



DIOCESE OF COVINGTON

Office of the Bishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

During the 2016–2017 year I asked the Department of Catechesis and Faith Formation, in collaboration of the Family Life Ministry Advisory Board (FLMAB), to conduct a survey of the parishes of our Diocese. This survey was an effort to gain a better understanding of the strengths and opportunities for improvement within the various diocesan family life ministerial programs. FLMAB members met with the priests of each deanery, making an appeal to complete the survey below to assist us in determining where our diocesan parishes stand regarding ministering to our families. Their goal was to broadly answer three basic questions.

1. What are parishes doing well?
2. What are parish opportunities for improvement?
3. What recommendations do the Department of Catechesis and Faith Formation and the members of the board have to address for improvement opportunities?

The board's goal was to receive survey responses from at least 50% of our parishes. After several follow up efforts by various members of FLMAB, they finished with sixteen (16) completed surveys.

The following topics are a synopsis of the strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations that have been identified:

1. Building leadership
2. Marriage preparation and strengthening
3. Creating a culture of life
4. Worshiping and prayer
5. Divorced and Separated Ministry
6. Youth Formation

Each of these topics was reviewed by the Department of Catechesis and Faith Formation in collaboration with FLMAB subcommittees, within the context of interpreting survey results.

Included in this booklet is a report listing the survey results.

Devotedly Yours in Christ Jesus

Most Reverend Roger J. Foy, D.D.
Bishop of Covington

DIOCESE OF COVINGTON
FAMILY LIFE MINISTRY ADVISORY BOARD
Results of Survey for Parishes

Committee Number 1

Topics Addressed:

Building Leadership, Marriage Preparation, and Strengthening Marriage

Page 1 Building Leadership

Summary

Overall parishes rated their role in forming leadership below average at 1.80, stating improvement is needed. Although the responses indicated that parishes seek participation of newly married couples (2.27), they also indicate that recruiting is an area that needs improvement. According to the responses most parishes stated that they did not have an active Marriage Ministry Team (1.13).

Strengths:

Authentic Church teaching about why marriage is the inseparable union of one man and one woman is provided from the pulpit, in RCIA or other forms of catechesis.

Opportunities:

Most parishes and the diocese offer little or no educational or enrichment programs for those ministering to engaged and married couples.

Recommendations:

- Diocesan workshops to offer formation and enrichment for those ministering to engaged or married couples (include lay ministers and deacons).
- Since recruiting is an issue, we recommend and believe that by elevating the Sacrament of Marriage couples would be more enthusiastic about joining a marriage committee.

Page 3 Marriage Preparation

Summary

Overall, parishes rated Marriage Preparation above average at 2.19. It appears that the rating is due to an effective diocesan program being in place, (Living Marriage as Sacrament, Evenings for the Engaged, Natural Family Planning and Engaged Encounter). Concern should be noted that currently finding team couples for these programs has not been as well received as in the past. Many couples are overcommitted at home, job or other obligations. The program *Evenings for the Engaged* needs to be rejuvenated since the current leaders are ageing.

Strengths:

The diocesan marriage preparation programs, *Living Marriage as Sacrament* (LMAS), *Evenings for the Engaged*, *Natural Family Planning*, and *Engaged Encounter* are strong in presenting authentic teachings on the Sacrament of Marriage.

Opportunities:

Since there is very little, if any, recognition or affirmation of engaged couples entering into marriage at the parish level, this program may struggle in the coming years due to a lack of team couples.

Recommendations:

- At the parish level, raise the enthusiasm for newlyweds as well as married couples. This would possibly provide a source of new team couples.
- Providing enrichment opportunities for married couples at both the parish and diocesan levels would create an enthusiasm that may spill over into marriage prep teams.
- Recognizing engaged couples prior to wedding day as a means for them to see their importance and that of their sacrament in parish community.
 - List engaged couples in the parish bulletin with their wedding date prior to the wedding
 - Place a Poster at the entrance of the church with a picture of the engaged couple
 - Call forth the engaged couple before their wedding day for a special blessing during a weekend mass of their choosing.

Page 5 Marriage Strengthening

Summary:

The survey indicated that most parishes have an active program to invite newly married couples to join (2.50), but results indicate that most couples do not respond. It appears that major improvement is needed in providing parish retreats (1.13) as well as support groups for married couples (1.31). The survey also showed that most parishes do not follow up by contacting newly married couples. (1.50)

Strengths:

Parishes are using the Baptismal program as a means of reaching out to couples and emphasizing the importance of parents as primary educators of their children.

Opportunities:

The opportunity for married couples to enrich and strengthen their marriage is lacking in most parishes.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations would serve the needs in all areas mentioned above and would incorporate the following:

- It is our strong opinion that randomly selecting a program for your parish will fail and eventually end as do so many other programs that lack overall enthusiasm at the diocesan level. Having the support for all programs is necessary at the diocesan level.
- The Bishop announce that next year will be a call to elevate the Sacrament of Marriage in the same manner that this year has been set aside as a year for prayer for priestly vocations.
- By elevating the Sacrament of marriage as God designed, there will be a heightened awareness and curiosity that will foster a greater participation in all programs mentioned.

Specifically we recommend the following:

- Recognize engaged couples in parish bulletins prior to their wedding day.
- Bless engaged couples at a mass of their choosing a few weeks before their wedding day, and invite parishioners to attend and pray for the engaged couple.
- At their parish, read a petition at all Masses on the weekend of the newly married couple's wedding asking for God's blessings and grace for them.
- Include petitions that relate to marriage on a bi-monthly basis at all weekend Masses. (more often, if possible)
- Have diocesan sponsored enrichment programs on a yearly basis for all married couples.
- Include bulletin inserts that address topics dealing with the sacrament of Marriage.
- Provide a reference handbook for parishes that can help the priest or deacon lead couples to programs dealing with relational concerns like finances, addictions, abuse or separation.

Committee Number 3

Creating a culture of life – parenting in the domestic church

Summary:

Of the 17 parishes or clergy who answered the questionnaire about “Creating a Culture of Life; Parenting in the Domestic Church,” most believed they were doing a good job. On a scale of 1 to 3, 1 was lowest (“No, we don’t do that.”), 2 was average (“We do it, but it needs improvement.”), and 3 was highest (“Yes, we do that.”). Individual parishes indicated how they rated their own level of activity.

Strengths:

Areas receiving the highest scores with 2.5 or better (Statements 3, 4, and 1) related to fostering an awareness of human dignity and supporting legal protection for the unborn, infirm, and elderly, and emphasizing that marriage is between one man and one woman, the unitive and procreative nature of marriage, and the indispensable place of mothers and fathers in the rearing of children.

Opportunities:

Areas scoring 2 to 2.5 (Statements 2, 6, and 5) included parish opportunities to pray for mothers and their unborn children, using sacramental preparation as an opportunity to teach parenting skills and the importance of parents in the education of children, making resources available and encouraging parents to model healthy relationships for children.

Areas averaging below 2 (Statements 8 and 7) are parish opportunities for parents to properly form their children and teens for marriage, and having a family perspective which considers the needs of the family when new programs are initiated in the parish.

Worshipping and Prayer

Summary:

Overall, ratings were lower in this category. No average ratings were above 2.5 on any of the 11 statements. Although some parishes indicated a 3 on the statements, the average was pulled down by the number of parishes that indicated a 1 or 2.

Strengths:

The following Statements rated between 2 and 2.35 in descending score: 1, 4, 5, 9, 3, 10, and 6 indicating the parishes felt they somewhat succeeded but could use improvement in the following areas:

- Prayer for the recognition of marriage as a permanent and exclusive union of one man and one woman.
- Offer petitions at Mass that regularly include marriage.
- Pray for couples preparing for marriage, who are married, and those celebrating anniversaries.
- Couples serve together in various ministries, such as greeters, lectors, and Eucharistic ministers.
- Have regular homilies on the joys and importance of marriage when the readings are appropriate to the topic.
- Give homilies that often connect Scripture with marriage and the Church's theology of covenantal relationship.
- Pray for those whose marriages face difficulties such as separation, divorce, widowhood, and distance.

Opportunities:

Besides the opportunities for improvement above, parishes scored below a 2 and saw little or no use in Statements 7, 8, and 2:

- Encourage couples to receive the Eucharist side by side.
- Invite newly married couples to come forward at Mass to receive a parish blessing.
- Have a monthly "Marriage-Building" Sunday to celebrate anniversaries, renew marriage vows, bless the engaged and newly married, and pray for those with difficulties, etc.

Committee 3, which reviewed these sections of the questionnaire, observed that smaller parishes, more rural parishes, and inner city parishes seemed to be more likely to score 1's. Without knowing specifics, the committee does not know the reasons, possibilities include: lack of resources, numbers and ages of parishioners; pastoral overload; and/or few volunteers.

Committee 3 Recommendations:

There is a need for more resources, encouragement, and catechesis for parents. The following recommendations would fit both categories (Creating a Culture of Life/Parenting in the Domestic Church and Worshipping and Prayer):

(Committee 3 Worship and Prayer Recommendations, Cont.)

- Use Sunday homilies to catechize the people in the pews. The diocese might provide outlines or actual homilies to parishes for the year.
- In the Prayers of the Faithful at Sunday Mass, frequently offer petitions for marriage, family, and the sanctity of life. (The Archdiocese of Detroit has an extensive list of Family Life petitions.)
- Recognize and bless couples who are engaged, newly married, or are celebrating milestone anniversaries.
- Constantly encourage the use of internet sites like FORMED.org, which includes Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained, in announcements and in bulletins. (Could the diocese provide membership for all parishes?)
- Encourage group viewings and discussion of FORMED.org and Symbolon.
- Make available Dynamic Catholic books, Lighthouse videos and CD's, parish libraries and pamphlet racks in all parishes.
- Encourage Parishes to sponsor speakers such as Dr. Ray Guarendi to help parents improve family life.
- Provide opportunities for couples and families to learn better communication skills.
- Provide prayer opportunities for families: parish missions, Lenten Stations of the Cross, Rosary on the Lawn in May and October, family rosary, Holy Hour, Eucharistic Adoration.
- Use sacramental preparation (Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation) as teachable moments for parents and children, e.g. Jesus Day Retreats.
- Encourage sports organizations (such as Boosters) to promote the scheduling of practices and games to allow time for Sunday Mass and Sunday School.
- Provide morning and/or evening Bible studies for women, e.g. "Walking with Purpose." Offer babysitting for morning sessions.
- Provide men's programs to encourage fathers, such as TMIY (This Man Is You).
- Since smaller parishes often have limited resources perhaps the diocese could connect a small parish with a larger parish when special events and programs are offered.

Diocesan Divorced and Separated Ministry: New Beginnings

Summary:

New Beginnings is the primary ministerial program in the Diocese of Covington offered to Catholics currently experiencing a divorce. While the incidence of divorce for Catholics in our diocese is much lower than the national average (28% vs 50%), one out of four married catholic couples experience the pain of divorce. New Beginnings has many benefits, but additional resources are needed to support this important ministry.

Strengths:

The coping, personal growth, emotional and spiritual healing tools people receive from New Beginnings are of monumental benefit. When you have a group of the right size, the relational support and personal connections that are made with people who understand where you are and that what you are feeling, has powerful impact. No one is "over it" in eight weeks, but they do have moments where they enjoy life again, and they can begin to see and have confidence in the fact that a future that is different than the one they had planned does not have to be an unhappy one. This is an area where the witnessing of the facilitators is of value. It is amazing how the participants progress from week one to week eight. When participants realize that their life is not over, it results in a true New Beginning.

Opportunities:

New Beginnings needs some improvement in communication with participants before a new group begins and taking the ministry to where there is need. Too often sessions have to be canceled because enough people have not registered.

Marketing:

There is concern that program awareness is not where it needs to be. As mentioned, one out of four Catholics experience divorce. Some New Beginnings participants, divorced for 10-20 years, have expressed regret that they did not know about the program sooner. From what we have observed, it appears that few people know about New Beginnings, including many priests.

Facilitation:

Recruitment of more facilitators should be a priority, especially from more outlying parishes. The facilitators could also benefit from a more detailed and involved training program.

Logistics: Consider meeting options in an effort to reach more people. Offer the program in different locations and at various times of the day. This suggestion ties into training and developing more facilitators and communication and marketing.

Recommendations:

- Add a staff member at the diocesan level to oversee New Beginnings. Several years ago there were two diocesan staff members supervising this program, 6-7 male facilitators and 6-7 female facilitators. There were at least 10 sessions each year with eight to ten participants participating in each session. Facilitator training was offered twice each year. These numbers have decreased by 50%. Adding a staff member at the diocesan level who could concentrate solely on New Beginnings would help bring focus back to the program. There is a substantial need for a divorce ministry in our diocese.
- Consider marketing the program throughout the diocese to ensure that priests and parishioners are aware of it. Begin at the parish level with the pastors.
- More facilitators need to be recruited and trained, especially in the more remote parts of our diocese, to improve the program's outreach. Outlying parishes should be contacted and encouraged to recommend candidates to facilitate the program. Facilitators should receive supplemental training annually.
- Provided that enough facilitators are recruited, more session attendance options should be provided. Even if it's 2-4 sessions per year in a "satellite" location in certain portions of the diocese, it would be more effective in reaching more people, as opposed to one central location for the 8 week program. It would also be helpful to consider one Fall meeting and one Spring meeting during daytime hours to reach people that are unavailable in the evening. Many people are single parents and attending a program earlier in the day during the school year may be a better option.

Youth Formation

Summary:

From the results for the Youth Faith Formation survey questions we discovered that some parishes have strong, successful youth programs, and some have either limited or no youth programs. The following are the strengths, opportunities, and recommendations we suggest.

Strengths

There are a few areas that are successful in the diocese. Theology of the Body, the Church's teaching on marriage, and the beauty of sexuality are being taught effectively. It also appears that parishes are trying to reach out to youth, but maybe there are not enough resources to follow-through on this at the parish level.

- Question 3 The beauty of sexuality and the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage are taught effectively to our youth (2.24)
- Question 9 Theology of the Body is taught to our youth (2.24)
- Question 14 Our parish reaches out to the youth of our parish and community in an effort to help them become active members of the Church (2.12)

Opportunities

Programs listed below ~~areas~~ have the most opportunity for growth in our parishes. It seems that parishes are looking for programs or events to reach high school and college-aged youth, and to help them strengthen and maintain their faith and prepare them for marriage.

Question 5 Post-confirmation program for high school seniors about marriage (1.12)

Question 6 Emphasis on remote preparation to help parents form children and teens for marriage (1.18)

These activities are not being done by the majority of parishes. Number 8 is something that is addressed at Youth 2000, but not all youth attend this retreat.

Question 4 Youth activities include efforts to honor married couples in our parish (1.41)

Question 8 Couples witness the joys and struggles of marriage to the youth (1.59)

The following are higher scoring responses that are opportunities that address in our recommendations.

Question 1 Parish provides young adults with effective catechesis that help youth discuss, understand, and defend marriage in the face of contemporary challenges (1.88)

Question 2 Faith formation and catechetical curriculum (1.71)

Question 7 Married couples are sought out as catechists (1.75)

Question 10 Fertility awareness/appreciation (1.71)

Question 12 Young adults have activities and catechesis available (1.65)

Question 13 Parish utilizes opportunities to catechize adolescents and young adults on meaning of covenant, sacrifice, faithfulness, and openness to life (1.88)

This last ~~one~~ item is done fairly well in the diocese, but not by all parishes.

Recommendations

- Reach the youth of the diocese through social media
 - Diocesan apps, Instagram and/or Snapchat accounts, etc.
- Begin youth groups at grades 5 or 6.
 - Get the kids involved at an early age to keep them interested even as they get older
 - Use 18 to 21 year olds to help run youth groups to ~~keep~~ encourage the older kids to stay involved.
 - Those aged 21 and up can join the Young Adult group for the diocese.

- Form Deanery Youth Groups
 - Shared accountability for parish resources – youth directors, priests, etc.
 - Helps keep costs to a minimum
 - Students from neighboring parishes join together
 - Youth group meetings would allow for:
 - ❖ married couples to witness the joys and struggles of marriage
 - ❖ general information about the beauty of NFP could be shared
 - ❖ youth could do activities to honor marriage
 - ❖ catechesis and faith formation could be taught
- Hold a monthly or quarterly youth Mass or themed evening
 - Mass celebrated by the Bishop
 - If not Mass, then Adoration or a speaker
 - Follow with food, games, a bonfire, or some kind of fun, social activity.
 - Include all the parishes of the diocese. Each deanery could take a turn planning/organizing
- Connect youth ministers. Have new youth ministers meet with those who have successful programs (i.e. St. Barbara's and St. Pius X)
- Research Ruah Woods' K-12 curriculum further
 - a way to teach students about the beauty of marriage, sexuality, and how we are all sons and daughters of God, created in His image
 - it begins in kindergarten and is age-appropriate each year
 - could be implemented through school religion classes, or classes in the parish program of religion
- Form/Enhance the relationship between NKU's Newman Center, Thomas More University, and senior high school students
 - college students can share their faith and attend events together
- Form a young adult book club and/ or speaker series like Theology on Tap for the college and older youth

¹The Survey was completed on Saturday, December 8, 2018, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the Department of Catechesis and Faith Formation in collaboration with the FLMAB.