

OLHC PARISH WENDOUREE

RESPONSE TO SYNOD DOCUMENT ON THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY

Overview

- 22 parishioners attended the meeting
- Participants found the document difficult to read because of language and “church speak”. This applied particularly to Parts 1 & 2 which is an essential basis for understanding the Sacrament of Marriage and the role of Family. Parishioners expressed the hope that future documents would be written in more understandable language and thus accessible to more people. To develop a simple concise document on the Sacrament of Marriage and Family Life may be something the Ballarat Diocese could undertake.
- The group responded to the eight pastoral perspectives outlined in the document. For each pastoral perspective four questions were posed for discussion.
 - What do we AFFIRM in the document?
 - What do we have DIFFICULTY with?
 - What IMPROVEMENTS might we suggest?
 - What are ideas for ACTION in our community?

The ideas for action will be reflected upon at the local parish level and not reported on in this response.

- Participants were able to choose to discuss three pastoral areas during the gathering. An analysis of their choices is an indication of the emphasis placed by the gathering on each of the pastoral areas.

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The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of the Declining Birth rate – 2

- The discussions were mature, reflective, robust and above all enlightening
- All attendees were over fifty except one (young Fr. Peter!)

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts

Affirmed

- Evangelizing is the shared responsibility of all God's people
- Catholic families are called upon to be the active agents and witnesses in every pastoral activity
- Paragraph 37, especially the last sentence

Difficulty

- The wording of the statement "Crisis in faith led to a crisis in marriage and family" was seen as presumptuous with little evidence or explanation. For example what is a crisis in faith defined as, and what depth would the crisis need to be?

Improvement

- Emphasize strongly the need for interested people to be regularly given the opportunity to join in discussions relating to Faith and the Gospels.

Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage

Affirm

- The recognition that particularly in today's social reality, engaged couples need total support in their preparation for marriage
- The insistence by the synod of the need to involve the whole Christian community in this preparation especially married couples and their families

Difficulty

- In society today the majority of engaged couples live together. The language of the document emphasising chastity is for them irrelevant.

Improvements

- Highlight the need for relevant, quality pre marriage education based on a 2015 reality

Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage

Affirm

- Experienced couples are key in the pastoral accompaniment of young married couples
- Going beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament. Frequently weddings are celebrated in a lavish manner with a big focus on the day overshadowing the real importance of the marriage itself

Difficulty

- Emphasis on having children. (Marriage is relationship first)
- The realism of what is being proposed
 - young married couples often move from place to place and soon find they no longer belong to any community
 - difficulty of maintaining contact when Sunday Eucharist attendance is minimal
 - the assumption that young couples will wish to journey with and learn from experienced couples

Improvements

- A post marriage program similar to RCIA may be helpful

Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together

Affirm

- The document acknowledges and endeavours to respond in a constructive manner to the present day realities of
 - increasing number of people live together in unions that have not been religiously or civilly recognised
 - traditionally some countries arrange marriages between families
 - marriages are sometimes delayed until couples are financially secure

Difficulty

- The theology of doctrine and fact should be switched to a more relational level – more understandable for some young people

Improvements

- The document could even more strongly emphasize
 - individuals / communities not making judgemental statements about couples living together outside of marriage
 - the need to be listeners and '*walk*' with the couples
 - acceptance of the way other people live their relationships

Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried, Single-Parent Families)

Affirm

- Paragraphs 43, 44 & 45
- To know how to forgive and to feel forgiveness
- Need to be able to recognize deep suffering –sufferers have suffered, repented through their anguish
- Acknowledgement that separation and divorce cause deep suffering to the married couple and their children
- Urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course
- The art of accompaniment on the journey of the wounded one must be leaned and practiced allowing us to remove our shoes before the sacred ground of the other
- Some unjustly suffer separation, divorce or abandonment. Respect them
- Pastoral assistance through agencies (qualified personnel) is good
- In particular, children are cared for pastorally

Difficulty

- Divorced and remarried persons or those living together can have fruitful recourse to Spiritual Communion.
The question was asked as to why they cannot receive Sacramental Communion?
The document states that further theological study would be undertaken to clarify this issue.
Our group stressed that this must occur.
- In 46 reference is made to women in a single-parent family. No acknowledgment is made of a male in this situation which is a frequent reality

- The use of the term 'mixed marriages'. In today's society a mixed marriage is one between different cultures. A marriage between different religions should be known as inter-faith marriage but even this term has its limitations.

Improvements

- Address clearly the issue of marriage annulments
- Clarify the sacramental status of a marriage in a violent situation
- Review the theology of marriage

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies

Affirm

- Persons with homosexual tendencies should be treated with respect and sensitivity
- Every sign of unjust discrimination should be avoided

Difficulty

- The use of the term 'Homosexual Tendency'
 - The science of homosexuality asks, is homosexuality a state into which we are born ie is it genetic or is it something a person has learned and a choice made to pursue? This debate is on-going, we do not have a solution to it. Without clarity there cannot be a general theology re. this question.
- Theology of Homosexuality in accordance with the Church's teaching. The Church's teaching states that homosexual unions are in no way, even remotely, similar to God's plan for marriage and family

Improvements

- Document needs to emphasize that we must support every member of our family, irrespective of sexual orientation. Not only must the family show support of all family members in this situation, but we know approximately 10% of the general population is homosexual who deserve respect and support from all in our Church. Jesus in the Gospel accepts all – is non-judgemental
- In all areas of the document move from a doctrinal approach to a theology based on relationships (Trinity)

Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization

Affirm

- That the document recognises the challenges facing families today and the influence of the media
- The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian Initiation, by being welcoming communities

Difficulty

- Insufficient recognition of the lack of confidence and capacity amongst parents to 'teach' the spirit of Scripture and the gospels

Improvements

- Less focus on doctrine and a more family / people approach.
- Encouragement to local Churches to develop sacramental programs which have major components of engaging, understandable and relevant adult faith education thus giving parents the confidence to work with their children