

TALKING POINTS

SLIDE 1

Called to Love: Pastoral Framework on Marriage and Family Life Ministry

- Brother bishops, at our last assembly, we approved a **national pastoral framework on Marriage and Family Life Ministry: Called to the Joy of Love.**

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- We are in the midst of a celebratory year of recognition for the family: **the Year of Amoris Laetitia-Family** which coincides with the fifth anniversary of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. This year also marks forty years since the promulgation of *Familiaris Consortio* in which Pope John Paul II reminded the Church that “willed by God in the very act of creation, marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ and have need of His graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin and restored to their “beginning,” that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God’s plan.” (n. 3)

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- Already forty years ago, *Familiaris Consortio* recognized that the family is “the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it...” These threats to the family have multiplied and intensified over the last forty years and culminate in the sweeping ideological currents that destroy and undermine our sexual identity as man and woman, and God-given vocations as father and mother, son or daughter.
- Therefore, “aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family, the Church perceives in a more

urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the People of God.” (n. 3) We can and must repeat these words of *Familiaris Consortio* with even more conviction and courage *now than forty years ago*.

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- It is **timely**, therefore, that, as a **body of bishops** we seek in every way possible to **implement this national pastoral framework within our diocese or eparchy**.
 - This framework is intended to assist **You the shepherd of your diocese** **together with your diocesan ministry leaders: whether ordained, consecrated, and laity, who serve and minister to and with families, especially marriage and family life directors in dioceses/eparchies and parishes.**
 - As the framework states, “*today, pastoral leaders face the challenge of addressing numerous marital and family situations that are more complex than in previous decades. This framework attempts to present pastoral approaches to many of these situations with the hope that all people “experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that ‘fills hearts and lives.’*” (AL, 200; Framework, p. 5)
 - Moreover, as Pope Francis reiterated in *Amoris Laetitia*, “*...the contemporary issues faced by couples and families require an outreach that is ‘not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems.’*” (AL, 201; Framework, p. 5)
 - Rather, “*pastoral care for families ‘needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one’s dignity and fulfillment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness.*” (AL, 201; Framework, p. 5)

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- **The national pastoral framework for marriage and family life ministry** is a highly practical guidebook to serving our couples and families by offering an *adaptable set of principles and strategies for pastoral care*.
- **You are asked to review this framework with your diocesan staff and clergy to implement it based on the needs of couples and families that you serve.**

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- As a reminder, the framework is divided into four sections, which we call **Pillars**. These pillars for strengthening marriage and family life are:
 - **Prayer** – or building one’s relationship with Christ
 - **Formation** – which includes Human, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Missionary formation
 - **Accompaniment** – which takes place in four major moments:
 - During marriage preparation
 - During marriage
 - During stages of family life
 - During complex or difficult situations of family life
 - **Advocacy** – for the concerns and needs of marriages and families (such as affirming marriage between one man and one woman and protecting the primary role of parents as the first educators of their children)

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- Every pillar focuses on areas of concern and then proposes **three areas of attention**. These areas of attention are repeated throughout the framework as three E’s: Educate, Encourage, and Engage:
 - *Educate* – This section suggests ***catechetical principles, knowledge and skills*** that are a foundational part of pastoral care or needed to impart pastoral care adequately. This is the ‘what’ or foundation for the Church’s ministry.

- *Encourage* – This section suggests **areas of encouragement to reinforce principles and meet specific areas of need that may be overlooked. This focuses on the ‘who’ or the recipients of education and care or the pastoral workers who serve them.**
- *Engage* – This section suggests **strategies that may be used to implement the aforementioned principles for the pastoral care of families. These are the ‘how’ or practical steps of implementation.**
- This section is followed by an explanation of how the framework may be **implemented** – primarily by way of the **family, through the joy-filled witnesses to the Gospel, and the parish as a family of families.**

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- To assist you and your diocese in the implementation process, our committee has **created a comprehensive implementation and distribution plan to ensure that the framework reaches widely to all dioceses, national organizations, and other constituents.**
- **Distribution:** distribution of the framework will be widespread and across ministries since marriage and the family intersects at every juncture of pastoral care.
 - Printed copies will be made available to every diocesan bishop and diocesan staff person responsible for marriage and family life ministry. These printed copies in English and Spanish versions will be available very soon. However, the full document is already available for download at USCCB.org.
 - National organizations or ministries dedicated to marriage and family life will receive copies of the framework. These include marriage preparation programs, marriage enrichment groups, organizations in support of building a culture that is pro-marriage and pro-family based on Christian values, ecclesial movements, and Catholic educational institutions.

- USCCB committees, offices and departments will also receive copies of the document with accompanying suggestions for implementation.

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- **Implementation:** To bring about a greater integration of marriage and family life ministries into the diocesan and parish priorities for pastoral care, our committee proposes an implementation plan over the course of one or two five-year cycles. Implementation tools:
 - As a first step in the implementation process, a **pre-inventory evaluation tool** was created for all dioceses and eparchies to gauge resources and ministries that serve marriage and family life at the local levels.
 - This inventory was shared with diocesan marriage and family life ministers with the request to review it with their bishop and other diocesan ministry staff in order:
 - To gauge the presence and effectiveness of ministries serving couples and families at the diocesan level.
 - To assess the national landscape of marriage and family life ministry at the diocesan and parish levels nationwide.
 - To inspire a greater recognition of the fundamental importance of a specific ministry to marriages (preparation and ongoing accompaniment) and families in every stage of life.
 - Another resource will be a **Parish Resource Tool Kit** created to:
 - To promote a new paradigm within parishes by placing the family front and center; creating a true ‘family of families’.
 - To further the pastoral plan that is or will be the key of interpretation for the framework locally.
 - To encourage the training of marriage ministers and family life ministers at the parish level.

- To enrich the parish life with a specific pastoral attention to all families of the parish, at all stages of life and in a variety of situations.
- To build a strong parish that starts with dedicated families of domestic churches.
- To inspire families to take an active role in the missionary dimension of the Church by extending their care and concern to families outside the parish.
- Finally, a **designated website** to accommodate future implementation resources and plans in an easily accessible online platform.

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- **Education and Formation**: to prepare constituents to engage with the framework effectively. Forms of education and formation will include:
 - **Diocesan Consultation Sessions**
 - To assist individual dioceses with the successful implementation of the pastoral framework.
 - To provide support, resources, and advice to bishops and their staff as they utilize the pastoral framework in the creation and implementation of a pastoral plan for marriage and family life ministry to meet local needs.
 - **Regional Convocations**
 - To assist regional dioceses with the successful implementation of the pastoral framework.
 - To offer a forum (virtual or in person) for dioceses by region to convene and recognize needs that are specific to their regions, possibly in view of a national conclusive event.
 - **Orientation and Discussion Series**: these will primarily take shape in the form of webinars and online workshops and be tailored:

- For bishops, clergy, diocesan and parish staff
- For seminaries of priestly formation, clergy, and deacons
- For leaders in organizations, ecclesial movements, and other groups that support initiatives of care for marriages and families
- For ministerial leaders in all areas of pastoral care that intersect with care for the family

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Finally, we wish to share with you an exciting opportunity that is being offered to dioceses willing to invest in their married couples and families.

- **The Catholic Marriage Initiatives Fund** (“CMI Fund”) is pleased to announce the availability of \$1,000,000 (one million dollars) of matching funds to be provided on a competitive basis to Catholic dioceses or eparchies within the United States that seek to implement key elements of the recently published document.
- Details of this opportunity include:
 - Total funding available from the CMI Fund to these dioceses will be \$1,000,000.
 - The size of each of the grants to the dioceses will range from a minimum of \$10,000 to a maximum of \$50,000.
 - These grants to the dioceses will be on a matching basis - in which the CMI Fund will provide a dollar-for-dollar match to funds provided by - or raised by - the respective dioceses.
 - All the money - the amount provided by the CMI Fund and the amount provided by each of the dioceses - must be utilized by the respective dioceses specifically to implement key elements of this National Pastoral Framework.
 - Each interested diocese will submit an application to the CMI Fund in which they describe their proposed project including how they would utilize the funds, what they would hope to accomplish with their project, and how they think their project would accomplish this.

- **The application process is open. Details can be found at:**
CatholicMarriageFund.org.
- **The first round of applications are due December 10.**

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- Brother bishops, we are all consumed by numerous pastoral needs that vie for our attention. I would like to remind you, however, in the words of John Paul II, that The Church's ministry to and with families is of paramount importance, for, "as the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live."
- The Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminds us that, "The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church." As the bishops of the United States, we have renewed our commitment to serve all married couples and families in our midst with special pastoral attentiveness this year and onwards.
- Let us go forward, therefore, entrusting this work to the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth so that families across our country will be renewed, fortified, and inspired by God's plan of love and life.