

WHEN A MARRIAGE DIES . . .

There Are Groups to Save the Survivors

Separation and the eventual demise of a marriage is not something that is ever given thought by a couple in the months of courtship preceding their wedding day.

Couples marrying for the first time firmly believe that they will grow old together and that nothing could drive that nuptial bond asunder.

Yet, divorce is on the increase. In modern times, marriages that were once thought to be indestructible have come apart.

Because some believe that helping the victims of such broken marriages is more important than statistics or examinations of the reasons behind such breakups, organizations such as the St. Charles Divorced Catholics Group have been formed.

Former wives and husbands find that their separation and divorce is a very emotional crisis and a tragic setback in their lives. When a marriage dies, so also does a part of each of the partners.

The St. Charles DCG was formed in 1975 by a small group led by Maryann Rivoli. Its first meeting in June of that year drew six. Today the DCG, still based at St. Charles Borromeo

Church at Dewey Avenue and Maiden Lane in Greece, has a mailing list of more than 600. The purpose is not to give any personal counseling but rather to provide peer support and informational sessions for both newly separated and the "more seasoned" divorced people.

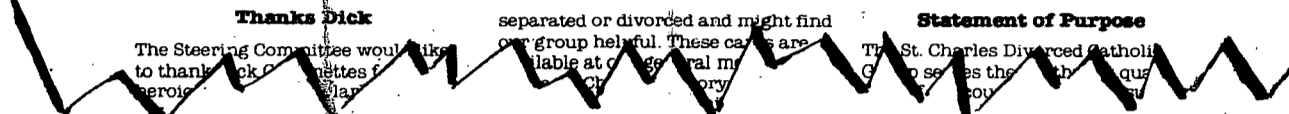
"The peer support aspect is probably the most important of our approach," said George Behrens, one of the cornerstones of the DCG. "One finds some kind of comfort in knowing that you're not alone and that others are having or had similar problems dealing with finances, career, ex-spouse, children, visitation, dating, etc. We gear our activities to help both men and women, young and old, with or without children, recently separated or divorced for some time."

The group meets on the first, third and fifth Sunday of each month in the St. Charles School hall or library at 3003 Dewey Ave. "Our general meetings usually draw 50 to 100 people for speakers, films, rap sessions or workshops on such topics as dealing with the legal, social, emotional, religious, financial or the child-caring aspects of divorce or just plain personal growth items," said Kay Geisler of the welcoming committee.

St. Charles Divorced Catholic Group newsletter

St. Charles Church
3003 Dewey Ave.
Rochester, NY
14618

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The St. Charles group publishes a bright, well-illustrated quarterly newsletter which includes listings of upcoming events, meetings and brief news items of interest to the readership. It is edited by Dick Courmettes.

She works at the St. Charles Rectory during the day and gets quite a few letters or calls every week requesting a copy of the group's six-page newsletter or inquiring about the next meeting.

Other area groups provide the same type of peer support. One meets at St. Paul's Church in Webster or Church of the Resurrection in Fairport on alternate Sunday evenings. Another meets at St. Louis in Pittsford on the third Sunday of each month. Another meets at Good Shepherd in Henrietta on the second and fourth Sundays every month; and the fourth meets at St. Christopher's in North Chili, the second and fourth Tuesday monthly.

The events and types of support activities that each of the groups offers is coordinated by the Diocesan Council of the Ministry to Separated, Divorced and Remarried Catholics headed by Kathleen Kircher of the Office of Family Life.

Ms. Kircher said that the council is composed of representatives from each of the five groups and works as clearing house in coordinating calendars. The council eliminates overlapping or competition of speakers or activities.

The council was formed in 1976, Ms. Kircher said, and whenever a new divorced Catholic group is formed, it is invited to send representatives to the council.

She encourages the five groups, 1,600 members in all, to co-sponsor and promote socials, picnics, Beginning Experience Weekends, Regional Conference meetings and the Christian Family Camp for single parents at Camp Stella Maris.

The council actually started the weekends and the singles camp.

Ms. Kircher said that the council also tries to schedule proportionate spiritual, social or practical events.

Recently a 24-hour

HOTLINE has been installed to give recorded details about the activities of all the groups — 225-9102.

"We like to think of our help in this ministry as being directed toward four distinct aspects, each beginning with S," said Dick Courmettes, another group leader. "We provide Support to our members through peer comparison in rap sessions, workshops, lectures and films. We provide Social opportunities with frequent parties, trips or recreational activities. We provide Single parents with programs geared to improving their relationship with their children. And we provide Spiritual encouragement and rebuilding through Church activities especially round the holiday season."

Courmettes said that "most people have a difficult time walking into their first meeting, but we keep the air friendly and non-threatening and soon they feel comfortable."

Each DCG group is directed and run by volunteer members. For speakers, they've had Dennis Boike, Father Thomas Bales, Father Robert O'Neill, Sister Alice Cooney, Dr. Carol Markovics and many other professionals and leaders from their own ranks.

"Since we are a group led by laypersons rather than by the clergy, we refrain from

giving advice on any regulations or giving any personal psychological help," Courmettes said. "We do, however, let our people know where to get such information and help."

The groups do have clergy support chaplains.

Of the three phases of recovery that a partner from a broken marriage goes through (surviving, healing and growing), the DCG concentrates on the healing and growing aspects, knowing that the shock, anger, guilt and depression that is felt early on will soon subside once the person starts to heal and grow again. The objective is to be happy about oneself again. For most, loneliness is their biggest obstacle and the meetings, outings, socials and liturgies offered by the groups give them a safe place to exercise a new found freedom, make new acquaintances and to be accepted again and start healing. The group collects no dues and has no specific membership requirements. Any Christian who is separated from a spouse and is having difficulty coping is welcome. There is no formal indoctrination or orientation.

More information on the activities of the St. Charles group is available from Kay Geisler at 663-3230 weekdays except Thursday or by contacting HOTLINE at 225-9102.



Dennis Boike, family therapist, teacher and lecturer, addresses a recent meeting of the St. Charles group on "Rebuilding Blocks after Divorce."

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Beware of Self Sureness

Dear Fr. Hohman,

Re: Courier-Journal Wednesday, March 11, letter "Knowledge but no Experience," signed by FWM.

I listened to a nun tell how someone approached her in almost the same way FWM approached you. The nun felt everything just fine in her life, etc. But when this same person asked her if perhaps her prayer life could be improved, or made richer, she had to admit that it could. She is now living a much richer life in Christ, that she never realized could be hers for the asking.

Father Hohman, I believe

God has the abundant life for His children and I believe the Lord is, as He said, "pouring out of His Spirit" in a fullness we've never experienced before.

FWM has received more from God than she probably ever dreamed possible and desires to share this with others. There is more than what we have. God does say, "you have not because you ask not."

Father, by your column, I know you love God and desire to help others. FWM is not saying she's better than you.

I do challenge you to ask God about the more abundant life in the Holy Spirit. I did, and my life is so much better and I experience Jesus in my life like never before. I'm no longer a

Sunday Christian but He is with me every day all day long. I have turned my life over to Him.

Father, there is more and He is willing to give us more if we ask

MPG

Dear MPG

I agree with you wholeheartedly. I really and truly care for and desire a more abundant life in the Spirit. I need to grow in my life of prayer. I need to grow in my life of service. I need to grow in my closeness to Jesus and I expect that that will continue to the end of my life.

If you can say, along with me, that you need these same things, long for them, and yearn for them, then I will be in total agreement with you. If, however, you say that you have reached a level where everything is okay, that you have "arrived," then I simply disagree thoroughly and find your position untenable. I sincerely hope that you are in the former mode rather than the latter. God bless you.

Nursing Students Receive Crosses

Hornell — Thirteen students in the freshman class of the St. James Mercy Hospital School of Nursing received gold crosses signifying successful completion of the first semester of nursing studies Sunday, March 15, in St. Ignatius Church.

Two class members received awards. Mrs. Margaret Welch presented the Ethan Welch, M.D. Scholarship Award to Mrs. Sharon Jones of Genesee, Pa. The \$100 award is given to a freshman pursuing a nursing career who has financial need.

Nancy Vasseur of Bath received the Riedman Agency, Inc., Award, which is presented to a student who has scholastic ability and financial need. The \$450 award is divided into \$150 payments for each year of the nursing program. The award is given to a student who demonstrates humanitarianism and kindness toward his or

her peers, and is chosen by the student body.

Sister Mary Rene McNiff, St. James administrator, congratulated the students on behalf of the board of directors and the hospital employees. Father Eugene Emo, hospital chaplain, gave the invocation and blessed the crosses.

Dr. Howard Named Dean At Fisher

Dr. H. Wendell Howard has been named Dean of St. John Fisher College.

As dean, Howard assumes responsibility for the general academic administration of the college, overseeing curriculum, budget and academic personnel.

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