

CWG IV: Challenge to Provide Authentic Pastoral Support for those who are Divorced

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish Listening Session, August 6th-7th + 10 Participants Reported by: Emily Lane, Synod Delegate

- 1. What are the elements necessary for a robust program of pastoral and spiritual support for those undergoing divorce, both during the process and afterward?**
 - The diocese could always have on hand, a therapist or counselor (a professional in the field), available for free. Someone a divorcee could go and talk to in a time of need.
 - Establish a Diocese counseling service made up of religious and lay people who can understand today's world and relationship problems – people who are empathetic and who are aware of marital difficulties.
 - Financial assistance program through the diocese, where one can go for assistance, while regrouping and trying to get their life back on track.
 - Giving support to those who feel the feeling of failure when going through divorce.
 - There needs to be some kind of support or compromise to make the divorcee not feel like an outcast in their own church and faith.
 - Show the person getting divorced that the Church is a safe and caring place for them and that God has not abandoned them.
 - Maintain an open mind when counseling a parishioner – do not make the divorcing person feel unworthy of continuing in the Catholic Church.
 - In order to offer pastoral and spiritual support, it would be necessary to have a sound understanding of the causes of the divorce and how the church addresses these causes. A "one fits all" approach would not work since not all divorces are the same. This might mean closer relationship between church and divorcing couples than is now the case.
 - The diocese may need to do a better job of explaining what is involved when an annulment is granted. I wonder if most parishioners know. Also, simplifying the process and cutting back on the time it takes to get an annulment might also help.

- 2. How can the diocese make the annulment process more accessible for our people?**
 - Parishioners should be exposed to the annulment process, by teachings from the priest during masses throughout the year. Most parishioners know nothing about the process and/or options available to them as a Catholic. As parishioners, if we know what the diocese expects of those going through the process, we may be of assistance to someone in need. As far as being accessible? Perhaps lengthening the amount of time someone can go through the process.
 - Let the divorcee get their annulment at the church where they are registered. A parishioner shared, "Based on my home address I should have been attending a different church but I chose a different church that had a convenient mass schedule for me. The church I attended said I had to go through the church geographically assigned to be. It was an incredible hassle to even get the process started and after 4 months of trying I gave up and left the church for a number of years because of it. I felt that I was trying to do the right thing but the church would not help me."
 - That parishioner continued with, "Being a newly single person on a single income, the cost was also quite high to apply. The cost hindered me from pursuing the annulment right away. It was years before I felt I could comfortably afford the annulment application fee."
 - A website for information on the annulment process.

3. How should we bring an understanding of the internal forum and conscience to our people, not only regarding the topic of participation for those who are divorced and remarried, but for all Catholics in their moral and spiritual lives?

- By offering programs similar to that as Marriage encounter. A get-away or outlet where people can go and be surrounded by a support group of those going through the same problem.
- A priest needs to be in the REAL world or he cannot adequately understand or counsel people whose marriages have disintegrated.
- The Catholic Church seems to look down on annulments and more so divorces. There is a stigma attached to the whole idea of separation. If the diocese wants to get involved in this area, it needs to make certain such stigmas no longer exist and handle such situations in a very positive way. We live in a state where divorce is commonplace and the church needs to recognize this and make constructive contributions. If the Catholic Church cannot control divorces, and it cannot, it needs to adapt in ways that do not drive people out of the church.