



The Call, the Journey and the Mission

A summary of responses

Office for Marriage & Family Life 2015



Diocese of Westminster

As the World Meeting of Families takes place in Philadelphia, we take this opportunity to spotlight marriage and family life. This document sets out a summary of the responses from across the Diocese to the synod consultation and offers 10 tips for a marriage-friendly parish to assist parishes who are looking for ways to place marriage at the heart of their evangelisation.

A summary of responses to synod consultation

In this document, we present the summary of responses. Detailed results of the consultation can be found on our website at www.rcdow.org.uk/diocese/marriage-and-family-life/

During the period of consultation, which ran from the Feast of the Holy Family 2014 through to the Solemnity of Pentecost, 24 May 2015, we estimate approximately 580 people responded to the reflection questions, individually, by parish or in small groups, electronically, by email and post to the Office for Marriage and Family Life. Responses from clergy which were sent directly to the Cardinal are not included in this summary.

We express our gratitude to all those who took the time and effort to respond and especially for sharing such heartfelt convictions. To everyone we repeat the words of the great 'pope of the family' St John Paul II that, 'no one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who "labour and are heavy laden".'

Key conclusions:

The Bishops invited people to respond to five key questions:

- **What are your joys and hopes of marriage and family life today?**
- **What are your struggles and fears of marriage and family life today?**
- **How can we better understand marriage as a vocation?**
- **How does your marriage enrich you?**
- **How does your family life enrich those around you?**

There were two key conclusions arising from the responses to these questions:

- Most people long to receive more support from the Church. There is a hunger for authentic pastoral care and realistic encouragement.
- The majority see and appreciate the importance of receiving (some/even more) solid and robust marriage preparation at different levels which is especially encouraging.

Detailed responses to each question follow on subsequent pages.

What are your joys and hopes of marriage and family life today?

- A lifelong commitment and friendship - a common mission
- Security for children, and a safe and happy environment in which to raise them
- To create a true bond with one's spouse to share life's highs and lows
- To grow in love as a family: Being a unit to face the world. Creating a home which is a holy place, a springboard for mission and welcome, a caring home environment with love and honesty as its foundation and a strong belief in a merciful God
- Raising children and sharing one's faith with them: teaching them prayer and the love for Mass and Holy Eucharist; teaching them about the Sacrament of Confession and the importance of it; helping them discern their vocations; praying the family rosary
- Solidarity with other Catholic families as a network of true friendship based on Faith
- Seeing that well-structured pre-marriage courses help lead to a joyful and stable life

'No marriage is without sacrifices. However, the hope of a successful marriage is a life centred on Jesus Christ.'

'Family is everything and we must celebrate the beauty of marriage (i.e., wedding anniversaries) more. It was through my own marriage that I felt truly connected spiritually to a higher being. I hope that others will have the opportunity to experience this joy.'

'No matter what life throws at us being together is the most important thing. To put our family first before, work, money and materials items.'





How can we better understand marriage as a vocation?

Those who responded to this question could be divided into 3 categories:

- Those who do consider marriage as a vocation (a)
- Those who don't consider it as a vocation (b)
- Those who don't know what a vocation is or are confused about the meaning of the term (c)

C *'I personally wonder if it is a vocation.'*

'I think that vocation need not necessary mean "for life".'

'I don't think marriage is a vocation; it is a journey and, unlike a career which can have a progression, marriage goes through different states and stages.'

'It is a careful decision, not impulsive, and lifelong if possible. The vocation is to have children for God.'

'It is like any career you choose you only get out what you put in.'

'How do we approach notion of vocation if partner doesn't believe in God? Does a call to marriage mean a call to children?'

'It is probably true that marriage and a family are not for everyone but I do believe that it is the most natural thing in the world for most people to experience.'

What are your struggles and fears of marriage and family life today?

- The lack of promotion of the benefits of marriage in our culture
- The Truth and the teachings of the Church are not being preached effectively
- Breakdown of traditional family life
- Confusion because even priests provide conflicting views
- Abortion has become another form of contraception
- Pornography
- The celebrity culture creating poor role models
- Balancing quality time for family with pressures from work
- Fighting against hostility towards truth that the best environment for children is the traditional family
- Retirement leading to friction and even divorce among the elderly
- Needs of single/lone parents
- Spiritual needs of childless couples

'Need to be accepting and loving gets misinterpreted to mean that there is no difference between cohabitation and marriage, divorce and fidelity, heterosexual generative love and homosexual friendship.'

'The lack of extended families these days also puts a strain on families. Perhaps the local parish could become a viable alternative to such.'

'We fear mostly for our children; we are deeply worried that they will not be taught about the beauty of marriage, its sanctity, how it is eternal.'

A *'The married vocation has been seen as having some type of lesser status within the Church. Without marriage and family life, there would be no Church.'*

'People see their marriage between husband and wife, not between husband and wife and God.'

'A true vocation is a decision of the will as well as a response of the heart.'

B *'I don't see marriage as a vocation as this would suggest to me that the church has an opportunity to meddle in it.'*

'It is not a vocation. It is a normal human committed loving coupling for procreation, companionship and nurturing our offspring.'

'I find this an unhelpful definition.'

How does your marriage enrich you?

All of the responses were very edifying. They all highlight the benefits of marriage, pointing out that marriage is a unique journey that leads to personal development through a sincere gift of self and through shared values, joys and struggles.

'Allows me to be more empathetic and understanding and thoughtful.'

'It absolutely makes me a better person in every way! While I have a strong sense of self, I am reminded that my place on earth is to enrich others.'

'I love being married, being a mother. It makes me happy, I am proud to be married and part of a solid partnership. It also makes me feel closer to God, I am thankful for all I have.'

'I am surrounded by love and respect.'

'Knowing that I am loved is a privilege.'

'My husband is my blessing in life: he constantly amazes me with how selfless and loving another human can be (and restores my faith in human nature).'

'My wife and I share the same values and I am very proud of her achievements and humility.'

'My husband says his aim is to ensure that I am happy and this in turn makes for a peaceful marriage. I try to think of him and make sure he is happy.'

'Having a reliable ally!'

'It taught me love. I am a better person as a result of marriage.'

How does your family life enrich those around you?

The majority of those who responded to this question said that their family life enriches those around them by witness as disciples of Christ; sharing conversations; showing consideration and care; seeking to offer an example of hope; showing commitment, especially to youth; generosity of service: offering and giving help as a family to those in need. Some key words were confidence, stability, love, joy, endurance, patience, strength, responsibility and respect. Also to cherish honesty and modesty and above all, sustaining family life in prayer.

Some seemed unsure if their family life enriches others. Others admit that they have not made it their aim to enrich others, but that they just live their family life as best they can. A tiny minority confessed that they don't have a strong family life or that their family life doesn't enrich others.

'By demonstrating the love in our family to others as a reflection of God's love.'

'I speak of my own blood relations who happen to be numerous. I derive enormous support from them. It is from them that I gain much knowledge on family life.' (priest)

'I hope that our home has over the years provided refuge, support and companionship for others when they are struggling.'

'By letting others see us fail and yet still be ok and worthy of love.'

'As a priest, I see the two parallel sacraments like a train. Faithfulness of the couple to each other helps me to be faithful to the Church.'



Ten Tips to make your parish marriage-friendly!

Establishing a new marriage preparation programme is one of the most important things I have ever done as a priest.

- A parish priest

A marriage-building parish is consciously predisposed toward inspiring the young to aspire to life-long marriage; supporting those on the journey to it as well as sustaining those in it and teaching all parishioners about the vitality of the sacrament. It means a willingness to strive to make changes to support matrimony more actively and openly. A parish is 'capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity' by recognising it is 'certainly not the only institution which evangelises.' (EV.28)

What can we do to promote and form spouses as the primary agents of evangelisation?

- Start up or expand marriage preparation provision with spouses who can be mentors to the engaged. Invite couples to adopt engaged/newly married couples in prayer.
- Celebrate Rite of Blessing for Engaged during Sunday Mass. Post photos of engaged couples, inviting the parish to pray for them. Encourage couples celebrating significant wedding anniversaries to receive a solemn blessing at Sunday Mass.
- Replicate the annual Mass of thanksgiving for Matrimony in the cathedral at the parish whenever it is deemed appropriate.
- Invite couples who attend cathedral event to write of their experience in the newsletter or give a testimony.
- Promote regular scripture readings for spouses and families (see www.twainoneflesh.org.uk and www.thewednesdayword.org).
- Actively encourage spouses to go on spiritual enrichment experiences (www.smartloving.org or see www.rcdow.org.uk/marriage-and-family-life/events/ for enrichment weekend dates/venues) or Marriage Encounter (www.wwme.org.uk).
- Encourage those experiencing crises in marriage to attend www.retrouville.org.uk (149 out of 160 marriages saved since 2009!) as well as counselling at Marriage Care.
- Hold social events for married couples and families and encourage/support groups like Teams of Our Lady (www.teamsgb.org.uk) and Couples for Christ (www.couplesforchristuk.weebly.com). Encourage people to support specific marriage charities either financially or by volunteering.
- Raise awareness of remote marriage prep apostolate in diocesan high schools through Explore (www.theexplorexperience.co.uk or Coordinator marymcghee@rcdow.org.uk).
- Help those with young children feel welcome at Mass by encouraging them to sit closer to the sanctuary. Remind parishioners of the importance of having young families at Mass especially if infants/babies are a little restless. Build up parents as the primary educators.



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The Marriage and Family Life Office is always glad to help in any way. www.rcdow.org.uk/diocese/marriage-and-family-life or email family@rcdow.org.uk. For more extensive pastoral guidance on improving your parish support for marriage, Becoming A Marriage Building Parish is available on request.

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