

**In the Heartland
With Bishop Pates**

**Year of Marriage and Family
October 19, 2014**

The Diocese of Des Moines will be celebrating a Year of Marriage and Family beginning with an inaugural Mass on Sunday, October 19th at 2:00 pm at St. Ambrose Cathedral. All are invited!

Marriage is the foundation of our human experience, an institution that predates all others and mirrors God's bond with the human community. The binding expression of love of husband and wife reflects God's fidelity to us.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis comments: "Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. As the French bishops have taught, it is not born "of loving sentiment, ephemeral by definition, but from the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life. " (#66)

Marriage and Family are among the top priorities of the pastoral ministry of the Diocese of Des Moines. The special year dedicated to this theme is intended to hold up the ministry rendered to couples and their children in order that they might experience fulfillment and happiness in accord with the meaning God has attributed to their union.

The Church focuses on three moments in the life of the married couple – marriage preparation, ongoing support and celebration of their life together.

For the past few years, under the leadership of Adam Storey, Director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life, the diocese in extensive consultation has been reviewing and updating what is institutionally designated as "Marriage Policy." These policies, under the title of "Marriage Preparation Policies and Procedures" will soon be available through Adam's office or on the internet.

The purpose of these guidelines is to offer a pathway for young couples to prepare for marriage in a manner that takes into consideration human elements but also seeks to probe the meaning of marriage from the perspective of God's revelation. Included in the preparatory process are trained married couples who serve as mentors, priests and deacons who provide guidance in the sacramental and liturgical nature of marriage and others who render assistance in the details of marriage preparation.

In this preparation, the couple is introduced significantly to the partnership that God plays in their treasured relationship. The Lord transforms the beauty of physical attraction and emotional feelings into a committed bond that is characterized by fidelity and perseverance. It has a lasting character and reflects the unity which God has with the human family. This bonding is then fruitful – obvious in the gift of children but also as the couple reaches out in love and sacrifice to others whom they are called to help and be attentive to.

In the same paragraph in which Pope Francis speaks about contemporary challenge to marriage, in reference to family life, he notes: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children.”

In the security of faithful and sacrificial spousal love, the child grows up with the taste of God’s unconditional love and the security which it generates. Through the parents, the child is implicitly introduced to God’s commitment which naturally engenders love and respect for brothers and sisters in the human family. Thus, the family is called the domestic Church, as it introduces the young to God’s presence in their lives.

The best, extended preparation for marriage does not guarantee a successful outcome. Like all relationships it requires intentional effort and adaptation especially in its early years. An equally important ministry for the Church community, therefore, is ongoing support of couples in the face of a multitude of hurdles.

The Church sponsors opportunities for prayer, for counseling and guidance, for marriage enrichment through a host of programs. It conducts parenting classes, retreats and initiatives to rediscovering the marital flame that might be close to or seemingly extinguished. From experience, it is obvious that personalities living together can chafe. On the occasion of my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary, when my Mother was asked, did she ever consider divorce, replied, “Divorce never, murder thousands of times!”

The Church recognizes, too, especially in our times that the outcome of marriage, oftentimes with all good intentions, can result in separation and divorce. This does not mean that these individuals are cut off from the Church. The community of faith continues to walk with them, support them in their pain and provide healing. In this outreach, the Diocese of Des Moines offers guidance in a program entitled “The Catholic Divorce Survival Guide” directed by Deacon Tony and Eileen Valdez. Information about the program is found at:

<http://www.catholicsdivorce.com/>.

Indisputable evidence of the value of life-long marriages is the recognition, the deeply felt satisfaction, and the celebration that nearly always accompany the marking of significant marriage milestones. The featured husband and wife, their children, relatives and friends pay heartfelt tribute to this accomplishment. Well aware of God’s involvement, the couple, nonetheless, render witness through their perseverance to life’s deepest meaning and the experience of love after the pattern of God.

The Church of Des Moines, and all of its marriage partners and ministers, rejoice in the privileged ministry to healthy and holy marriages entrusted to us. The Year of Marriage and Family is intended to renew and enthusiastically embrace once again this gift which extends God's love over the ages.