

Archdiocese of Winnipeg, Synod 2016-2018

White Paper Submission

Focus Commission on Marriage and Family Life

Inspired by Archbishop Gagnon's Pastoral Letter, the Focus Commission on Marriage and Family Life Advisory Group has come together in prayer and discussion, while always recognizing the need for the Commission to keep within the highlighted themes drawn from the peoples' listening sessions.

As suggested, our Advisory Group recognized the following concerns from the perspective of both the local church and parish communities in terms of:

- 1) Support & pastoral accompaniment for families
- 2) Evangelization of families by families
- 3) The place of families in passing on faith to children & youth
- 4) The mission of the domestic church

After considering the reports from the Listening Sessions, our own experience in our various Parishes and discussions with friends and family our Advisory Group makes the following recommendations.

1. Informed by the need for leadership specifically focussed on the unique challenges of Marriage and Family Life in a Catholic context and recognizing the enormous potential for growth and evangelization in our communities; we recommend to:

Establish a resource centre for Marriage and Family Life within the Archdiocese to help promote the Sacrament of Marriage.

This will focus on support of married couples and families, and provide central guidance to Parishes in order to follow through with the additional recommendations. This centre would work closely with the office for Youth Ministry and Catechetics to provide opportunities to educate and witness on the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage and the role of family in strengthening the church.

This centre may choose to offer the following;

- Ongoing 'Listening Session' style gatherings where engaged or married people could come to continue the powerful dialogue that began with the Synod listening sessions.
- A section on the Archdiocese of Winnipeg Website to identify topics related to marriage and family life. The Archdiocese of Winnipeg would benefit from identifying and including information and resources on their website specifically on topics related to marriage and family life as a way to show their support of such areas amongst the community.

To give a few examples, the website identifies upcoming marriage preparation sessions, marriage enrichment programs, up to date news & activities on related topics, and offers links to organizations that support marriage and family life. Subjects identified under the umbrella of 'Marriage and Family Life' include family planning, same sex attraction, grieving, and troubled marriage resources which

links you to Christian marriage counseling and other communication programs. Additions of this kind would demonstrate that the Archdiocese is supportive of the realities and dedicated to the nourishment of marriage and family life.

The incorporation of multimedia videos and testaments would help strengthen spiritual growth, relationships and family values. This would also be an additional avenue for those who are hesitant on coming forward for help and the 70% of non-practicing Catholics (according to Bishop Barron).

Some samples of multimedia videos:

- *Word on Fire - Bishop Barron*
<https://youtu.be/N2fcNFHDzAE>
- *Ascension Presents: Wait, Marriage can be fun?*
<https://youtu.be/OCJGKx1btFs>
- *Ascension Presents: CHOSEN: Lesson 16, Seg. 1: What is Marriage?*
<https://youtu.be/47LaozR2NCs>

- While considering existing faith programs, this centre may be responsible to create a suitable program to fulfill the needs of parishes on the topic of marriage and family life, while also offering the lay faithful the opportunity to engage in dialogue and prayer on this theme.

Preliminary topics of discussion could include 'experiences and challenges of families' or 'the current realities of the family', identified in the letter Amoris Laetitia of the Holy Father Francis on Love in the Family. Sharing on such topics would provide information to the lay faithful and offer them the opportunity to discuss present day circumstances. Such dialogue and gatherings would shed light on present day realities and build and strengthen bridges between discipleship and families.

- This centre may provide training opportunities and regular networking gatherings for couples who are volunteering to help out in the Marriage and Family Life ministry at the Parish level.

One example could include sending marriage preparation teams or parish representative/s to Cana retreat by Chemin Neuf at St. Charles Retreat Centre and/or Nathanael and The Summons Lay Formation experience.

- Assist with catechesis/faith formation for the family starting from pre-courtship stage followed by the stage of preparing oneself for the marriage vocation and finally the stages of raising family.

2. Informed by God's call to love; recognizing the changing reality of "family"; a strong desire to be an inclusive community called to share the joy of the Good News to all; and a desire to understand church in the modern world, we recommend to:

Bring a greater focus to Education of Seminarians and Clergy on how to recognize our non-traditional brothers and sisters and their families. This will, in turn, provide leadership and education to the parish communities to strengthen the bonds of love and fellowship to all of God's children.

Specifically;

- To speak to God's presence and fellowship in various family structures and dynamics –blended or composite families, and family crises/tragic/atypical circumstances,
 - Family themed teaching in reference to catechesis and other social issues (family planning, social media, teens, theology of the body, vocation),
 - offering understanding, friendship and support in all stages of life no matter where they are in their faith journey,
 - Pastoral support for divorced and step families, adoptive Families, single parent families, intergenerational families (ie/ grandparents taking care of grandchildren), military families, etc.
 - Pastoral support for senior adults, those with mental illness, disabilities, alcohol/drug addiction, death of a child, bereavement for children, children of divorce, those who have experienced abuse, those who have experienced a miscarriage or abortion, those with fertility issues, LGBTQ and inter-faith/inter-cultural marriages.
3. Informed by Christ's call for all of us to be family; and a desire to keep God as the focus of the nuclear family, the parish community and the global Church, we recommend:

Support of the role of Marriage and Family as the life of the Parish.

- Establish parish level ministries for Marriage and Family Life with the encouragement of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. To support parishes in these small yet significant efforts, the Archdiocese is supporting the faithful to embrace their authentic journeys in marriage and family life.

These ministries could help facilitate the initiatives of the Archdiocesan Marriage and Family Life Centre and might include some of the following;

- Assist their parish in providing a welcoming and merciful attitude towards all types of families.
- Implementing celebrations, dedicated prayer and witnessing on of various stages of Family life and Marriage within parishes with an aim to celebrate, educate and pray the important sacraments and journeys of our faithful and their respective parishes. (eg. blessings of the children during Mass, blessings of couples celebrating anniversaries, • Family Day/Couples Day, etc.)
- Family Visitation Day – have families visit other families to strengthen community and provide: welcome to new immigrants, support on occasion of death, sickness, charity or prayer request, etc.

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- Provide programs that extend beyond Marriage Preparation – consider couples sponsorship/mentor program offering understanding, friendship and support in all stages of life no matter where they are in their faith journey.
- Sunday School/Catechism programs that include activities for the whole family.
- Reaching out through Social Media.
 - Eg. Parishes could have their own social media account for friendlier access/engagement of the parishioners or websites with links to the main website of the Archdiocese.
- Institute a Bring a “new family to church” Day

In today's society, families are surrounded by many challenges. The mere definition of it is diluted and altered to accommodate situations whether in convenience or a means to cope with circumstances beyond control. The emergence of cyber technology, concept of minimalism and independence pose both opportunity and threat to the stability of the Christian family. We believe that more than ever, families are confused and forced to keep in pace in this changing world and are in dire need of guidance, support and love. The institution that has been mandated to protect, strengthen and nourish this fundamental unit of society is the CHURCH. Would it not be that the ultimate reflection of the communion of Jesus and His Bride be the family- witnessing faith, hope and love in their daily lives?

We recognize, just as the Son of God came into the world in a family and shared relationships with families and friends, we too are all called to continue in witnessing and spreading the Good News of Marriage and Family Life. Supported by the action of the Spirit, the married couples and families need the encouragement, love and support of the entire Church.

We humbly ask the Diocese to consider these recommendations so that the family as the domestic church, might increasingly spread the light of Christ, the Light of the world.

Together in Christ,

The Focus Commission on Marriage and Family Life

Maurice Comeault P.H.

Fr. Michael Wollbaum



Billon Beaudin

Lucille Beaudin



"Everybody today seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for greater developments and greater riches and so on, so that children have very little time for their parents. Parents have very little time for each other, and in the home begins the disruption of peace of the world."

Mother Teresa



