

Marriage and Family Life ...

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2. A program using group process and well-trained, experienced couples from healthy marriages can effectively raise the everyday issues which tend to cause conflicts in marriage. These issues need to be raised in forum where Christian values are respected.

3. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio*: "The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even more in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages."

F ISSUE: Parish Adult and Family Life Committee — We recommend that: Parishes, and clusters of parishes, with the help of diocesan Adult and Family Ministry, establish a parish Adult and Family Life Committee to encourage and coordinate a variety of spiritual, social, educational, support, and recreational programs and activities which are inclusive of all individuals and types of families.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many feel that their parish and its current programs are not in touch with the day-to-day concerns of contemporary individuals and families.

2. This committee could survey and interpret needs, suggest repositioning of staff energies, delineate opportunities for volunteer involvement, point out gaps in current programs, reach out to non-traditional families and to others in need.

3. With the increase of pressures on family life, the Church has to mobilize more of its efforts to help people cope, find support, gather information and speak openly with those who share the same values.

G ISSUE: Skill Development Programs — We recommend that: Parishes, with the support of diocesan Adult and Family Ministry, offer or promote programs which enhance interpersonal and marital communication, teach parenting skills or respond to the specialized needs of individuals, couples or families in all their forms at different stages of development.

We make this recommendation because:

1. There are times when a relationship is at an impasse or parents feel lost and powerless. People need help in developing skills to be effective, loving, and responsible in the face of the challenges of our society.

2. The Church needs to be supportive of family life in all its various forms, being particularly sensitive and responsive to the problems and needs of single parent families and divorced, separated, or widowed Catholics.

3. We need education and training to learn to cope with the stress, conflicts, issues and crises of everyday life. This would include skills in problem solving, communication, self-esteem, conflict resolution, facing loneliness, developing intimacy, financial management and coping with difficult situations.

H ISSUE: Support Groups — We recommend that: Parishes, and clusters of parishes, in cooperation with the diocesan Social Ministry Offices and Adult and Family Ministry, train support group leaders and lay ministers to assess needs, develop networks and access resources necessary to establish support groups to meet the specialized needs of a variety of people (blended families, newly married, singles, divorced, widowed, youth parents, elderly, single parents, gays and lesbians, those undergoing a crisis, etc.).

We make this recommendation because:

1. It is the very nature of the Church to reach out to others who are in need of support or resources. These groups, by providing opportunities to share faith and Christian values, can offer great spiritual support while addressing common problems.

2. Peer support groups have proven to be very valuable in helping people help themselves through the sharing of common problems and the searching for workable solutions.

3. Some Catholics feel isolated or alienated from the Church because of their problems or life situations. Through such groups, the Church community can reach out, heal and welcome home those members of our community.

Theme 2: Faith-filled Celebrating Communities

A ISSUE: Building Parish Community — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help of diocesan Parish Support Ministries, explore and implement ways of deepening parish based community life through specialized retreats, programs, neighborhood clusters, interest networks, intentional communities, or base communities in which to share life and faith, receive support and put faith into action, while nourishing the whole community.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many Catholics feel the need of a closer community, a caring support system during the various ages and stages of life, and are sometimes going elsewhere to find it.

2. Smaller groups can foster faith sharing, faith exploration and faith nourishment through discussions of the riches of the Scriptures, the sacraments and our Catholic spiritual tradition. They also can be a vehicle for hospitality, outreach and evangelization.

3. In small group communities there is a better chance of including people of various ages, cultures, ethnic backgrounds and non-traditional families, and others who now feel alienated from the Church.

B ISSUE: Greater Participation in the Liturgy — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help and direction of the diocesan Office of Liturgy, design a comprehensive, ongoing program to help parishes measure, evaluate and improve the effectiveness and relevancy of liturgical practice, particularly the participation of the entire assembly in the Sunday liturgy.

We make this recommendation because:

1. A program which evaluates the involvement of the parish in planning the Sunday liturgy and in carefully carrying out the various roles in the liturgical assembly should help increase active participation in the Mass. The more people participate, the more they feel a part of the community's life and commit to its mission.

2. Pastors and parishes seem to understand that there are elements of reverence, celebration, involvement, instruction and commitment which should be present in each celebration but have little idea how to begin to instill these elements in the various weekend liturgies.

3. There is a general need to recruit and rotate more people in the various liturgical roles. By actively participating in planning, writing prayers, preparing the environment, or serving as an usher, server, lector or Eucharistic minister, the members of the community become more aware of their gifts and become more at ease in sharing them with others.

C ISSUE: Ministry of Hospitality — We recommend that: Parish communities, with the help and support of the diocesan Office of Liturgy and other appropriate offices, establish ongoing hospitality programs to create a welcoming environment and set an atmosphere of community in the parish, in the surrounding area, and in the assembly which gathers for the celebration of Eucharist.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Although hospitality is a basic Christian virtue, many parishes still do not make parishioners, guests and newcomers personally welcomed at Sunday Eucharist so that they feel part of a family celebration.

2. Parishes have not been sensitive to the physical barriers which exclude some parishioners nor to the spiritual, social, cultural and lifestyle barriers which exclude others.

3. Although studies show that a parishioner's sense of belonging in a parish is often directly proportionate to his or her active

involvement in the parish community, few parishes have taken the steps necessary to encourage this active participation.

D ISSUE: Lay Ministry Training — We recommend that: The diocesan Ministry Formation Office implement a comprehensive lay ministry training program which recruits from all segments of our Church, educates theologically and ministerially at convenient locations, offers tuition assistance in return for a contractual pledge of service, offers careful placement and monitoring, gives community recognition and develops guidelines to compensate lay ministers justly.

We make this recommendation because:

1. The Church, according to Vatican II, is made up of all the baptized, so the work of reform and renewal is the work of all. All need to discover their gifts and the various ways they can put them to use in service.

2. Many studies have shown that where the participation of the laity in the life of the community has increased, the ownership of community by the community increases. When a community lives its baptismal call to ministry, it becomes a livelier, more committed, more genuine faith community.

3. Some groups in our local Church seem under-served while the gifts of others in our communities are under-utilized in ministry.

E ISSUE: Outreach Ministry — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help of diocesan Parish Support Ministries and Faith Development Ministry, train parish core groups to establish an outreach ministry with parish involvement to alienated and inactive Catholics and to maintain contact with those, such as young adults, who tend to be marginalized.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Since many of those alienated from the Church are hurting, they need much encouragement and support in order to feel accepted and become active again. Caring, personal contact can bring them home, especially in key pastoral situations (e.g. sacramental preparation, crisis moments, etc.)

2. Some Catholics feel marginalized because of youth, color, disability, nation of origin, infirmity, poverty, divorce or sexual orientation; others because of difficulties with the Church itself. The feeling of belonging and the spirit of an embracing community must be offered to them.

3. Although a strong and generous faith is an excellent starting point, an effective program and proper training are also required, lest good intentions only bring further alienation.

F ISSUE: Parish Liturgical and Spiritual Education — We recommend that: Parish communities, with the support of the Diocesan Faith Development Ministry and the Office of Liturgy, develop a process which would help educate each parish and its members to the Vatican II changes and their rationale including the use of Scripture, liturgy and liturgical environment, the Sacraments, ministry, ecclesiology; and to their standard practice in the Diocese of Rochester.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Even after almost 30 years, many people — including some priests and ministers — still do not accept or understand why many practices were altered after the Second Vatican Council and hence find it difficult to teach or support them.

2. We need a process that will give us a common understanding and a common language when we speak of issues in our Church.



3. Many people are uncomfortable with what appears to be too much individual interpretation, too great a difference in teaching and practice from parish to parish, and consequently a drifting of some parishioners to other denominations which offer greater clarity.

G ISSUE: Personal and Non-Liturgical Prayer — We recommend that: Parishes, with help and resources provided by the diocesan Office of Liturgy and Faith Development Ministry, expand opportunities for parishioners to learn about the Bible and the Catholic prayer tradition as well as schedule a variety of prayer experiences to build the spiritual life of the parish and strengthen its witness through action.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Spiritual support groups, such as prayer groups, Bible studies, Rosary groups, and Eucharistic adoration groups all provide opportunities for people of similar spiritualities to grow together in faith.

2. Parish-based retreats for adults, families or teens or diocesan-wide retreat movements, such as Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille, Family Camp, have proven helpful in renewing Christian marriage and family life and deepening many spiritual lives.

3. Parish-based opportunities to learn about prayer, to practice the art of praying, to read with direction Catholic spiritual classics and to experience spiritual companionship have all helped Catholics to understand their own spiritual tradition instead of looking elsewhere for spiritual nourishment.

H ISSUE: Quality Preaching — We recommend that: All preachers, under the direction of the diocesan Office of Liturgy and in collaboration with St. Bernard's Institute, make quality preaching a priority by participating in ongoing enrichment programs, dialoging with parishioners for homily preparation and feedback, and participating in periodic evaluation.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Homilists should be encouraged to prepare better homilies and not simply paraphrase the Scriptures. Many parish/community Synod recommendations suggest the need for homilies which apply the Scriptures to everyday life, explore moral issues, make the Scriptures relevant to contemporary issues, represent the diversity of all parishioners and in the process share the Church's theology with the congregation.

2. More attention needs to be paid to the mechanics of preparation and delivery of homilies in order to increase their clarity and the congregation's understanding. Many preachers seem disorganized, unprepared and rambling, or try to make too many points at once.

3. Many Roman Catholic preachers seem self-conscious and embarrassed to publicly express their faith and therefore hide behind abstract ideas. Consequently, too few preachers seem faith-filled in their delivery resulting in too few in the congregation being built up, empowered and moved to action by the words of the Gospel.



Theme 3: Violence, Addiction, Burdensome Pregnancy and Terminal Illness

A ISSUE: Adopt-A-Ministry Program — We recommend that: The diocesan Social Ministry Offices assist the parishes (to) establish a network wherein each parish or group of parishes in a region would adopt or initiate a particular ministry — temporary emergency housing, safe houses for the abused, homes for unwed mothers, hospices for the dying, housing for single parent families — which it would support and/or staff while serving as a resource for the community as well as other

parishes in its region.

We make this recommendation because:

1. All of these ministries are needed and yet no one parish has the resources to do them all. Pooling resources and planning regionally would enable parishes to focus their charitable energies effectively.

2. Many churches have former convents, rectories, or school buildings that could be recycled for these needs. This new use would

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