



Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
760-758-4100 x100
michaelr@stmoside.org

Diocesan Synod: "Embracing the Joy of Love"

Here is an update from the Diocese regarding the Diocesan Synod, "Embracing the Joy of Love." Also included in the Bulletin this weekend you will find an insert giving the proposals and objectives from the Synod's participants. Please take time to read and reflect upon the Synod and its suggestions.

All of this will help us move forward into the future and to build bridges between all Catholics in our Diocese and in the wider community.

On the weekend of October 30-31, the diocese of San Diego held the first diocesan synod in the nation of the theme of marriage and family life outlined in Pope Francis' encyclical on *The Joy of Love*. A synod brings together representatives of the entire Catholic community in a diocese for dialogue, deliberation, prayer, and decision-making.

For our synod here in San Diego, every parish had a delegate, as well as the university communities, theological faculties, and members of the diocesan pastoral staff. These delegates included priests, religious sisters, mothers, fathers, deacons, and young adults of every culture and language.

The deliberations at the synod pointed to the need for renewed dedication of married couples toward embracing the depth, permanence, sanctity, and sacrifice which lie at the heart of the Catholic conception of marriage. The discussions emphasized the need to make a spirituality of marriage and family life more available to our parishioners, especially to young couples who often find it less automatic to bring prayer and the Gospel into their marriage and role as parents.

The Synod pointed to the need to invite young couples lovingly, non-judgmentally, and energetically into Catholic marriage and to provide mentors for them. The delegates spoke movingly to the need for the Church to reach out to divorced men and women at every moment of their journey, to support them spiritually and pastorally, to help them move through the annulment process, and to assist those who are divorced and remarried and cannot receive an annulment to utilize the internal forum of conscience in order to discern if God is calling them to return to the Eucharist.

Finally, the Synod proposed a spirituality of family life which is deeply inclusive: embracing mothers and fathers beautifully bonded in their married love and the love of their children, as well as single parents, those who are widowed, our many military families where deployment brings great stress, LBGT families, families which deportation has split, and families with members who have special needs.

During the coming months Bishop McElroy will be working with a committee of synod delegates who will focus on the implementation of these goals. It is our hope that through this initiative the grace of married and family life will be profoundly deepened.

F. Mike

2016 SAN DIEGO DIOCESAN SYNOD

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PROPOSALS WITH OBJECTIVES



- I. Witness to Both the Beauty and Realism of the Catholic Vision of Marriage and Family Life
- II. Form a Culture of Invitation and Hospitality to Unmarried Couples
- III. Welcome, Nurture, and Form Children
- IV. Provide Authentic Pastoral Support for Those Who Are Divorced
- V. Bring Depth to Family Life

Challenge I – Witness to Both the Beauty and Realism of the Catholic Vision of Marriage and Family Life

Three Proposals in Order of Priority

I-A Create a parish environment that nurtures and celebrates marriage

1. Pastor to appoint a ministry **team** to implement marriage ministry objectives.
2. Celebrate marriage anniversaries regularly in the parish to include 1, 5 etc. and not just 25 and 50 years.
 - a. Send anniversary cards to parishioners
 - b. Celebrate World Marriage Day at both diocesan and parish level
 - c. Have longest marriage couple contest
 - d. Encourage parishes to have events to celebrate marriage and renewal of marriage not forgetting younger couples
 - e. Create parish experiences for couples such as retreats and socials for couples with children and without
 - f. Gather couples connected to a regular liturgy
3. Liturgy
 - a. Have deacons and priests preach about marriage
 - b. Make better use of the Prayer of the Faithful
 - c. Create more family friendly liturgies
4. Make creative use of the website

I-B Create married couples mentor groups at the parish and/or at deanery level

1. Create married couples support groups
2. Diocesan training for mentors
3. Acknowledge the struggles of marriage and family life
4. Develop networking between parishes to share resources
5. Engage military families
6. Develop parish marriage preparation follow-up, mentoring and sponsors.
 - Explore doing pre-cana possibly on the deanery level as well as celebrations

I-C Make education in faith for all ages more effective as the foundation for sacramental marriage

1. Provide on-going formation for priests regarding the sacrament of marriage
2. Have workshops for marriage renewal with cultural sensitivity
3. Diocese to provide training for parish ministry teams.
4. Make Catholic education more affordable through intense diocesan fundraising efforts
5. Inform and engage all Catholics in formation on marriage thru social media and the internet

6. Focus on Catholic teaching and specifically sacramental marriage
7. Use parish facilities for pre-school and after-school formation programs
8. Deacon couples teach about marriage
9. Provide education, materials & resources NFP and the Church's teaching on artificial contraception

Challenge II – Form a Culture of Invitation and Hospitality to Unmarried Couples

Three Proposals in Order of Priority

II-A Establish parish-based mentors to welcome and accompany young adult and couples into full participation of church life

1. Invite young adults to take on leadership and liturgical roles in parishes
2. Form groups of parish “ambassador couples” in deaneries and clusters to accompany couples through the process of preparing for marriage and afterwards
3. Invite “ambassador couples” who like to listen, are very personable, non-judgmental, confidential, and can share faith
4. Create a pilot program for parish based mentors/ambassador couples with diocesan support identifying proper resources, methodologies, and experiences
5. Expand social events such as *Theology on Tap*, *Catholic Sports*, and other experiences for couples
6. Expand small group faith formation such as nights of reflection, adoration, praise and worship, Bible studies, catechesis and other ways to engage young couples
7. Parish priests can be creative about hosting young adults/couples
8. Inform and invite Pastors to participate
9. Affirm that Pastors are among the most effective mentors of presence and welcome for each parish

II-B Form a diocesan task force to establish best practices on support for couples preparing for marriage

1. Evaluate current marriage prep programs, and explore what they would like to see in future marriage prep experiences
2. Analyze data of local demographics for young adults and those not married in the church
3. Explore best practices of marriage support
4. Explore what is working best in some ecclesial movements such as *Couples for Christ* and others
5. Explore what is working in other churches
6. Create a welcome package
7. Training on how to teach good relationship skills

II-C Foster a culture of inclusion for couples in all stages of their relationship

1. Accompany couples to a deeper experience of Christian marriage
2. Explore the hope of celebrating marriage in the Catholic Church

Challenge III – Welcome, Nurture, and Form Children

Three Proposals in Order of Priority

III-A Create experiences and resources that educate and evangelize children and their families in the Faith

1. Establish a Diocesan Task Force to investigate and distill “best practices” for children’s ministry and parish involvement
 - a. Visit Deaneries to train lay leaders in these new strategies, leaving ample room for the particularities of each parish community
 - b. These child centered practices should touch all aspects of parish life, including social, sacramental, liturgical, education, service, and retreats

2. Survey desires and needs of children and families. (Parish level)
 - a. Through Faith formation
 - b. After Mass
 - c. Via social media
 - d. Diocesan–Tap into existing resources

III-B Create Parish small groups to cultivate Faith and relationships among families

1. Need to be Christ-centered and sociable; Faith should be gently guided according to the formation of the group.
 - a. Sociality and Faith within small groups are not mutually exclusive.
2. Parish Guidance
 - a. Groups by ages of children
 - b. Fun, Faith and Fellowship.
 - c. Facilitator
 - i. designated volunteer, sponsor family
3. Priest or deacon to visit small groups on an annual basis
4. Outcomes: Experiential, relational, catechesis/evangelization
 - a. Experiential/catechesis and evangelization: age appropriate faith based catechetical activities
 - b. Relational: supporting the formation of relationships outside of the parish context

III-C Identify and minister to families who are alone, isolated or on the margins in our parish communities

1. Survey to identify a specific groups within the parish boundaries
 - a. Examples of constituencies
 - b. Military realities which impact mobility, brevity of time in parish and one parent bringing child/children when one spouse is on deployment
 - c. Immigrants and refugees
 - d. Complexities with different stages in life such as divorced, widowed and single parent
 - e. Social justice concerns in witnessing to those on the margins of society in a parish
2. Establish a welcoming/hospitality committee within each parish
 - a. Identify families/existing ministries to facilitate
3. Create community partnerships and liaisons
 - a. Outside agencies should refer Catholics to parish and parish should refer parishioners to available agencies (mutual referral)

Challenge IV – Provide Authentic Pastoral Support for those who are Divorced

Three Proposals in Order of Priority

IV-A Create a culture of support for those in all stages of separation and divorce

1. Provide support regarding grief, pain, and loss
2. Incorporate sensitivity to cultural and generational differentiations
3. Include all in community, Catholic and non-Catholic
4. Utilize existing resources and make available to parishes
5. Formalize a parish-based mentoring program
6. Provide education, based on canon law, on the annulment process and remarriage
7. Find creative ways to reach out to divorced Catholics who are away from the church

IV-B Reconfigure the Marriage and Family Office to include a director focusing on all stages of separation and divorce

1. Recruit, convene, and direct a working group to develop elements of a parish-based diocesan ministry
2. Implement the process developed by the working group to bring the divorce ministry to parishes
3. Provide guidance on the annulment process in collaboration with the Tribunal.
4. Serve the separated, divorced, and remarried populations

IV-C Provide formation in the areas of conscience formation and the Internal Forum, not only to implement the pathway to sacramental participation outlined in the *Joy of Love* but even more fundamentally to illuminate a core element of Christian discipleship itself

1. Provide forums on conscience formation for pastoral leadership: priests, deacons, religious, and lay leaders
2. Evaluate current programs of faith formation for children, youth, and adults regarding conscience formation
3. Identify and develop resources including print, web-based, video, and other media on conscience formation
4. Incorporate catechesis on external forum and internal forum in programs of adult faith formation

Challenge V – Bring Depth to Family Life

Three Proposals in Order of Priority

V-A Create a diocesan office for family spirituality

1. Provide marriage preparation and ongoing support of marriage as a vocation
2. Develop resources for parishes to minister to families (i.e divorced, single-parent, widowed, deployed, deported, special needs, multigenerational households, LGBT)
3. Develop resources for family activities to promote family unity/solidarity
4. Publish a handbook of resources for family prayer and spirituality for the home
5. Sponsor days of prayer and retreats for couples, families and festivals of faith for children at an annual diocesan “open house”
6. Identify, screen and train spiritual directors for Catholics through the Diocesan Institute
7. Identify counselors who appreciate and value the faith dimension of Catholic families

V-B Create a parish culture of faith which welcomes and fosters family participation in prayer and liturgy

1. Invite “Family” participation
2. Greeting, mentoring new families and struggling families
3. Attempt to use the prayer of the Mass to invite children to understand what is going on and make them feel welcome and engage
4. Provide childcare- Masses and parish activities
5. Connect cultural expressions to teachings of the church
6. Acknowledge, celebrate and bless significant life events
7. Connect religious education programs to Mass schedule

V-C Establish local centers to support family spiritual life

- Coordinate within deaneries to identify and provide spaces and services to spiritually support families (i.e. counseling, retreats, and a variety of prayer experiences)

