

# A COLLOQUIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND THEOLOGIANs

Sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Committee on Marriage and Family Life  
And Hosted by the Center for Marriage and Family  
At Creighton University  
On

*Promoting and Sustaining Marriage as a Community of Life and Love*

October 24-25, 2005  
Creighton University  
Omaha, NE

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## Panelists and Papers:

### Social Science

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Ph.D.  
*Patterns and Predictors of  
Success and Failure in Marriage*

W. Bradford Wilcox, Ph.D.  
*Seeking a Soulmate: A Social Scientific View  
of the Relationship Between Commitment  
and Authentic Intimacy*

Barbara Markey, ND, Ph.D.  
*The Lifecycle Stages  
of a Marriage*

### Theology

John S. Grabowski, Ph.D.  
*Marriage as a Unitive and  
Procreative Partnership*

Julie Hanlon Rubio, Ph.D.  
*Marriage as a Covenant and  
Sacrament*

Wendy M. Wright, Ph.D.  
*Marriage as a "School of Love"*

## Moderator:

Michael G. Lawler, Ph.D.  
Director of the Center for Marriage and Family  
Creighton University

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## OCTOBER 24:

### Introduction of the program and papers:

Dr. Lawler presented brief summaries and highlights of the papers as a catalyst for discussion with the panelists.

### Whitehead paper

Dr. Whitehead presents a picture of the "state of our unions," that underscores three social facts: 1) the benefits of marriage for both women and men; 2) the strong aspiration of young Americans to the *idea of marriage*; 3) the precipitous drop in the past twenty years in the numbers of married people. She raises a major question for this colloquium: "Why are so many Americans enchanted with the idea of marriage but increasingly disenchanted with being married?"

Whitehead lists the standard predictors of marital success or failure: parental divorce, age at first marriage, homogamy, level of education, religious commitment, economics, non-marital sex, cohabitation, rampant individualism. Her own research has highlighted one individualistic factor that offers a possible answer to the question cited above: “When you marry, you want your spouse to be your *soulmate*, first and foremost.” Precisely because the soulmate expectation is unrealistic, when unfulfilled it is “likely to make marriages unhappier and potentially more fragile,” and it can lead to marital conflict, especially when the soulmates become parents. Dr. Markey points out what is well known to researchers, namely, that “the marriage satisfaction rate drops significantly for parents with young children...Having children both centers the marriage and changes the overall quality of the marriage.” The unfulfilled soulmate expectation can also lead to divorce when the failing soulmate-spouse, in Dr. Grabowski’s words, is “set aside for a newer model.”

### Grabowski paper

Whitehead finds that “religious teachings offer strong normative support for marriage and for the norm of marital permanence.” Grabowski presents such teaching, drawing on “rich biblical and theological resources which can serve to ground both a conceptualization and praxis of marriage even in the face of unprecedented challenges.” Among those resources, he lists a traditional Catholic approach to marriage as sacrament and as covenant.

The idea of marital covenant discloses what Paul VI called, for the first time in Catholic history, the “unitive end of marriage,” with its demands for total self-gift, spousal fidelity, and marital indissolubility. The total self-gift of the spouses to one another in marriage, Grabowski points out “is lived out in the myriad struggles of a couple’s daily life.” It includes and is sealed by the mutual self-gift in sexual intercourse, which introduces the other end of marriage in the Catholic tradition, namely, procreation. Grabowski calls attention to the fact “the shared fertility of a couple challenges the couple to see their relationship in a broader [social] and more truthful perspective,” especially the perspective that “they are not trying to live happily ever after as an isolated couple.” Part of that Catholic truthfulness in marriage is excellently covered in Grabowski’s final section, *Marriage as Partnership*, in which he argues cogently for the equal dignity of the sexes one finds in the Biblical traditions from the story of ‘*adam* through the “mutual submission” required of all Christians in Eph 5. It reached its modern articulation in *Gaudium et Spes*, which described marriage as “an intimate partnership of life and love.”

### Wilcox paper

Dr. Wilcox’s presentation highlights the importance of the double commitment that makes some marriages more successful than others, commitment to one’s spouse and commitment to marriage as an institution. That double commitment or dedication, social scientific evidence shows, creates and sustains a

marriage that has manifest advantages over its widespread cultural alternatives, cohabitation and divorce and remarriage. Commitment to marriage is defined as: 1) a belief that children should be born in wedlock (many studies indicate that two parents are better for a child than one); 2) a pro-natalist orientation; 3) viewing marriage as a life-long enterprise; 4) a strong disapproval of divorce, especially when children are involved (many studies show that divorce is bad for children, and its ill effects are trans-generational); 5) belief that marriage is a better state of life than singleness. Wilcox makes an important point that could be good news for theologians: “People who believe that marriage is sacred....are significantly more likely to partake of the fruits of a good marriage...than are people who commit themselves only to remain married as long as they both shall love one another.” This is an important correction to the “soulmate” notion. This double commitment promotes intimacy: physical intimacy (sex and time), emotional intimacy (satisfaction with affection received), and intellectual intimacy (mutual understanding of needs and desires).

A high-commitment marriage: 1) allows spouses to take the long-term view of their relationship (or “soulmatedness”); 2) encourages both material and emotional investment in the marriage; 3) fosters intimacy and protects it from external threats; and 4) generates material and emotional support for the marriage from family, friends, and other interested parties. Wilcox reports the now well-known data: “Adults who are married enjoy happier, healthier, and less violent relationships, compared to adults who are in dating or cohabiting relationships.” By contrast, cohabitation (which is never really a “trial marriage” because it lacks the public commitment of marriage) is unlikely to do these things, and it may also generate bad habits that can be carried over when a cohabiting couple simply “slides” into marriage without much thought or commitment. Second marriages, Wilcox reports, “are characterized by less intimacy than first marriages.”

### Rubio paper

Dr. Rubio presents a plea for the Catholic Church to take seriously what *is* “between a man and a woman” in marriage, and to privilege the marital *experience* of couples over abstract and idealistic principles. The traditional terms *sacrament* and *covenant*, she argues, are “mostly devoid of content both for those inside the church and those outside it.” Catholic couples “need a deeply theological vision of marriage they can connect to their own lives, something they can believe in and work toward, something in between difficult papal documents and the simple pamphlets often promoted at the pastoral level.”

Rubio speaks of the sacrament of marriage in the way that the majority of Catholic sacramental theologians speak of it today, namely, as something that “pertains not simply to juridical bonds or marriage liturgies, but primarily to human relationships.” The real sacrament in marriage is the marital life of the couple, with its loves and conflicts, its joys and pains, its faults and forgiveness, etc. It is that marital life, lived in faith and steadfast love, imperfect and messy as it is, that reveals the presence of God or Grace to the couple, their family, and the world around them. As they lovingly and justly endure and work through together the messiness

of married life, couples discover themselves as soulmates, friends, and spouses; they discover their marriage as something they could not now turn their backs on; and they discover the presence of God/Grace in their life. Marriages are sacramental “because they are loving relationships through which God can be deeply known.” Marital love 1) reveals God, 2) is not insular, and 3), eschewing romantic idealism, is imperfect yet holy. The idea and reality of *covenantal commitment* is necessary to achieve the steadfast love that yields both marital and familial communion. An important point is that love must always be informed by *justice*, “a willingness of all persons in a family to regard each other as persons of worth, renew relations when they are broken, and restore any imbalance of power.”

The notion of the imperfection and messiness of married life, including marital love, well-known to any married couple, provides a needed correction to idealistic rhetoric about the total self-gift that spouses make to one another. Spouses can *intend* their love, commitment, and life together to be total and indissoluble but they cannot *make* it total and indissoluble at any given moment of their life, for that life always stretches out before them into the unknown future.

#### Markey paper

Markey points out two facts that are important for growing into marital wholeness: 1) change is the essential dynamic in a marriage, as it is in life, and this change is “a marrying process” and 2) that marrying process “involves building ‘multiple marriages’ with the same spouse.” Change is never easy and, for every changing “marriage” or renewed relationship with a spouse to be healthy throughout the life cycle (which today can extend to 50-70 years), renegotiation and restructuring are indispensable strategies. Memory is important here, the memory of past success seen in mentors or past success a couple has had in the growth process. Successful renegotiation and restructuring reveals each spouse to her/himself, reveals their coupledness (soulmate again), reveals their marriage to them in each new stage, and reveals to them the God/Grace to which Rubio testifies.

Markey offers a chart that presents the standard stages associated with the life cycle of a marriage and the tasks and issues they involve. Concerning these she writes “If the Church in the United States [or universally in Magisterial documents] has as a goal the promoting and sustaining of marriage as a community of life and love, its plan of action needs to be built on understanding what such marriages require [over their life cycle].”

#### Wright paper

Dr. Wright also underscores that marriage is not a static state but “a radically fluid experience that changes over the course of the life cycle.” It is frequently in wounded and fragile love that marriage is a School of Love, and that love has to be practical: “we cannot *be* loving if we do not *practice* loving.”

Wright's treatment of the four loves has much to teach us, particularly that there is much more to love than simply "making love." *Storge* is domestic love, most visibly manifested in the mutual affection of parents and children, but abundantly manifested also in the care of other persons when needed. *Eros* is the creative love that "draws a couple together to form a new life" [the new life of the couple together and then, potentially, the life of a child]. It is *eros* that overcomes individualism, sets aside self-interest, and plants an other self at the core of our being. Wright expands on this demand when she deals with *philia*/friendship. She offers a beautiful image: "If *eros* in marriage can be imaged as a man and a woman turned toward one another and entering into the mystery of love discovered face to face, friendship can be imaged as a man and a woman standing side by side, facing out." This image points to the social dimension of marriage, the need for a couple to be about more than their own preservation. Since friendship is about equality and mutuality, Wright correctly raises doubts about the notion of gender complementarity and its ability to generate friendship. She also doubts that "*philia* can flourish in a theological environment in which the husband, by virtue of his maleness, is assumed to be spiritual [and social and economic] head of the family." Here she makes connection with Grabowski who indirectly raised the same question in the concluding section of his paper.

Wright does not grant to *agape*, "the radical love which extends itself unconditionally toward all," the primary place it traditionally holds in the Catholic tradition. She argues that all the loves, when correctly understood, can allow us to experience the love of God. That is not to say that *agape* is not a crucial element in a Christian life, for it is. It is the love that enables one to love "the stranger, the enemy, the forgotten and unlovable." Its place in a married life is secure and Wright explains why. "It is the sort of love that risks embarking on the journey of forgiveness, that struggles to effect reconciliation rather than retribution, that strives to heal and repair rather than hold others bound in chains of fear, hatred and prejudice. It is the love that seeks peace not conflict, that works for a world and for relationship that, in some small way, hint at the kingdom Jesus proclaimed." The bundled four loves, "when rightly directed, come from and return to God; they simultaneously point to, are pathways into, and participate in the divine life itself."

### **General discussion:**

Dr. Rubio suggests that the average layperson has no understanding of the sacramental meaning of marriage. It was noted, however, that some people who cannot articulate what the sacramentality of their marriage means live out that sacramentality nevertheless. On the other hand, there was a question as to whether people realize the sacramental presence of God in everything, including the messiness of daily married lives. The conversation led to the following conclusion: the bishops have to help people understand how Jesus is present in the sacrament by teaching them the rich tradition of the sacramentality of marriage in language they understand. Also, even if a couple grasps on some level what is meant by the sacramentality of marriage during

marriage preparation, it is not until a couple is married that they can really comprehend what they have been taught. The Church needs to help couples continue to do theological reflection on their experience.

It was further noted that there is often a dissonance between the commitment to the idealistic notion of marriage and the reality of marriage. The reason for this needs to be explored. The notion of an idealistic soulmate marriage is what is left when you strip away all the richness that sacramental marriage has to offer.

Another line of discussion opened up regarding the similarities and differences between sacred and secular marriage. Many noted the idea that marriage is the only sacrament that has a direct correlate with a secular institution. In this view, there is a great need to inoculate Christians against the current cultural view of marriage. Others did not want to use language that strictly divided the sacred and secular notions of marriage in this way; rather, they wanted to see it as two parts of the same reality. All agreed that the bishops need to articulate what the Church means by marriage.

Finally, in response to a point that Catholic marriages need to be outward looking and open to the world, another point was made that openness to children needed to be emphasized first of all.

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## **OCTOBER 25:**

### **Presentations by Dr. Barbara Whitehead and Dr. John Grabowski:**

Dr. Lawler opened by re-stating the three goals of the colloquium: 1) to search for points of convergence and agreement in how we understand marriage and why we value marriage; 2) to search for ways of connecting the wisdom that comes from theology and from social science with the questions, needs, and aspirations of people preparing for marriage or those who are already married; and 3) to search for implications and strategies that could help both the Church and society to promote and sustain good marriages.

#### **A. Dr. Whitehead:**

Whitehead presented some further thoughts on the implications her essay on social science data has for Catholic teaching on marriage. In particular, she chose to focus on young adults because the future of marriage depends on them. There have been significant changes in the life stage of young adulthood that need to be discussed. She listed basic differences between today's young adults and the previous generation. The age of entry into first marriage is higher. Further, most young adults are sexually active in this non-married stage, so marriage now is not as connected with sex and procreation. Also, many young adult marriages now are preceded by cohabitation.

Whitehead shifted to a discussion of cultural factors that influence the young adult view of marriage, arguing that no institution has done a good job of preparing young adults for marriage. They are not only unformed, they are misinformed. A majority of young adults even agree that cohabitation is a good way to test compatibility before marriage. A minority of high school seniors think that marriage is better than cohabitation.

They cohabit because they are afraid of divorce, but they must be convinced that cohabitation is not good for marriage. It is especially unjust for women. Other examples of lack of knowledge include the fact that many high school students believe having a child out of wedlock is experimenting and not hurting anyone. Whitehead stated that these cultural notions about sex, love, marriage, and parenthood are very damaging for young adults.

Concerning the implications of her paper for the larger conversation about marriage, Whitehead emphasized that much social scientific evidence confirms what the Church teaches on the goods of marriage. For instance, religious practice and commitment to marriage are strong predictors of success in marriage. Also, the church teachings on divorce and teachings on sexual fidelity are backed up by social science data as healthy for marriage. Catholic teachings present a very clear alternative to what we see in popular culture, and it is important to strengthen the difference between popular culture and Catholic teaching. Whitehead thinks young people are looking for that committed alternative; the desire for a soulmate marriage is a yearning for something more.

Whitehead closed with an emphasis on an intergenerational connection. Young adults want to hear stories about people who have been married for a while; they should hear about the reality of marriage. One way of making this happen is to have parents of couples attend marriage preparation classes.

#### **B. Dr. Grabowski:**

Dr. Grabowski observed that there is a disparity between contemporary cultural patterns and our own normative Catholic theological accounts of marriage. He explained that the language of virtue can give us a lens to help bridge the gap between secular and sacred marriage. Virtue depends on sight; we have to see the good in order to become good. We are shaped by those we love and admire, so we need to see it embodied in couples. Also, we need to be habituated to that good through the practices of our communities. The Church needs to help provide a vision of virtue that people can imitate. We need to tell better stories about the church's view of marriage, which is already corroborated by "value free" social science. The first part of the vision is that marriage is a covenant and sacrament, but those words can seem empty, so they need to be defined as a promise sealed in a bodily gift of self and an efficacious sign of grace. Also, it should be emphasized that John Paul II taught that marriage is a sacrament from the very beginning. In a certain sense it predates and prefigures the other sacraments.

Grabowski suggested that marriage as a covenant and sacrament is a critique of culture of the divorce in favor of lasting communion. This communion is brought into being by vows and in the day to day acts of self donation. If a married couple is understood as a domestic church, then their communion is part of a larger communion, and part of marriage prep has to be evangelization and faith formation. The Church needs to treat marriage more like preparation for priesthood, which is extended and serious. We must bring people to faith if the sacrament is going to be efficacious. The church's vision of marriage includes its procreative aspect, by

which couples exercise their dominion over creation. The Church insists on the importance of the procreative aspect of marriage because she wants to address the whole person, including a person's fertility. Children have to be understood as a blessing and not a burden and economic drain on the couple. The Church can practically support the procreative aspect of marriage by supporting family prayer, ways of teaching children how to think about patterns of work and patterns of consumption, ways of becoming open to the world around them, and by teaching NFP. These teachings can be passed along through mentoring and support groups. If the family is the basic cell of the Church, the Church has to give life to families in more than sacramental preparation.

Grabowski pointed out that the church's view of partnership in marriage has ancient biblical roots, and added that now we find the Church emphasizing this equality whereas she did not in the past. Although it may be difficult to reconcile equality and difference, men and women can have a mutual partnership even with differences in vocational roles and psychological predispositions. Though men and women may be able to perform the same tasks, they do have differences on the level of qualities that inhere more deeply in them. Ways the Church can practically support the concept of marital partnership include teaching couples communication skills, the art of mutual discernment, how to develop a life of prayer so they share decision making, how to pay attention to psychological differences, and methods of conflict resolution.

Grabowski concluded that we need to think more deeply about how we put the church's vision of marriage into practice. Understanding marital experience is especially important when discussing practice. It is essential to ask whose experience of marriage is normative, and how do we judge that?

By supporting marriage, the Church is attempting to change culture. Couples must be at the forefront of this. Part of what we are doing is to equip couples with what they need to build a Christian community in their households, communities and parishes.

### **Dialogue with Dr. Whitehead and Dr. Grabowski**

Since social science data has authority in our culture, the necessity of advertising how the church's understanding of marriage is actually supported by social science was emphasized. Because our culture tends to think that the church's input is so negative, we must portray the Church as having a positive and expansive vision. It is also of utmost importance to connect our vision not only to research but also to compelling narratives about the lived experience of marriage. Communicating these messages effectively through the media available to the Church is an important goal.

The discussion about using the social science data to the church's advantage raised concerns that the data be used accurately and that the subtlety and complexity of the data be kept in mind. For instance, the data that says people who are more like each other do better in marriage was questioned. At the same time, these data have some validity, and people need to know of additional challenges if they marry someone very different

from themselves. Nevertheless, the data are broad and must be presented carefully to non-experts. *Follow the Way of Love* (U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1994) was able to popularize data while recognizing its complexity.

The injustice of cohabitation was discussed, particularly with regard to the injustice done to the woman. The law makes no provisions for a cohabiting relationship if it should fail. Although women seem to be hurt the worst by cohabitation, it was noted that men suffer from cohabitation as well, if in different ways.

Another topic of conversation was the challenge of communicating the church's teachings on marriage when some priests do not necessarily accept the church's teachings, such as those on contraception. A lot of younger priests may accept the teachings, but do not have the language or experience to teach them, whereas older, more experienced priests may not accept the teachings. Perhaps priests need to be exposed to the positive dimensions of church's teachings.

There was a discussion about gender equality and gender differences. Some thought equality alone should be emphasized, while others thought that it was preferable to talk about equality as well as the different vocations men and women have. A discussion about the use of the term "contraceptive mentality" followed. The church's need to emphasize other child-centered practices, e.g., adoption, foster care, mentoring, in addition to NFP was raised as a concern.

## **Presentations by Dr. W. Bradford Wilcox and Dr. Julie Rubio**

### **A. Dr. Wilcox:**

Dr. Wilcox proposed that people are turning to the soulmate model of marriage as a source of solidity because other sources of solidity in society have weakened. Because soulmate marriages do not involve a complete gift of self, however, they cannot provide security either. People are only likely to find authentic intimacy if they and their spouse are dedicated both to each other and to marriage as an institution.

Wilcox reported that 40 to 50% of marriages end in divorce. Though the divorce rate has gone down since 1980 and Catholics divorce less often than others, there is still much to be done. The Church must work against the dead ends of divorce and cohabitation. Why is divorce not a route to authentic intimacy? What often triggers the divorce is not a dramatic breakdown, but something subtler. Some think the best way to solve problems is by getting out, but they often carry the same problems into the next marriage. Because of this, remarriages are more likely to end in divorce. On the other hand, Linda Waite's study in the late 1980s on people who said they weren't happily married found that, of those who stayed married nonetheless, 64% were happily married 5 years later. The people who had divorced and remarried did not fare as well. People need to realize that all marriages go through peaks and valleys.

Wilcox said that cohabitation is a relational dead end because it can be associated with lower levels of sexual satisfaction, a higher risk of divorce, more domestic violence, and negative affects on children. Also, cohabiting couples tend to slide into marriage. Those who do not cohabit tend to be more deliberative and make

better decisions about marriage. Children in a cohabiting union are more likely to be sexually and physically abused than children in a married union. Even children born to a cohabiting biological couple are much more likely to see their parents split up. Commitment provides a context where authentic intimacy can flourish. It is valuable to have a long term horizon that allows one to see marriage as an extended exchange of gifts rather than as a contract that can be broken. Having what can be seen as a consumer mindset about marriage is also a problem. It is very damaging thinking that one is going to try it out rather than fully buy into it. Children, too, benefit when their parents have a long term view of marriage. For instance, men with a strong commitment to marriage are much more likely to be committed to their children.

Because God created us male and female, Wilcox suggested, we need to articulate our gender differences, the gifts and temptations that are unique to each spouse. These insights can help people understand their spouses better. One obvious difference between the sexes is that men are called to fatherhood and women to motherhood. Social science suggests that, on average, mothers tend to be more attentive to cues of children. Men tend to challenge their kids more, and men can be better at disciplining adolescent boys. The Church hasn't focused very much on fatherhood; it may be time to look at the unique gifts men bring to marriage. Our gender roles are going to affect how we organize our familial lives, and it is important to note that women tend to be happier when some aspects of their marriage are gendered in traditional ways.

Wilcox concluded that, with regard to many contested issues of our day (divorce, cohabitation, contraception) social science vindicates Catholic moral teaching, and we need to be less ashamed of that teaching in the public square and in our churches.

### **B. Dr. Rubio:**

Dr. Rubio said that, in her experience on a college campus, there is a combination of cynicism and idealism about marriage among young people. The idealism may be unrealistic, but it is important to encourage this longing for something better for marriage. The cynicism, on the other hand, makes discussion about marriage difficult. The youth cannot see a difference between good premarital relationships and marriage, and sometimes premarital relationships such as cohabitation seems better in their mind to the dead marriages they have observed. Because these people have been formed by the narratives in our culture, the best way to reach them is to tell the story of our tradition to answer those false narratives. The Church needs to give people a realistic view of marriage, a union that has many peaks and valleys and is a great adventure. One example of a story that speaks the truth about family life is that of the feuding children who came together only after caring for their dying mother. Though they allowed bitterness to overtake their relationships for a time, in the end they were faithful to their covenant with one another.

Rubio suggested that a good place to find the Catholic answer to the culture about marriage is John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*, which shows how the sacramental love of God is experienced in the intimacy of

marital relationship. This intimacy involves sex, and we need to emphasize how positive Catholics are about sex. It also involves a wider physical intimacy that is played out not just between the couple but also in the larger life of the whole family. The sacramentality of marriage is lived out in the sphere of the family, and covenantal intimacy sustains the sacrament. At the same time, the pace of our lives does not seem to allow time for the intimacy the pope writes about; therefore, families must find intimacy in the midst of things and in the messiness of life. Also, families must live out sacramentality beyond the sphere of their small family, forming children in a school of social living that emphasizes hospitality, justice, and openness to the needy.

Rubio said married theologians would add to the reflections of the pope on intimacy and sacramentality a discussion of the importance of mutuality and justice. Some people may not be comfortable with the language of justice within marriage because it seems like keeping score, but perhaps the language of justice needs to be used alongside the language of self gift. A rule of justice makes sure love is actualized. For instance, to fulfill justice a person will tithe, and that almsgiving is ultimately in the service of loving charity.

Even though it is important to show what a Catholic family should strive to be, we must remember that setting forward the ideal family causes anxiety for real families. Another strength of the Catholic tradition is to acknowledge that grace is present in the midst of our imperfections. In fact, there can be advantages to weaknesses because in times of weakness we are able to grow and recognize our interdependence on each other and our dependence on God. God is still there in our marriage in the dark times, when we realize we are not good enough. It is at those times when we must remember that marriage is structured to accommodate dysfunction. In light of this truth, to what extent do we tell people if you live out your marriage according to the Church's vision, you will be happy? To what extent do we tell people there will be difficult times and they may not always be happy? It is important to deal honestly with the difficulties of a Christian union.

### **Dialogue with Dr. Wilcox and Dr. Rubio:**

The importance of not denying the difficulties of marriage was emphasized, as well as God's promise to be present in the midst of these difficulties. Dr. Wright told a story about the way a mother and her children who had been abused by their husband and father found the ability to speak to each other about their suffering in an unlikely sacred space, located around the kitchen sink as they washed dishes. God's grace, then, breaks through in the even the darkest time of family life, often in the most ordinary places and in the most ordinary ways. The bishops' Pastoral Initiative needs to give a vision that can speak to people of the availability of God's grace in the midst of vicissitudes of their daily lives.

There was a discussion about gender differences in marriage. Some wanted to explore gender differences in depth, looking at the way men's and women's vocations complemented each other and honoring their differences. In particular, some wanted to explore the role of men as husbands and fathers, which they considered a neglected topic in the work of John Paul II. Others pointed out that we are too close to a time when

talking about gender differences meant that women were seen as unequal to men, and that it is important to be very sensitive around this topic. Mutual and equal dignity must be highlighted.

All concurred that it is very important to pay attention to the complexity involved in these gender difference discussions. For instance, it is important to establish principles of mutuality and responsibility before speaking about roles. Roles should not be prescribed before principles of mutuality and responsibility are established.

Another topic of discussion was the necessary interplay between the two kinds of commitment to any given marriage: commitment to one's particular spouse and to the greater institution of marriage. This commitment to marriage as an institution is important because marriage is being seen as more and more privatized. If it is too privatized, it is not an institution anymore. How does the Church help people develop a normative commitment to the public institution of marriage out of their commitment to a particular spouse?

The importance of reconnecting marriage and childbearing and childrearing was discussed. If people understand that a stable marriage is the healthiest environment for children, they may see marriage as more than an emotional reality.

The definition of the word *sacrament* and how it should be used in the pastoral letter was discussed. It is important to distinguish between calling marriage one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ and seen by the Church as a juridical reality and calling marriage a small "s" sacrament of grace in daily life. The two definitions of sacrament are connected to each other but not interchangeable. Further, to whom is sacramental marriage available? Also, how can the Church give people faith in the sacrament of marriage? This is necessary because whether they believe or not will affect the efficacy of the sacrament. Also, what was marriage before Christianity and what did Christianity bring to the institution of marriage? Because marriage is created by God, it points back to God. The notion that marriage has been sacramental from the beginning was discussed.

## **Presentations by Dr. Markey and Dr. Wright**

### **A. Dr. Markey:**

Dr. Barbara Markey, ND spoke about the lifecycle stages of marriage. According to her, there are 14 different stages of marriages, and the Church needs to have the vision and commitment to help people build healthy marriages at each stage. The way people navigate these stages is to resist change at first. Then they want to throw out the old ways, and finally they begin to try to find a new balance between the old and the new. Marriage preparation should prepare people for these shifts. Currently, the Church focuses most attention on immediate marriage preparation, at the expense of remote preparation, proximate preparation, and lifelong support.

Markey said, with regard to remote preparation, it is important to get people in touch with the notions about marriage they learned in childhood and will bring with them to an adult marriage. Families need to be

supported from the beginning because children of divorced families are much more likely to have a crisis of faith about marriage later in life. Proximate preparation in the adolescent and young adult years is important because this is the time during which attitudes about sexuality are formed. Parents need to be educators at this time. They need to be supported to prevent their children from making bad decisions and work with them if they do. Teachers can also be a great help at this time. If we are going to prevent casual sex and cohabitation, we have to do it in secondary school. There is a correlation between people who have good religious education in secondary school and people who do well in marriage preparation. Once these young people grow into young adults, they enter a period that the Church has neglected to a large extent. Between the ages of 24-35, people decide whether church is important to them, and the Church needs to be there for them at that time.

Markey explained that after the wedding, marriage preparation has a shelf life of about four years until its good effects start to fade. Typically, our programs do not prepare couples enough for the coming of children, and other problematic issues for young marriages such as time, sex, and money. Midlife marriages often need to be supported with marriage counseling because of the stresses couples undergo as they raise adolescents and take care of ageing parents. The Church is providing fewer and fewer opportunities for such counseling. Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter are helpful, but they are not sufficient. Also, the Church needs to think about what she can do for couples whose children have left home. At this time, they must make a new life for themselves, and the Church needs to be there for them and continue to see them through their later life marriage.

In conclusion, Markey suggested the Church needs to make these improvements in marriage support and at the same time remember that what we do and what we do well in the way of marriage prep and marriage support is often for the middle class. The needs of the poor, Hispanic, and African-American Catholics couples need to be addressed as well. This Pastoral Initiative could be modeled on an effort begun in the 1980s when the bishops asked dioceses to produce family life plans, and a great deal was done for family ministry. An effort on this scale needs to happen again in order to give Catholic married couples the support they need from the Church.

**Dr. Wright:**

Dr. Wright opened by raising larger economic questions that relate to marriage. Societal problems such as the lack of a living wage, paucity of institutions that offer healthcare benefits and long-time employment, and job loss all enter into the lifecycle stages of marriage. It would be good to look more closely at these economic issues and how they impact marriages.

Wright next discussed her approach to the spirituality of marriage, explaining that her basic assumption is that God cannot find you where you want to be, God can only find you where you are. Her approach is to open people to the fact that God is present, to emphasize that in order to grow into marriage and into a

spirituality of marriage, a couple must simply make a beginning rather than worrying about where they should ideally already be.

Marriage should be seen as a school of love where we practice virtue. It is a formative process, an art of being in a relationship with another person in many different marriages. In marriage, a couple must pay attention to the fabric of everyday life, knowing that creative, generative, sanctifying love is at the basis of everything. What does it mean to love our spouse? There are many different ways to experience and practice love, and they are all developed through the lifecycle stages of marriage.

It is important to emphasize that growth in love and growth in holiness is always a unique process, and individual experiences are an important resource for the whole Church. The process of allowing the Spirit to move in our lives is a way of allowing God to take us where God wants us to go. People may feel that they cannot grow into the ideal Christian couple because all ideals call forth our sense of not being able to live up to them. Ideals should instead fuel our imaginations to live out our individual gifts.

The four loves that couples practice and learn in marriage include *eros* or creative love, *storge* or affection, *philia* or friendship, and *agape* or charity. *Eros* overcomes individualism and is a generative love. *Storge* is found in the care of children, spouses, or the elderly. *Philia* undergirds mutuality and equality in marriage and allows the spouses to stand side by side as they engage in working toward the good together. The practice of mutual discernment and listening is important in friendship. Gender differences play out in other loves much more clearly than they do in friendship, which may be the most Christian of loves because it is more particular than the others. *Agape* is the most universal love; it includes a love for one's enemies, a desire for peace, a capacity for forgiveness, and a love of the stranger. A wide and generous love, it involves sacrifice in order to generate new life. *Agape* is also a more abstract love, and its growth is encouraged by the practice of the other more particular loves. Although some contend agapic love should be seen as separate from other loves, Wright stands with those who hold that all loves have as their beginning and end divine love. Any love is part of Love itself.

Wright concluded that living out these loves in everyday life requires a sacramental sensibility that embraces the complicated, earthy, human environment of family life and finds grace there.

#### **Dialogue with Dr. Markey and Dr. Wright:**

The importance of spreading the word about the different lifecycles of marriage and supporting couples throughout these lifecycles was discussed. People need to know about this paradigm because it is a good way to understand changes in marriage, and it is also a message of hope about the ability of a couple to remake their marriage. Also, different ways to reach couples as they go through the stages were discussed, including like-to-like ministry and faith-based marriage counseling. In order to serve couples well, it is important to make full use of our resources of different groups that support marriage. Further, the bishops must teach the same principles

about marriage to different groups and have them go out and spread the word. It was also noted that marriage must be strengthened in the parish, at the time of births, when children come to school, in adolescence, at the time of marriage, during times of sickness and death. These are all transition times in marriage when sacraments are received. Yet even though the parish is vital for carrying out any plan to support marriage, it cannot just happen in the parish. Leaders must be trained on a regional and diocesan level, and lay leaders are important in this ministry.

The question of marriages that come to the brink of destruction was discussed in light of the lifecycle paradigm, which may not account for the experiences in these severely dysfunctional unions. In these cases, the years of young marriage may be totally wiped out by despair and pain or the dysfunction may have so alienated children that relationships have to be built all over again when children become adults.

It was noted that often a person's experience of the language of divine love is disconnected with daily experience of love. People need to be taught that the way that they instinctively protect their children or learn to forgive their spouse is a sharing in divine love. The importance of a couple's spirituality was emphasized.

### **Summary Session – Open Conversation:**

Attention was drawn to two hopeful signs for the success of a marriage initiative. Over 70% of US couples choose to get married in a church setting. Also, there is an upswing in interest in spirituality. There is a receptivity to good teachings on marriage that was not there ten years ago.

The importance of putting forward the good news about Christian marriage and speaking positively about the church's message of hope was again discussed. The need for a more comprehensive plan to speak to couples about the importance of their day to day lives was suggested, and the need to invest in resources to communicate this message from the beginning of the project was noted, i.e., peer ministry, older couples mentoring younger couples, Marriage Encounter. Also, it was emphasized that cultural perspectives should be kept in mind. The initiative should not just be for white middle class Americans; it should reach out to Hispanic, Asian, African-American, and other populations as well.

Marriage as a vocation for the common good needs to be emphasized. Young adults are hungry for teaching on social justice, and this can relate to their marriages as well. Also, Catholic social teaching is directly related to the procreative drive of a couple. By focusing on fertility and having children, which is primary, we may have neglected other aspects of pro-creative life. It is important to expand the notion of procreativity to include the defense of life everywhere and the advocacy for life. It is important to remember that the family is the lynchpin of social reform.

Also discussed was the idea that John Paul II's insistence that God's people "be not afraid" can be applied to marriage ministry. Couples may abstractly desire marriage, but in practice they tend to abandon their idealism because they are fearful. This pastoral needs to help couples face the fear of fidelity with courage. It is important that the bishops emphasize marriage as a heroic and rewarding adventure not for the weak of heart.

The need for a re-articulation of our teaching on the proper role of sexual intimacy and procreation was noted. For example, the harm that cohabitation does should be addressed. Young people respond to a call to integrity, and a sexual relationship outside marital commitment is not an action of integrity. God created an ecological balance linking the ability to give life with a profound expression of love, and harm is being done to children, women and men by the trivialization of such intimate expressions.

Different aspects of the problem of cohabitation were discussed. It was noted that the social scientific data on cohabitation are not unequivocal. For instance, some cohabiters do not have a higher risk of divorce after cohabitation. On the other hand, that does not mean they have not picked up bad habits through cohabitation. The need to minister to and evangelize cohabiters was discussed. If a priest communicates well a caring attitude toward the cohabiting couple, they can be very open to being evangelized. Because cohabiters raise particular pastoral problems, it may be helpful if priests who have been successful in dealing with cohabiting couples can educate other priests. Some priests will not minister to a cohabiting couple; others prepare them for marriage but never address the cohabiting issue. All couples who want to be married in the Church should be welcomed, including cohabiters, but at the same time the Church needs to protect her sacraments from misuse.

The importance of the role of the priest and his attitude for marriage preparation and ministry was discussed. Also, the importance of having a team to do marriage prep, consisting of both married couples and clergy, was noted. Perhaps there should be some guidance in the letter specifically addressed to pastors, who are the gatekeepers of marriage prep. The idea that this guidance should be within a separate document was suggested, but the need to have only one document was stressed by others.

The question of examining marriage as a vocation was raised. Currently there is a theological reexamination of vocation taking place, and the concept of vocation is being seen as a less static and more progressive reality. Would it be possible for the bishops to develop a theology through which marriage is seen as a process that is a vocation? How should the call to marriage and the discernment of that call be understood? Is vocation a “contentless” word like *covenant* and *sacrament*? On the contrary, it was suggested that the word *vocation* may hold more familiarity for the average layperson.

Also acknowledged was the need to address the financial pressures couples feel. For example, some engaged couples are living together so they can save the money to have the wedding they want. Part of the problem is that people are trying to live up to the expectations of society about what they need and how they need to raise their children. How does the Church help couples and families discern a wise use of resources?

Another point raised was that readiness for marriage is what is being assessed in marriage prep, but, in light of the idea that all marriages are actually a collection of many different, changing marriages, we must ask which marriage is a couple being prepared for in marriage prep? Further, with regard to marriage preparation: How do we teach people to deal with change? How should they deal with conflict in the family? How can they

learn forgiveness? Holiness? How can they learn to build a lifelong friendship? What is the best way to teach couples these skills that will bring them through all of their changing marriages?

Other points that need to be addressed include: 1) the need to spend time thinking about the language of the sacramentality of marriage; 2) how to translate the church's vision about marriage into the practice of actively supporting marriage; 3) the necessity of speaking with care about gender issues with regard to marriage and the need to realize that gender roles cannot be generalized across age groups; 4) the importance of the welcoming stance of parishes toward engaged couples; 5) the need for more opportunities for dialogue to go on around issues such as sacramentality to help inform the future shape of the letter; 6) the need for relationship skills to be taught in the schools; 7) the need to tie the document to people's experience, including the experience of married couples, engaged couples, and the people who prepare them for marriage; 8) the need for the letter to include some discussion of freedom for the good because covenants have freedom at their core; and 9) the necessity to evangelize the people we educate about marriage.

Bishop Kevin Boland, chairman of the Committee on Marriage and Family Life, concluded by listing some points that the discussion brought up that were of particular interest to him. They included: 1) the importance of correctly informing young adults about the dangers of cohabitation; 2) the importance of heeding the predictors of success and failure in marriage; 3) the idea that to be married is to be deeply countercultural; 4) the importance of using the like-to-like model of RCIA as a model for marriage preparation and support; 5) the notion that God can only find you where you are; 6) marriage as a primordial sacrament; 7) the economic impact the shift from an agrarian to a technological society has had on marriage; 8) the importance of bringing the clergy into this discussion on marriage, providing resources for them, and having people to help them with their tasks; 9) the need for priests to preach on cohabitation; 10) the question of why we talk so little about sin anymore and how we can begin to speak about sin constructively; 11) the notion that the way to change the culture is to change the gods of culture; 12) the question of contraception and openness to life in every sexual act; 13) the importance of seeing procreation as a continuum, not just about conception or birth; 14) the idea that marriage is designed to accommodate dysfunction; 15) the question of how we get beyond the immediate phase of marriage preparation to include post-wedding education; 16) the need to encourage parishes to reach out to families through family life ministries; 17) the implications of *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2005) for marriage ministry; 18) the need to build up marriage positively as a way to come to God; and 19) the need to talk more about the concept of marriage as a vocation.

Bishop Boland concluded the colloquium by expressing gratitude to everyone who took part in its planning and presentation. He said that the colloquium had been an important experience of consultation and learning for the bishops of the Committee on Marriage and Family Life.