



## White Paper Containing Excerpts from Various Documents on the Aftercare of Marriage

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Excerpt from: Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage

Pontifical Council for the Family May 13, 1996

**Canon 1064 — It is for the local ordinary to take care that such assistance is organized fittingly, after he has also heard men and women proven by experience and expertise if it seems opportune.**

It is the local ordinary (cf. c. 134) who should ensure that appropriate forms of pre- and post-matrimonial help spoken of in the previous canon are provided. The canon is practical in stating that the ordinary should consult, if it is opportune, with men and women whose experience in these matters can help him provide the best help possible. This means that the ordinary should do more than provide generic pre-marriage courses. He should ensure that assistance appropriate to the situation of the people living in the diocese is provided. He can learn what is appropriate through the people whom he consults. Such courses or assistance should be updated regularly to keep in touch with any changing issues that should be addressed.

Excerpt from: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in Context of Evangelization (Instrumentum Laboris) Vatican City. 2014

89. Generally speaking, the responses from various places in the world devote attention to divorced and remarried persons or those, at least, who have formed a different union. Those living in such canonically irregular situations display various attitudes ranging from their being entirely unaware of their irregular situation to their consciously enduring the difficulties created by their irregular situation. For the most part, divorced persons in new unions display similar attitudes in the various parts of the world, with the most prevalent in Europe and America and the fewest in Africa. In this regard, some responses attribute this situation to a lack of formation or religious practice. In North America, people often think that the Church is no longer a reliable moral guide, primarily in issues related to the family, which they see as a private matter to be decided independently.

90. A rather great number of people give no thought to their irregular situation. In these cases, no one requests access to Holy Communion nor the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. These persons often become aware of their irregular situation when they request the Sacraments of Christian Initiation for their children or if they are asked to be a godfather or godmother at the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism or Confirmation. At times, adults, who have a personal and conscious experience of the faith in the programme of catechesis or the catechumenate, become aware of the irregularity of their marital relationship. From a pastoral point of view, these situations are good opportunities to begin the process of regularization, especially in cases of cohabitation.



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91. Before treating the suffering associated with those who are unable to receive the sacraments due to their irregular union, the responses refer to a more basic suffering which the Church must take in hand, namely, the suffering of a breakdown in marriage and the difficulty of regularizing the situation. Someone experiencing this crisis expresses a desire to seek the Church's assistance. Various episcopal conferences in Europe, Africa and America mention that distress in the situation often seems to depend on the degree of formation. Many times, people in these irregular situations do not grasp the intrinsic relationship between marriage and the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Penance. Consequently, they find it very difficult to understand why the Church does not allow those who are in an irregular situation to receive Holy Communion. The catechetical instruction on marriage does not sufficiently explain the connection. Some responses (America, Europe, Asia) relate how at times people wrongly think that divorced people as such, without entering a new union, are automatically excluded from receiving Holy Communion. Such people, however, are not prohibited from receiving the sacraments.

92. Some Church members who are cognizant that they are in an irregular situation clearly suffer from the fact that they are unable to receive the sacraments. Many feel frustrated and marginalized. Some wonder why other sins can be forgiven and not theirs. Others cannot see how religious and priests can receive a dispensation from their vows and priestly obligations so they can marry, while divorced and remarried persons are unable to receive Holy Communion. These questions highlight the necessity of providing suitable formation and information in the matter. In other cases, persons do not understand how their irregular situation can be a reason for their not being able to receive the sacraments. Instead, they believe that the Church is at fault in not permitting their irregular marriage situation. This way of thinking can lead to viewing withholding the sacraments as a punishment. Furthermore, another factor of concern is the lack of understanding of the discipline of the Church when access to the sacraments is denied in these cases, as if it were a punishment. A good number of episcopal conferences recommend assisting people in canonically irregular marriages not to consider themselves as "separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life" ([FC](#), 84). Moreover, responses and observations from some episcopal conferences emphasize that the Church needs to equip herself with pastoral means which provide the possibility of her more widely exercising mercy, clemency and indulgence towards new unions.

Excerpt from: Address Of His Holiness **Benedict XVI**, To The Bishops Of Cuba, On Their "Ad Limina" Visit , Friday, 2 May 2008

"In a special way I would like to entrust the pastoral care of marriage and the family to you (ed. Bishops). I know how concerned you are about the situation of the family whose stability is threatened by divorce and its consequences, the practice of abortion or financial difficulties, as well as the break-up of families caused by emigration or other reasons. I encourage you to redouble your efforts so that all, especially the young, may understand better and feel increasingly attracted by the beauty of the authentic values of marriage and the family..."



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Excerpts from: Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, to Married Couples Celebrating Anniversaries, on the Three Pillars of Married Love, June 2, 2014

"It is a faithful love; it is a persevering love, He never gets tired of loving His Church; it is a fruitful love. It is a faithful love! Jesus is the faithful! St. Paul, in one of his letters, says : 'If you profess Christ, He will profess you, of you, before the Father ; if you deny Christ, He will deny you; if you are not faithful to Christ, He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself!'. Fidelity is being of the love of Jesus. And Christ's love in His Church is faithful. This fidelity is like a light on marriage. The fidelity of love. Always".

Always faithful, but also tireless in perseverance. Just like the love of Jesus for His Bride. "Married life must be persevering, it must be persevering. Because otherwise love cannot move forward. Perseverance in love, in good times and in difficult times, when there are problems: problems with children, economic problems, problems here and problems there. But love perseveres, it pushes onwards, always trying to work things out, to save the family. Persevering: the get up every morning, the man and the woman, and carry their family forward".

The third pillar, "fertility". The love of Jesus, said Pope Francis, "renders the Church fruitful with new children, Baptisms, and the Church grows with this spousal fecundity". In a marriage this fertility can sometimes be put to the test when the children do not arrive, or are sick. Faced with these tests, the Pope said, there are couples who "look to Jesus for the power of fertility that He has with His Church". While on the other hand, he concludes, "there are things that Jesus does not like", or marriages that are sterile by choice.

"These marriages that do not want children, that want to remain without fecundity. This culture of well-being of ten years ago convinced us , 'It's better not to have children! It's better! So you can go out and discover the world , on holiday , you can have a villa in the countryside, you have no worries ' ... But it is perhaps better - more comfortable - to have a dog, two cats , and your love goes to two cats and the dog. This is true, is it not? Have you seen this? And in the end this marriage arrives at an old age of solitude, with the bitterness of ugly solitude. It is not fertile, it does not do what Jesus does with his Church: He makes it fertile".

### WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR MARRIAGE IS IN TROUBLE

William E. May September 07, 2010

One of the finest discussions of this question is given by Germain Grisez in his book, *Living a Christian Life*, Vol. 2 of his *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, pp. 721-737. In *Love and Responsibility* (1960) Karol Wojtyla has some helpful things to say, particularly in the final chapter on sexology. I will first summarize material from Grisez, then from Wojtyla, and finally offer some practical suggestions.



### From Grisez

#### 1. *If marital troubles arise as a result of moral failures*

Very often marital problems arise from different moral failures, usually by both husband and wife. At other times nonmoral factors can cause them. Since God's grace and human persons cooperating with his grace can overcome all serious sins, the moral failings troubling a marriage can be overcome *if the couple uses the means necessary to do so*. At times venial sins can cause difficulties which a couple may not be able to overcome entirely (e.g., using profane language, getting impatient), but they must learn to live with such failings on each other's part. And if we say we are without venial sin we are liars. Usually, difficulties begin to trouble a marriage when one or the other spouse (or both) is doing something he or she should not do or is failing to do what he or she ought to do; naturally this does not please the other and a conflict brews. Such difficulties almost always involve a moral conflict rooted in some sin of at least one of the spouses and frequently in ongoing, more or less serious, sins of both. Among moral failings leading to or aggravating marital troubles, the failure to fulfill one's duty to communicate, to express feelings and thoughts carefully and gently, to listen attentively and sympathetically is of special importance because failure to communicate makes it very hard if not impossible for the couple to cooperate in developing their special friendship and in dealing with difficulties that arise. There are various ways of improving communication, among them learning how men and women differ in the way they think, use language, etc. It seems to me that men in particular have a problem in "listening" to their wives. A friend once told me one ought to "*listen with one's eyes as well as ears.*" Doing so can work wonders.

To overcome difficulties rooted in moral failures, husbands and wives must be ready to admit these failures, repent of them, and stop doing them. The Church teaches (see Council of Trent, decree of justification) that God gives sufficient grace to enable Christians willing to repent and cooperate with grace to avoid serious sin. Couples should repent, forgive, and admonish each other, and do the latter gently. They absolutely must use the supernatural means necessary and available to overcome their own moral failures: prayer, personal and as a couple, the sacrament of penance, Mass and reception of communion as often as possible. They should pray for each other. If they do this, and one spouse or the other thinks that the other has not repented some serious fault causing trouble, he or she should admonish the apparently sinful spouse in a way appropriate to a married couple and in a way likely to help rather than aggravate. The admonishing spouse should appeal to the common good of marriage, which consists in their unique communion of persons imaging on earth and making present here and now the communion of the Divine Persons. This good ultimately results in their sanctification, and shows how the spouse's behavior harms this good in a specific way. At the same time, the admonishing spouse should reaffirm his or her love and make it clear that no grudge is held. Spouses must void: (1) using admonition as a way of striking back; (2) appealing to selfish interests of their own; (3) becoming so discouraged that they end up condemning the other as hopeless. (See Grisez, pp. 721-723).



### *2. If marital troubles are rooted in non-moral sources*

Sometimes marital discord stems not from moral failure but from physical or psychological factors that lead spouses to behave badly (e.g., ulcers, neuroses of various kinds). As a result of these spouses may become easily upset and irritable and spouses affected by them commit venial sins of various kinds: verbal abuse, sulkiness, refusal to cooperate in small matters. Although such sins are often neither deliberate nor serious in themselves, the other spouse recognizes them as bad and is likely to react sinfully and conflicts arise; these can seriously disrupt marital harmony.

At other times marital discord arises from other non-moral evils, e.g., a lack of communication skills, ignorance of key differences between men and women, sexual clumsiness and impatience with other partner in sexual relations.

Frequently when marital troubles arise from these sources husbands and wives need the help of professionals (medical doctors for physical problems, psychologists/psychiatrists for problems caused by neuroses etc., good therapists for sexual problems). (See Grisez, pp. 723-725).

### **From Wojtyla**

In the final chapter, "Sexology and Marriage," of *Love and Responsibility*, in considering "marriage and marital intercourse," the future Pope John Paul stresses that "certain findings of sexology that enable us to understand more fully how sexual stimuli affect men and women (boys and girls) differently, how boys and girls differ in their sexual awakening. Such information can be of value in understanding better the complex of somatic and physiological factors conditioning the sensual reactions in which the sexual urge manifests itself" (pp. 268-269).

In discussing marriage and marital relations he is principally concerned with making males aware of the very different way in which sexual excitement reaches its climax in females than in males. He argues that "from the point of view of another person, from the altruistic standpoint, it is necessary to insist that intercourse must not serve merely as a means of allowing sexual excitement to reach its climax in one of the partners, i.e., the man alone, but that climax must be reached in harmony, not at the expense of one partner, but with both partners fully involved" (p. 272). In short, husbands ought to learn how to please their wives by becoming familiar with the findings of sexology in this matter. "Non-observance of these teachings of sexology in the marital relationship," he says, "is contrary to the good of the other partner to the marriage and the durability and cohesion of the marriage itself" (p. 273). If insufficient heed is paid to such truths, "the wife, who will not be fully involved, may begin to have a hostile attitude toward sex, become frigid in some way, and even result in psychological and physiological damage to the woman" (p. 273). He thinks that it is inappropriate for the wife to "sham orgasm," because this conceals the problem and can at best be a palliative. He pushes for true personal education in the matter and distinguishes between a "culture of marital



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relations" and concern for mere technique--the "how to" manual approach (pp. 274-275). What is most needed is true love.

### **Some practical suggestions**

To avoid and overcome marital problems I think that the following suggestions are helpful:

1. If one is ever inclined to think that he or she would be better off if he or she had not married this particular person, one ought to regard this thought as a *proximate occasion of sin* and immediately put this idea out of one's head.
2. If one is becoming unhappy with one's spouse, one should focus attention on the reasons why one wanted to marry this person to begin with.
3. Every day, perhaps best as you are both going to sleep at night, tell your spouse that you love her/him and are happy that you are married to him/her.
4. Do not go to bed angry with one another; rather beg forgiveness for anything you have done or failed to do that causes unhappiness.
5. Once you have forgiven a spouse for a serious moral failure, don't remind him or her of it every time you get irritated. Forgive and forget!

For Your Marriage Website – From the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Please review resources found at:

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/marriage-resources/news-blogs/happily-even-after/>

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/marriage-resources/marriage-help-and-support/>

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/marriage-resources/marriage-rx/>



**Study Questions for Discussion at Meeting – FOCUS ON IMMEDIATE PREPARATION AND AFTERCARE**

1. What are the most pressing challenges that married couples face today as they try to faithfully live out their vows of matrimony?
2. In what specific areas of Catholic Church teaching on marriage and family life do you think today's married and engaged couples are deficient?
3. Pope Francis identifies three pillars of married love; fidelity, faithfulness, fecundity. What resources and support do we offer married couples to strengthen these three pillars of their love?
4. What strategies do we need to reach out to couples in irregular marriages and or troubled marriages?
5. What actions/strategies are needed in our diocese for marriage enrichment?