

Meeting at Brackenstown Parish, Swords, Co. Dublin on Wednesday 18 March 2015

Question One:

How are people being helped to see the value of lifelong commitment in marriage?
What more could be done?

Marriage Preparation Courses

Homilies at weddings are a good opportunity to speak about marriage as a lifelong commitment, outside of that very little is done.

Have Family Days – a get together with input, family prayer, opportunity to be together as a community.

A marriage support network at parish level.

Engaged couples to meet other engaged and married couples to share experiences.

Importance of family prayer – commitment of couple to family prayer.

Marriage Enrichment Courses at parish or deanery level.

More homilies on value of the Sacrament of Marriage and the recognition that it is not always easy – encourage couples to seek guidance both from God/Holy Spirit and from people who are willing to help e.g. Accord Counsellors. I think it is important to refer people to an organisation like Accord which has a Catholic ethos.

Question Two

How are people being helped to understand that a relationship with God can help and enrich marriage and that the grace of the sacrament of marriage helps to sustain couples in lifelong love?

Good marriages can be an example of lifelong love – these should be celebrated, celebrating marriage is important.

There is an opportunity at weddings to define Christian marriage and encourage it to an audience that might not regularly be in Church. It is an opportunity to instil the values of Christian marriage.

Use the Celebration of the Family after Christmas as an opportunity to talk about Christian marriage.

Education of young couples

- On how to hand on faith
- Provide support for parents
(there is an absence of extended family in communities today and families can have few supports, important to provide support)
- Faith formation for young couples
- Sharing of experience by couples married for a long time.

To share awareness that during challenging times God is there with us to support and that it is important to keep a relationship with God.

A committed relationship with God creates opportunities to be guided by what he says. (sometimes you hear in the Gospel or the readings just what you need to hear on a given day).

Question Three

How can couples living together be encouraged to enter into marriage in the Church?

Marriage in the Church = marriage for life (it may be understood that civil marriage can be more easily ended)

Getting married does not have to be a big affair. We need to help couples to understand that the “white wedding” is not a feature of the Church, that you can have a small intimate wedding within the Church. Maybe this needs to be said in general homilies and not wait until the couple are in the room with the Priest.

We need to sell the positives of marriage in the Church.

Couples praying together should be established in the home.

Marriage is commercialised.

Talk more about the Sacrament of Marriage. (we are not hearing about the Sacrament of Marriage). Marriage as a Sacrament is not being promoted in the Church. Speak more about the value of the Sacrament of marriage.

Marriage Preparation Courses are not fit for purpose. They are essential but not all the same.

Ask couples who are living together “what would encourage them to get married in the Church” (Research)

Tell people that support is available.

Pray for newly married couples, celebrate their marriages, mention names – invite them back.

Education: people need to understand what the Sacrament means, the commandments, the word of God, commitment.

Explore possibility of having multiple weddings (reducing costs).

Church needs to sell Sacramental marriage as it is competing with civil marriage at the moment.

Some people don't want it.

Provide welcome to those not practising when they want to get married in Church.

Question Four:

Do couples in the early years of married life need more support? If so, what?

Yes, as before.

They need prayer, support, extended family support, values.

Often in the early years of marriage couples are working hard and can live in isolation in parish communities. We need to find a way to welcome and encourage them into the parish community. When a couple have their children and especially when those children start school, it is a great opportunity to bring them into the parish community.

Question Five:

How can the Irish Church respond compassionately to people in irregular unions while remaining faithful to the teaching of Christ and the Church?

Education – RSE classes – to define what is regular and irregular.

Respect and recognise people's journey's to God.

Move away from condemnation and be mindful of language used.

Welcome those in "irregular" as much as possible into the life of the Church.

Accessibility to supports – follow up from marriage preparation courses, bring couples back.

Prayer for families.

Clarity around Eucharist for those in irregular unions.

The Eucharist helps us to heal – allow people to receive Eucharist.

Church needs to look at “state of grace” before attending Eucharist. (example given of Judas being at the table with Jesus).

Encourage those who do not feel completely at ease in the Church to come to the altar for a blessing so that they feel part of the community.

Question Six

How can the Irish Church respond better to lesbian and gay people and their families?

The Church to be non-judgemental and compassionate

Avoid discrimination

Look at support groups with parishes for families – parents, children. Mention of organisation called Courage.

People wondered how to respond to situations e.g. invited to a gay marriage or a civil marriage, do they go, go with conscience?

Recognise that lesbian and gay people will already have experienced a lot of discrimination in their lives and need the support of a Christian community.

Question Seven

What more can we do to prevent abortion and foster a genuine culture of life?

Prayer

Support – financial and emotional for those who find themselves pregnant.

Physical presence at clinics to prevent abortions.

Giana Care – support organisation in Dorset Street.

Make resources available to women known.

Challenge the notion that abortion is a women-only issue.

End of life also needs to be considered – the importance of the value of life at all stages.

It seems that Pro Choice = Pro Abortion.

Whole families are affected by abortion.

Encourage those that attend our Churches to be compassionate and caring to those in their families who find themselves pregnant. Encourage a non-judgemental approach.

Question Eight

How can parents and the Christian family be made aware that the duty of transmitting the faith is an intrinsic aspect of being a Christian?

This starts at Baptism and continues through the Sacraments.

Provide groups to support faith and fun.

There are gaps between Sacraments, parents not attending or bringing their children.

Encourage prayer.

Parents don't have faith formation from Confirmation to Marriage. (Many people do not have a mature faith, they are still at the stage they were at Confirmation. We need to provide opportunities for faith development for parents)

We need to focus on Passing on the faith not passing on the rules – there needs to be a spirit of faith.

There are lots of resources for children.

Godparents should be given a more defined role.

Baptism anniversaries should be celebrated.