

WORLD & NATION

Symposium examines marriage, family life issues

ARLINGTON, Va. (CNS) — Participants in a national symposium on marriage and family life were encouraged to be well-informed and upbeat in their work in a field that is full of challenges.

About 400 people involved in various types of family-related ministry met in Arlington Aug. 15-18 for a symposium marking the 20th anniversary of *Familiaris Consortio*, an apostolic exhortation on the family that has shaped programs such as pre-conception and annulment counseling and natural family planning.

The symposium was co-sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' secretariats dealing with pro-life issues and family programs.

Several speakers said marriage is getting an unwarranted bad rap in today's society, and that the church needs to do something about it.

"Marriage (today) ain't what it used to be for our parents and grandparents. It's gone through profound changes," said Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University.

Whitehead, author of the 1997 book, *The Divorce Culture*, said a shift in the importance society puts on marriage is having a profound impact on today's children.

She said there are "mountains of data" showing how children benefit most from two-parent families. For example, compared to their peers in two-parent homes, children living in single-parent households are generally more likely to experience poverty, academic and emotional problems and to experiment with sex.

Parents need to learn to strike a balance, she said, so they realize that the needs of children are not always equal to the needs of adults.

Scott Stanley, co-director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the Uni-



Karen Callaway/CNS

The duties of a family laid out in the 20-year-old apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* are to form a community of persons, to serve life, to participate in the development of society, and to share in the life and mission of the church.

versity of Denver, discussed a societal change in the way people view marriage, particularly when those who marry now may have a 45 percent chance of divorcing.

But those who look at the high divorce rate and say the solution is to not get married also fail to solve the problem, he said.

"It's not that simple," he said. "People still have the God-given desire to be mated for life, regardless of the bargaining society makes."

At the opening session of the symposium, Dolores Leckey, a senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center, looked back on what went into shaping the docu-

ment.

In 1980 Leckey was director of the U.S. bishops' 3-year-old Secretariat for the Laity when she attended the Synod of Bishops on the "Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World" as an adviser to U.S. participants.

She not only was involved in the presentations made by U.S. bishops to the synod, but when *Familiaris Consortio* was published a year later based on the proposals from the synod, it was her office at the U.S. bishops' conference that implemented its ideas.

She recalled that it was her boss at the bishops' conference, general secretary Bishop Thomas C. Kelly, now archbishop of Louisville, Ky., who ensured her place at the synod was egalitarian. As far as she knows, she was the first woman to be an official adviser to the American delegation to a synod, she said.

First, she said he insisted she stay with the rest of the delegation at Villa Stritch, the American hierarchy's residence in Rome, where she would be the only woman resident.

Bishop Kelly knew that the American bishops would be speaking at the synod on the changing roles of women and men, she said. "He thought that my being at the villa might illustrate, in a small way, the conference's commitment to women's public role in the church."

In a later session, panelists discussed church teachings on contraception, infertility problems and end-of-life care.

John S. Grabowski, associate professor of theology at The Catholic University of America, said surveys show that many Catholics are opposed to the church's position on life. "They aren't really sure what it is; they just know they're opposed to it."

The publication of *Familiaris Consortio* reaffirmed to Catholics that "the first and fundamental purpose of marriage is to transmit life," he said. "But it does not say families must have as many children as possible. There is no negation of the gift of self in natural family planning."

Diane Daly, coordinator of fertility care services at St. John's Mercy Medical Center in St. Louis and natural family planning coordinator for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, said most infertile couples do not realize that there is an alternative to in vitro fertilization which is "effective and 100 percent in keeping with church teachings."

In another address, Michael Lawler, a theology professor and director of the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., said the church needs to consider how it treats people whose marriages don't work.

He said about 50 percent of divorced Catholics remarry, but only 5 percent seek annulments. Couples who have been married for years, he said, have "no desire to say, 'Our marriage never existed.'"

Lawler, who served as a translator during the Second Vatican Council, said the council documents "made a huge difference on the Catholic doctrine of marriage," and "reshaped the tradition of marriage in a way that has not yet made its way into our lives."

In one of several seminars on related topics held in the days before the symposium, the bishops' longtime spokeswoman on pro-life issues told diocesan natural family planning coordinators that spiritual preparation, a thorough understanding of the topic and a loving demeanor are the keys to successful presentation of the pro-life message.

Helen Alvarez, who served for 10 years as the director of planning and information in the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, said those working in natural family planning and other pro-life areas must learn to "make your message attractive." She said that begins with making oneself attractive to listeners.

"If the audience rejects the person who is selling it, the message is lost," she said. "You will not command attention if you are viewed primarily as someone who is against something."

Pope's Armenian visit challenged

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The government of Azerbaijan has questioned Pope John Paul II's planned September visit to Armenia, saying Azerbaijanis view Armenia as the aggressor in a long-standing territorial dispute.

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliyev expressed his country's concerns in a meeting with Archbishop Peter Zurbriggen, the Vatican nuncio in the region. The two met in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku Aug. 17, according to a report by Itar-Tass.

The report said Guliyev explained that the papal visit was prompting mixed feelings among the Azerbaijanis.

"The pontiff's visit to Armenia, which is a party to the conflict and is regarded as the aggressor, is not fully understood in Azerbaijan," Guliyev was quoted as saying.

The foreign minister said Azerbaijan needs "more attention and moral support" among the international community.

According to the Itar-Tass report, the nuncio confirmed that the pope would travel to Armenia following a visit to Kazakhstan in late September and expressed the Vatican's hope for a peace settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute.

The dispute is centered in the area of Nagorno-Karabakh, an enclave of Azerbaijan with a majority population of ethnic Armenians. Fighting between mostly Christian Armenia and mostly Muslim Azerbaijan continued from 1992 to 1994, when a temporary cease-fire was declared, with Armenian forces in control of the area.

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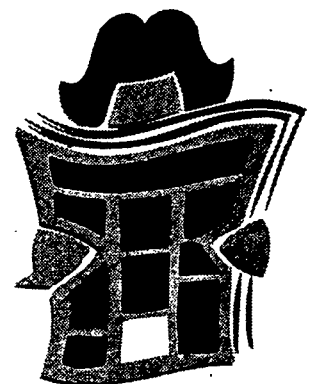
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