it naturally.” He then added, “*That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is the leaven of society.*” Yet today, while many are quick to recognize and point out the “crisis of vocations” to the priesthood and consecrated life, many do not realize that the Church now has an even larger and more pervasive crisis of vocations—a steep decline in the number of people approaching the Church for sacramental marriage. This is critical because marriage serves not only as the foundation and building block of civil society and of the family; it is within this family that our faith is formed. “The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family.” (*Lumen Fidei* 52) Marriage also exists as a source of natural blessings to the couple, their family and to society, in such a way that Blessed John Paul II reiterated continually throughout his life, the “future of humanity depends on marriage and the family.” (*Familiaris Consortio* 75)

But what do we mean when we talk about marriage? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that marriage is a lifelong partnership of the whole of life, of mutual and exclusive fidelity, established by mutual consent between a man and a woman, and ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation of offspring. (CCC no.1601) The Church teaches that marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman, and that this union—if validly entered and consummated—creates a bond that cannot be dissolved by the will of the spouses. (CIC cc. 1056, 1134, 1141) **This is because marriage is a natural and supernatural gift.** It is given by God the Creator and lived out according to His plan, with each spouse giving of themselves completely to the other. The entire community shares in this gift through the bearing and the raising of children, and through the witness of the couple to God’s divine plan. Although this natural blessing of marriage was distorted by original sin, it was not lost; it was Christ Himself who restored and elevated marriage as a sign of His love for the Church. Christian spouses help each other to grow in holiness and lead each other to heaven.

Marriage is the unique union of a man and a woman. In Genesis 1:27 we read that man and woman are created in God’s own image, “male and female He created them.” They are equal in dignity and both sexes are necessary for God’s divine plan. Man and woman complement each other as husband and wife, and only a man and woman can form the intimate union of love and life called marriage. It is this unique union that has the potential to bring new life into the world. **Marriage is also a communion of love and life.** As God is a “*communio* of persons” in the Trinity, so the husband and wife form a communion of persons within their family. In this unique communion of persons, there are two inseparable purposes: the unitive, which is “love-giving,” and the procreative, which is “life-giving.” Couples who are called to sacramental marriage establish a partnership for their whole life, vowing fidelity, and promising to be open to the gift of children. The nuptial act in which they share signifies the marital covenant, and each act must be open to life. Natural methods of family planning respect God’s own design for married love.

Marriage is a sacrament of Christ’s love. This spousal love participates in and makes present Christ’s love for His Church. Christ’s love for the Church is the very model for marital love, and this marital love is called to be *total, faithful, permanent, life-giving and self-giving*. Both Matrimony and Holy Orders are sacraments at the service of communion, because they are directed toward the service of others. Yet it is only with the help of the grace of Jesus Christ that these sacraments can be lived and realized.

In addition, marriage is the foundation of the family and society. Marriage is the foundation of the family and of society. It is life-giving not only because children are borne from marriage, but it is also life-giving to the extended family and to the wider community. The husband and wife then create a “domestic church” (FC 49) that mirrors the gathered Church. This domestic church is characterized by the care that the spouses show for each other, and that is realized in their own growth in faith. Their children are taught how to pray and to follow the commandments, growing in virtue. The members of their growing family are nourished by the Eucharist, and supported by the faith community. Their familial love overflows to reach out in an embrace of the world and to be at service to society. In that way the domestic church builds up the kingdom of God.

Marriage is also truly a journey of human and spiritual growth. Grace builds on nature in such a way that we can come to understand that it is within marriage and the family that the human and the spiritual are most deeply intertwined. This spiritual growth, or growth in holiness, simply means a growing in the virtues; virtues cultivated by the habits learned within the family. For married couples, the goal of their married life is to image Christ’s love for His Church; thus, we understand that marriage is a vocation. It is a call from God and it is as necessary and as authentic as other vocations in the Church. In a very specific way, it is the response to the universal call to holiness and an imitation of Christ’s self-giving love. **In its essence, marriage is a school of love and gratitude.** For the spouses, each must recognize the other as God’s gift. This is their ongoing call. This recognition leads to gratitude, and helps them to grow and persevere in charity. This gratitude opens the spouse to receive further gifts from God, especially in the gift of children. As a family, they reach out in this openness and respond to anyone in need. This slow growth in Christ’s love changes the Christian couple as they become signs of the kingdom of God and blessings and gifts to each other and the world. In this way they become signs of hope in the power of Christ to transform hearts.

Current Cultural Realities

Few dispute that there have been seismic changes in the cultural realities facing married couples and families. When asked, many couples can point to many positive realities that help them to live out God’s plan for their marriage. These changes range from a greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, a stronger promotion of the dignity of women, and the realization of the Church’s mission proper to the family and to its responsibility in helping to build a more just society. (FC 6) Many of these couples would also point out the negative cultural realities which make living out a marriage that is faithful and fruitful difficult, and at times seemingly impossible. Some see a culture that is overtly “hostile” to marriage and family life, and which cultivates a frenetic “busyness” that is seemingly inescapable, and which is detrimental to raising a holy and happy family. Other threats to marriage and family life exist, such as the rampant and pervasive pornographic elements in our society that has grown exponentially and which is now brought directly into homes through the internet.

Concerns which were unheard of until a few years ago have arisen today as a result of different situations, from the widespread practice of cohabitation, which does not lead to marriage, and sometimes even excludes the idea of it, to same-sex unions between persons, who are, not infrequently, permitted to adopt children. The many new situations requiring the Church’s attention and pastoral care include: mixed or inter-religious marriages; the single-parent family; polygamy; marriages with the consequent problem of a dowry,

sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman; the caste system; a culture of non-commitment and a presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary; forms of feminism hostile to the Church; migration and the reformulation of the very concept of the family; relativist pluralism in the conception of marriage; the influence of the media on popular culture in its understanding of marriage and family life; underlying trends of thought in legislative proposals which devalue the idea of permanence and faithfulness in the marriage covenant; an increase in the practice of surrogate motherhood (wombs for hire); and new interpretations of what is considered a human right. ("Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization," Extraordinary Synod Preparatory Document)

The Church calls on the faithful to work to strengthen marriage and to become witnesses in society to its true meaning. The United States bishops have written a pastoral letter meant to strengthen and catechize couples entitled *Marriage-Love and Life in the Divine Plan*. In this pastoral letter, the bishops acknowledge these threats to marriage, and articulate and identify four fundamental challenges that contemporary society poses to the nature and purposes of marriage and the family. Many see this Archdiocesan Synod as an opportunity for an "evangelization blueprint" on marriage and the family, and also see the upcoming Extraordinary Synod of 2014 in Rome as giving welcome attention to the pastoral challenges that married couples face in living out the vocation to marriage. Below are the four challenges to marriage as identified by the United States Bishops in their 2009 pastoral letter on marriage:

- **Cohabitation.** Today many couples are living together in a sexual relationship, and yet are not married. They have many reasons for this, ranging from economics to convenience, and do damage to their own relationship by not reserving this nuptial love for the covenant of marriage. For many, cohabiting has become an actual "step" on the way to the lifelong commitment of marriage.
- **Divorce.** Marriage by its very nature is meant to be a lifelong covenantal union. The Catechism tells us (2384) that divorce, "claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death." Jesus himself taught that divorce is against the binding nature of marriage as intended by the Creator. (Matthew 19:3-9) While understanding that in some cases, divorce may be the only solution, God's plan for marriage exists and "He continues to offer mercy and healing grace." (LLDP 25)
- **Same-Sex Unions.** "Marriage is a unique union, a relationship different from all others. It is the permanent bond between one man and one woman whose two-in-one-flesh communion of persons is an indispensable good at the heart of every family and every society. Therefore, attempting to redefine marriage to include such relationships empties the term of its meaning, for it excludes the essential complementarity between man and woman, treating sexual difference as if it were irrelevant to what marriage is." (LLDP 22)
- **Contraception.** Each marital act signifies, embodies, and renews the original and enduring marital covenant between husband and wife. Blessed John Paul II wrote extensively that engaging in marital intercourse is "speaking a language of the body." (LLDP 18) Artificial contraception is opposed to God's plan for marriage because it makes the nuptial act "signify, or speak, something less than the unreserved self-gift intended in the marriage promises."

These challenges are significant, yet they also provide opportunities for the evangelization by couples who can witness to their own covenants of marriage. Many of these challenges are pervasive within the culture, and there is a great need for **pre-evangelization**—even among the faithful-- of a true anthropology of the person. It is therefore best if the evangelization of married couples begins as simply one of the joyful living witness of those married couples faithfully living out the Church’s teachings on marriage in daily life. This witness in love will help to recover an awareness of the real value of the human person, especially within the vocation of marriage, and to prepare couples to “hear” the Church teaching and accept it.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundations for marriage and the family are found in the very beginning of Sacred Scripture. The two creation accounts in the book of Genesis communicate truths about the understanding of man and woman and the relationship between them. In the first account, God creates male and female at the same time, in His image, and finds it to be “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) “In this way, Sacred Scripture affirms the fundamental equality and dignity of man and woman as persons created in God’s image.” (LLDP 9) The second account of creation highlights the necessity of both sexes for God’s divine plan. “It is not good for the man to be alone.” (Genesis 2:18) So God creates a “helpmate” (*ezer*) who is a “suitable partner for the man.” (Genesis 2:20) When Adam sees the woman, he cries out in joy: “This one, at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called “woman” (*ishah*), for out of “her man” (*ish*) this one has been taken. (Genesis 2:23) “Adam and Eve were literally made for each other. Man and woman have been made to come together in the union of marriage.” (LLDP 9) “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body (flesh).” (Genesis 2:24)

The Vatican II document, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, 48)* expands on this section of Genesis:

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by his laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence, by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. . . . Thus, a man and a woman who by their compact of conjugal love ‘are no longer two, but one flesh’ (Mt 19:6ff).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church further elucidates the place of marriage within man’s relationship with God. In his mercy, God does not forsake sinful man. Rather, the nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel prepare the way for a new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving His life, unites to Himself all of mankind, which is saved by Him, thus preparing for the “wedding feast of the Lamb.” (Revelation 19:7) At the beginning of His public life, the Lord chooses to perform his first sign during a wedding feast. “The Church attaches great importance to Jesus’ presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence.” (CCC1613) The inviolable fidelity of the spouses, as

they make a gift of themselves to each other is “definitive”: The “intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demands total fidelity from the spouse and requires an unbreakable union between them.” (GS 48)

Yet the Church recognizes the difficulty in living out this unbreakable union and acknowledges that it can seem difficult and even impossible to bind oneself for life to another human. (CCC 1648) That is the genesis for the overt pastoral ministry that the Church as Mother extends to her children. It is with this pastoral ministry to married couples and the family in mind that then Pope John Paul II crafted his seminal, *Familiaris Consortio* in 1981. In it, he speaks to all families in the modern world, and in the name of the Church, offers help to those already aware of the value of marriage and the family who seek to live it out faithfully. He also offers this support to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth (FC 1). In this document, the Holy Father speaks to this precise moment of history in which the family is the object of forces which seek to destroy it or in some way deform it (FC 3), and points to the reality that the well-being of society is intimately tied to the good of the family. By supporting and strengthening the family, the Church seeks to ensure the full development of the person, and thus make possible their contribution to the renewal of society and of the people of God.

The bishops of the United States in their *National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage* began a far-ranging endeavor to strengthen, promote and defend marriage, including a permanent website with resources and the creation of the Defense of Marriage Office as a permanent office of the USCCB. As part of this *Initiative*, the bishops wrote a pastoral letter from the conference entitled *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*. In it, they acknowledge the difficulties in contemporary society related to marriage, and call for a comprehensive and collaborative ministry to marriages. They seek a ministry that would be made present within local dioceses that would proclaim and witness to the fullness of God’s Revelation about the meaning of marriage. In terms of pastoral theology, the bishops ask dioceses to accompany and assist people in all stages of their journey (from early years as young adults learning about committed relationships through married life and even beyond to those grieving the loss of a spouse). The bishops also encouraged a serious approach that would celebrate and incorporate the diversity of races, cultures, ethnicity, and heritage of all couples, and a ministry that would be open to the call of the New Evangelization as one that is new in “ardor, methods, and expressions.”

This defense of marriage and the family took prominence in Pope Francis’ first encyclical “Light of Faith”:

“The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This union is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God’s own love, and of the acknowledgement and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) and are enabled to give birth to a new life, a manifestation of the Creator’s goodness, wisdom and loving plan. Grounded in this love, a man and a woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture which engages their entire lives and mirrors many features of faith. Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love” (LF, 52). “Faith is no refuge for the faint-hearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation

of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness." (LF 53)

Today, Pope Francis is seeking input as preparations begin for the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "The Pastoral Challenges for the Family in the Context of Evangelization" which will take place in the fall of 2014. This effort by the worldwide Church seeks to defend, promote, strengthen, heal and reconcile marriages and to create a vibrant culture of marriage that is rooted in God's plan for the good of humanity.

Social Science and Other Wisdom

The changes in the reality of marriage as an institution are clearly borne out in current data. For example, a new "marriage gap" has emerged in the United States, with marriage becoming increasingly aligned with income. While marriage has declined among all groups, marriage remains the norm for those adults with college educations and steady incomes. However, marriage is now dramatically less of a reality among those in the lower socio-economic categories. There is also startling evidence of a "generational gap." *Pew Research Social and Demographic Trend: "The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families"* (November 18, 2010) reports that in 1960, two-thirds or 68% of all twenty-somethings were married. In 2008, just 26% were. There are many reasons for this: length of college and post-college study, positive views on cohabitation without marriage and same-sex unions, and a higher premium on economic security. Some also note that many of these young adults today are children of divorce, and much more reluctant to marry because of their own background experiences of unsuccessful marriages.

The gradual re-definition of marriage and the family has influenced couples also. According to this data, the public does not see marriage as the only path to family formation. 86% percent of those surveyed say a single parent and child constitute a family and 80% say that a couple living together with a child is a family. In addition, 63% percent of the respondents believe gay or lesbian couples raising a child should be considered a family. The single most identifiable index in these statistics is the existence of children. If a cohabiting couple has no children, a majority of the public says they are not a family. However, marriage does matter: if a childless couple is married, 88% consider them to be a family.

As the faithful face these dramatic changes in marriage and the understanding of the family within the culture in which it lives, and as the Church seeks to reach out in a pastoral way to minister to families, the question must be asked: "What does it mean to live out the Catholic faith and the teachings of the Church on marriage, married sexuality, and family when the prevailing majority of citizens clearly believe and live another reality?" In other words, in light of the current data from social scientists, is *marriage becoming obsolete?*

As an answer to questions such as these, Blessed John Paul II answers the social scientists in *Familiaris Consortio*:

The "supernatural sense of faith," however, does not consist solely or necessarily in the consensus of the faithful. Following Christ, the church seeks the truth, which is not always the same as the majority opinion. She listens to conscience and not to power, and in this way she defends the poor and the down trodden. The church values sociological and statistical

research when it proves helpful in understanding the historical context in which pastoral action has to be developed and when it leads to a better understanding of the truth. Such research alone, however, is not to be considered in itself and expression of the sense of faith. (FC 5)

Thus, while remaining faithful to these truths on marriage and the family, the Church must still reach out to those faithful who seek to realize these truths in the everyday life of a Catholic in America. That means that as Church, we must face the reality of these changing mores, and learn to speak to and engage a culture in a way that they can “hear.” This is the benefit of the study of social data. Adding to this information is the new research which communicates a new reality: the rise in the growth of the “non-affiliated.” In the *Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project* regarding religion and the unaffiliated, (November 9, 2012) the number of Americans who do not identify with any religion is growing at an alarming rate. Fully one-fifth of American public—and a whopping one third of adults under 30—are religiously unaffiliated. These are the highest percentages ever in Pew Research polling. These numbers of unaffiliated have increased from just over 15% to just under 20%. Thus, while the truths of the Church on marriage, sexuality and family have not changed, the outreach of the Church certainly must recognize major cultural shifts that affect marriage and family in the daily life of its faithful. The advent of social media, rapid dependence on technology, and the rise of the “nones” are all social trends which must help to shape ministry to married couples and their families.

Key Issues to Be Addressed

Catholic Identity. Today more than ever, as an understanding of marriage and the family is known by fewer of our citizens and as society searches for the reality of the truth of marriage, Christians are called to fully realize their vocation to marriage and to undergo a permanent yet continuous conversion of mind and heart. To do this, Christians must take the education of the moral conscience seriously and seek to become living witnesses, “missionary families,” to the faithfulness of God to His covenant and Christ to His Church, in order to influence positively the building of a more just world, one at the service to the family.

Evangelization. To live out this Catholic identity requires the “inescapable requirement of the work of evangelization.” (FC, 4) Couples are called to work to deepen their own understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage, and to raise families that do not run from culture and society, but rather engage in it in order to become living witnesses to sacramental marriage. For young adults, outside of Sunday mass, many will approach the Church primarily in seeking marriage preparation for the sacrament of marriage. Marriage preparation therefore is a singular opportunity for these young people to learn more about Jesus Christ and His Church, as well as the teachings on marriage and family life. Much care must be given to these young adults as they approach what may be their first real adult experience of the Church. In addition, the Church in southeastern Wisconsin is able to assist Catholic couples through ministerial outreach, formation of the entire faith community on marriage as life-long and life-giving, and by helping couples to live out a network of support and community through real peer ministry.

“The mission of preaching the Gospel to all creation, entrusted directly by the Lord to his disciples, has continued in the Church throughout history. The social and spiritual crisis, so evident in today’s world, is becoming a pastoral challenge in the Church’s evangelizing mission concerning the family, the vital building-block of society and the ecclesial community. Never before has proclaiming the Gospel on the Family in this context been more urgent and necessary. “(*Extraordinary Synod Preparatory Document 1*) Because of current

challenges posed from contemporary society, evangelization on marriage is one of gradual conversion, living witness, and sensitive teaching. Identifying simple and clear truths for evangelization, and helping the lay faithful in the pews to become adept at evangelizing and discussing marriage with family and friends can help to evangelize culture. The following are major points of emphasis that are taken from the USCCB's Defense of Marriage Office for evangelization by the faithful:

- **Marriage is a natural institution.** Marriage predates not only religion and government but is also grounded in the very nature of the person. Every human society has understood marriage as the sexual union of man and woman with the purpose of procreating and educating the next generation. That is why it has been given a unique status in the law. The complementarity of the sexes and natural meaning of marriage can be known through reason even without appealing to Sacred Scripture.
- **Same-sex attraction/"civil unions."** The experience of same-sex attraction is a reality that calls for compassion, sensitivity, pastoral care and attention. But no one is served - especially children, by the redefinition of marriage. Civil unions or "domestic partnerships" "mimic" certain aspects of marriage, but erode the true institution of marriage. The Church does not approve or promote civil unions.
- **Mothers and fathers matter.** Only a man can be a father; only a woman can be a mother. Parenting is gender-specific and not gender-neutral and mothers and father bring specific gifts to the shared tasks of child-raising.
- **Marriage and religious liberty.** Redefining marriage changes not just hundreds but thousands of laws all at once. Redefining marriage in the law will make any public witness to the natural moral law, as well as the Church's teachings on marriage, against the law (civil, human law), and a form of so-called "bigotry." Marriage and religious liberty are two fundamental good that stand or fall together.
- **Dignity of the human person.** Marriage as an institution protects the basic human rights of all, but especially those of children. All persons have inviolable dignity and are deserving of love and respect.

Stewardship. The clear teaching of the Church on marriage as a natural institution that is a permanent, faithful and fruitful partnership between one man and one woman is both a support and challenge for married couples today. The faithful understand that they sometimes stand as a lone voice in cultural wilderness, and understand that Christian families have the mission of proclaiming "with joy and conviction the good news about the family" (FC 86). They know that the Church never seeks to impose these deepest truths on the followers of Christ, but "feels an urgent need to propose it to everyone without fear and indeed with great confidence and hope although she knows that the good news includes the subject of the cross. " Married couples and their families understand that it is through the cross that the family can achieve perfection in love, which is the fullness of holiness.

Key Questions for Consideration

- ***"The mission of preaching the Gospel to all creation, entrusted directly by the Lord to his disciples, has continued in the Church throughout history. The social and spiritual crisis, so evident in today's world, is becoming a pastoral challenge in the Church's evangelizing mission concerning the family, the vital building block of society and the ecclesial community. Never before has proclaiming the Gospel on the Family in this context been more urgent and necessary."*** (Extraordinary Synod Preparatory Document 1)

- How can couples proclaim this “Gospel on the Family” to others in society?
- Do you see your parish or diocese as a support for marriage?
- How can the Church encourage generosity and openness to life among married couples?
- What pastoral care can the Church provide in supporting couples in formation as well as couples in crisis situations?
- How can local parishes support families and help them to live out their vocation as the “domestic Church?”
- How can the Church support “stay-at-home mothers” as well as women who work outside the home?
- What would you describe as “critical challenges” to marriage and the family today?
- How can parishes support interfaith couples and their families?
- *Familiarias Consortio* identifies three stages of marriage preparation: *remote* (preparation occurring early in life); *proximate* (beginning around puberty and involving specific preparation for the sacraments—including an understanding of healthy relationships, sexuality, the virtue of chastity and responsible parenthood); and *immediate preparation* (involving formation immediately before the sacrament of marriage). In your opinion, how could preparation for marriage at these three stages be improved?

Conclusion

One of the key indicators of a vibrant parish is the strength of the marriage of its couples, and the renewing life of new couples joining their parish in order to receive the sacrament of marriage. Parishes that are alive have faithful married couples of all ages and weddings of new couples. These parishes know that significant marriage ministry today has no resemblance to the “pre-Cana” catechesis of the past. Authentic marriage ministry starts with the youngest members of the faithful, is intentional and comprehensive, and joyfully proclaims the Good News that marriage is between one man and one woman and life-long and life-giving.

Parishes are called to promote the vocation of marriage in a variety of ways: through regular preaching on marriage; through catechesis on marriage throughout the formational life of the faithful; through thorough and comprehensive formation of the engaged; and through the support of married couples from early to mature marriage. True evangelization happens when there is a collaborative effort between clergy and seasoned married couples who work as a “collaborative team” to minister to and evangelize married couples. A renewed commitment to pastoral caring and ministry at the parish and archdiocesan office level must include support for married couples, referrals for marriage counseling to committed and believing pro-marriage Christian counselors, and expanded marriage ministry efforts and resources. The archdiocesan marriage office should take seriously the formation of seminarians and diaconal candidates and the continuing formation of priests and deacons so that they can minister to all married couples. In addition, members of the laity who have received certified, pastoral formation should also be recruited and trained to minister to engaged and married couples and their families. All marriage-building parishes must take seriously the vocation to marriage, and work to grow, strengthen, promote and protect the sacrament of marriage.