

Go, you are sent... to support marriage and families

“...there was a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee.”

JOHN 2:1

Many factors can create adversity and hardship for families, for example, low wages, long hours, insecure employment, health problems, relationship issues, lack of extended family support, being in a new country. Single parent and blended families face special challenges, and for those involving a Catholic parent, there may also be a sense of not being welcome in the Church.

Catholic marriages have declined with wider community trends. More couples live together, often for long periods. Approximately 80% of couples attending Catholic marriage preparation courses are living together, and some have children. The majority of young Catholics have non-Catholic partners.

The marriage rate in New Zealand has fallen consistently since the 1960s. The general marriage rate (number of marriages and civil unions per 1,000 aged 16 years and over who are not married or in a civil union) was 11.1 in 2015. This is around one-quarter of the 1971 peak, when the rate reached 45.5. About one-third of marriages end in divorce before the 25th anniversary of marriage.

1. How can marriage be made easier and more desirable for young Catholics? (Anyone can answer this question, but please say if you are a young Catholic.)

2. What initiatives would help families which are in difficulty, in the Catholic community and in the wider community?

3. What do those who are divorced, who have remarried or not remarried, and blended families need from their Church community, and how can the community respond?

Please say if the circumstances in Q2 or Q3 are yours or those of someone close to you (anonymously is fine) as your answers will provide important insights.



“We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.”

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“Given the pace of life today, most couples cannot attend frequent meetings; still, we cannot restrict our pastoral outreach to small and select groups. Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended.”

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“It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. They are not excommunicated and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.”

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“We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism. Then too, we often present marriage in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation. Nor have we always provided solid guidance to young married couples, understanding their timetables, their way of thinking and their concrete concerns. At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.”

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