



Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

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Dear Brother Bishops,

Greetings and blessings in this new year. The upcoming observances of National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14) and World Marriage Day (Sunday, Feb. 12) provide an opportunity to celebrate the gift and blessing of marriage and to affirm and support engaged and married couples.

Promoting and strengthening marriage remains a pastoral priority of our Conference, as affirmed by the 2017-2020 strategic plan that we approved at our November plenary assembly. Marriage, both as a natural institution and as a Christian sacrament, is an irreplaceable good for society and all people. The Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth (LMFLY) remains ever grateful for the ongoing efforts in dioceses and parishes to promote, strengthen and defend marriage, and to accompany married couples in their joys and trials.

The year of 2016 brought several wonderful opportunities to reflect more deeply on the gift of marriage and family. First and foremost was the release of our Holy Father's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), the fruit of a two-year synodal process that engaged the worldwide Church in reflection about the strengths and needs of today's married couples and families. As a conference and in each of our respective dioceses, we have begun the process of receiving wholeheartedly and implementing faithfully Pope Francis' rich insights and guidance. *Amoris Laetitia* will significantly shape our work on behalf of marriages and families in the years to come, especially as the LMFLY Committee coordinates the development of a pastoral plan for marriage and family life ministry and advocacy.

Also in 2016, we in the United States welcomed the revised translation of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. This liturgical text draws our attention again to the beauty of Catholic weddings and encourages us to, as Pope Francis says in *Amoris Laetitia*, help engaged couples "to make the liturgical celebration a profound personal experience and to appreciate the meaning of each of its sign" (no. 213). The *Order* also made more readily available a beautiful blessing of engaged couples and of married couples on their anniversary, both of which can help us remind couples of their foundation in Christ and the Church's personal care for them.

Brother bishops, on behalf of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, I am grateful to highlight various resources that may be of assistance as your dioceses and parishes continue to build a culture that honors and promotes marriage and the family.

Preaching Resource – We are pleased to offer a preaching resource based on the readings for World Marriage Day, Sunday, Feb. 12 (enclosed). We hope this will encourage and assist your priests and deacons in preaching about marriage and the family, with a suggested emphasis this year on the joy of following Christ's commandments.

Bulletin Insert – We are making available a new bulletin insert that can be used during National Marriage Week or at any time (enclosed). This insert provides some encouraging quotes from *Amoris Laetitia*, which hopefully will invite the Catholic faithful to become more familiar with this important work.

Call to Prayer for Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty – During National Marriage Week, dioceses and parishes might consider promoting Friday February 10 as a day of prayer and sacrifice for this intention: “May all married couples be strengthened in their call to reflect the love of the Trinity.” More about the Call to Prayer is available at www.usccb.org/pray.

For Your Marriage and Por Tu Matrimonio – A large and varied collection of resources for couples who are married or preparing for marriage can be found in English and Spanish at www.ForYourMarriage.org and www.PorTuMatrimonio.org. Both sites also run Facebook pages, which will provide daily content during National Marriage Week: www.facebook.com/foryourmarriage and www.facebook.com/PorTuMatrimonio.

Marriage: Unique for a Reason – Video and print materials and other educational and catechetical resources that present the beauty and explain the uniqueness of marriage as the union of one man and one woman can be found at www.MarriageUniqueforaReason.org. The latest video on marriage and the common good was released this past December.

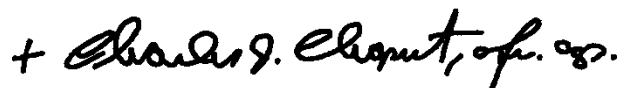
World Marriage Day – Resources for celebrating World Marriage Day (Sunday, Feb. 12), sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter, are available at <http://wmd.wwme.org>. World Marriage Day, now in its 35th consecutive year, received the Apostolic Blessing of Pope St. John Paul II in 1993.

National Marriage Week USA – Lastly, National Marriage Week, now in its eighth year, is a collaborative effort to influence the culture by faith communities, business, media, education, and non-profit groups. It promotes marriage as a benefit to husbands and wives and to the nation, as well as the best environment in which to raise children. Information and resources are at <http://www.nationalmarriageweekusa.org>. Dioceses might consider adding marriage programs, including conferences and retreats, to the national calendar facilitated by National Marriage Week USA.

Thank you again for this opportunity to highlight these resources in anticipation of the celebrations for marriage next month. I would be grateful if you could share this information with the clergy and lay leaders of your diocese. May these upcoming observances be occasions to affirm ever more deeply the gift of marriage and family life and may the Lord continue to bless all that you do in witness to the beauty and gift of marriage and the family.

With gratitude and prayerful best wishes on this Memorial of St. John Neumann and as we continue to celebrate the joy of Christmas, I am

Fraternally yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia
Chairman
Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

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