

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

St. Didacus Parish Listening Session, July 24th and 25th + 45 Participants

Report by: Fr. Michael Sinor, 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?

There is a program offered in the diocese called New Beginnings, which helps those transitioning because of a divorce or the death of a spouse. Parishioners seemed unaware of anything like this offered in Spanish. Diocesan training for peer ministry on the parish level in this area (English and Spanish) would be helpful. If not on a parish level, perhaps a group of peer ministry on a deanery level can be offered. There is a significant level of misinformation about the “church status” of those who have been divorced i.e. participation in the sacraments and other Church ministry. The parish and diocese need to do a better job of education regarding legitimate reasons why people *should* divorce (i.e. spousal abuse) so that the stigma is removed. A significant and affordable program for pastoral outreach and counseling in English and Spanish to the children and teenagers of divorced should be developed.

2. How can the diocese make the annulment process more accessible for our people?

Education on the process seemed to be the biggest recommendation. A fact sheet from the Diocese with the basics regarding an annulment would help. Also, a FAQ on the diocesan web page and parish web pages was suggested. People need to have common misconceptions addressed (i.e. cost, status of spouses and children involved, situations where a formal annulment would not be necessary, etc). A diocesan or deanery team that can travel and convey information at Sunday Masses in both English and Spanish was suggested. Using another term besides “Tribunal” was also suggested. We shouldn’t be modeling ourselves after the Roman Empire. A suggestion was also made that the Bishops of California and the country ask for greater cooperation from the Bishops of Mexico and other Latin American countries in processing annulments here. The law of the Church is the same around the world. *How* Church law is implemented and practiced is very different in many dioceses of Mexico than it is here in the United States.

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?

There is no explanation of *Internal Forum* in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The Bishops as a group need to give a reasonable explanation of this concept that the average person in the pew can understand, especially in light of conflicting ideas regarding divorce and remarriage from the bishops themselves. The term *Internal Forum* is stated explicitly in the Papal document. Therefore, it seems appropriate that a reasonable definition should be offered that people could understand. There seems to be a large section on “erroneous conscience” in the Catechism, but nothing on *Internal Forum*. Education and resources for education on the formation of conscience that are available in English and Spanish are a necessity.

Education needs to be offered to people who do not believe they can be married in the Church because they are afraid of creating problems with their immigration status.

Some marriage and remarriage situations are much easier to resolve than others. When this is possible and how this is possible needs to be more effectively communicated to our people. Training for priests and deacons as well as religious and other qualified laypeople might be made available so that they can communicate guidelines for *Internal Forum* and formation of conscience.