

CWG II: The Challenge to Form a Culture of Invitation and Hospitality to Unmarried Couples.

St. Pius X, Chula Vista Listening Session, August 11, 2016 + 28 Participants

Report by: Paul Lopez, Synod Delegate

1) How can our local church truly embody the principle of graduality in reaching out to and supporting couples who are in civil marriages or cohabitating?

- a) Enlist the help of the parish council to promote family events and welcoming events that meet people in their current condition.
- b) Use pulpit announcements to inform, educate and invite parishioner's to discover the blessings of sacramental marriage and distinguish it from civil marriages.
- c) Encourage couples who are cohabitating to speak with clergy about entering sacramental marriage. Do it in a spirit of love and a non-judgmental way.
- d) Sponsor *Couples Groups* that are inclusive of civil marriages and cohabitating couples. Couples groups should model and speak to the beauty of Catholic marriage.
- e) Educate couples on the process of annulments.
- f) Recognize wedding anniversaries periodically at Sunday liturgies to give witness to all families.
- g) Initiate a friendship program. Parishes could seek out couples who are in civil marriages or cohabitating and assign older couples to form friendships and provide a witness catholic marriage.

2) What practices in our parishes and diocese alienate or frustrate couples seeking to marry in the church?

- a) Long waits to get married if in need of an annulment. Lack of education or misinformation when it comes to the annulment process.
- b) Inconsistent outreach to couples who are not married in the church or are contemplating marriage.
- c) Overly conservative dress codes on wedding attire. Rules related to photos, videos or decorations sometimes overly restrictive.
- d) No possibility of destination weddings, ie, garden weddings, beach weddings... conducted outside of a church.
- e) Liturgical music for weddings very limited.
- f) Marriage preparation guidelines vary from parish to parish or ambiguous interpretation from parish to parish.
- g) Cultural differences plays a role in understanding marriage which is not always addressed in marriage preparation.
- h) Scheduling of wedding dates dictated by Parish calendar. Availability of church, times, days, clergy not always in line with couple's desire.

3) How can our diocesan and parish efforts to provide effective marriage preparation be enhanced?

- a) Offer communication classes conducted and facilitated by trained marriage counselors.
- b) Prepare a contact list of licensed marriage counselors for those seeking marital counseling.
- c) Promote marriage encounter or similar retreats for married couples.
- d) Assign mentors to newly married couples to stay in contact with couple during first year of marriage. Friends who walk with them during that first year on the journey of marriage.

- e) Sponsor family nights that promote catholic values and help strengthen family life.
- f) Marriage formation, sponsor speaker series on marriage, workshops, classes, seminars... and provide parish sponsored babysitting for these events.
- g) Diocesan Family Life office should provide resources to parishes on marriage formation.
- h) Use of media to educate laity on marriage. Parish websites, radio, Facebook... as a means of reaching out beyond the parish boundaries.
- i) Diocesan sponsored regional television commercials promoting catholic marriage and family values.

4. Is there a realistic pathway to building structures of support for couples after they are married?

- a) Initiate family gatherings where two or three couples meet to share meals at home in a relaxed environment. The goal is to foster friendships to help support one another throughout the year.
- b) Periodically, invite couples who went from civil marriage or cohabitating to sacramental marriage to give a brief testimony at the end of Liturgy. Invite couples who went through the annulment process to being married in the church to speak.
- c) Ministry to married couples must be intentional, consistent and well organized. There should be representation on the parish council dealing specifically with marriage and family life issues.
- d) Deaneries could sponsor semi-annual, annual events that bring couples together with other with couples from neighboring parishes. Concerts, picnics, plays, service projects.... and any other creative ideas to support couples while forming a strong catholic identity.
- e) Sponsor an anniversary dinner for couples celebrating milestone anniversaries such as 10, 20, 25... whichever the parish feels is appropriate.
- f) Send out anniversary cards to couples.
- g) Sponsor a couple's night out with the clergy at the parish or a local restaurant which includes free babysitting.