

Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization

1a: Describe how the Catholic Church's teaching on the value of the family contained in the Bible, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Familiaris Consortio* and other documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium is understood by people today? What formation is given to our people on the Church's teaching on family life?

Many Catholics in the Diocese of Davenport are not familiar with the Church documents related to the Church's teaching on the value of the family. Most learn about these teachings from homilies given on the subject and from other sources such as marriage preparation and baptism preparation programs, from church and public media, and from their family of origin.

1b: In those cases where the Church's teaching is known, is it accepted fully or are there difficulties in putting into practice? If so, what are they?

Many teachings are not fully accepted because they appear contradictory to their personal experiences and/or are very painful for families. Unfortunately this has led to families leaving the Catholic Church. Issues of concern are: contraception use, divorce, remarriage without annulment, civil marriage preferred rather than sacramental marriage, increase in de facto unions, increase in same-sex civil unions, homosexuality. Other difficulties that families face are: spousal abuse, addictions, societal trends that diminish the lifelong commitment in marriage, lack of and cost of professional therapy.

1c: How widespread is the Church's teaching in pastoral programs at the national, diocesan and parish levels? What catechesis is done on the family?

There is pastoral programming at the national, diocesan and parish level, but more could be done. The US Bishops' web site on marriage, while very good, could be expanded to other topics related to families. Some find catechesis in homilies, parish bulletins, bishop's web site, marriage preparation programs, Generations of Faith, digital media, Christian Family Movement, marriage encounter, EWTN, newspapers and other parish programs. Some see it lacking in the same.

1d: To what extent—and what aspects in particular—is this teaching actually known, accepted, rejected and/or criticized in areas outside the Church? What are the cultural factors which hinder the full reception of the Church's teaching on the family?

Some areas are understood and practiced. Some areas are understood and ignored. Others are not understood. Secular media continues in its effort to promote a 'new normal' in

family life that rejects Church teachings on family. What the Church teaches on family needs to be reviewed, restated in terms easily interpreted, and evaluated to meet today's situations. The Church needs to utilize all media available to minimize misinformation and to promote understanding of the Church's teaching on family life.

2a: What place does the idea of the natural law have in the cultural areas of society: in institutions, education, academic circles and among the people at large? What anthropological ideas underlie the discussion on the natural basis of the family?

There is little discussion of natural law in modern society. Most people do not understand or recognize natural law. Even those who firmly agree with the idea of natural law state that it had been a long time since they had heard about it from the pulpit, classroom, or in everyday discourse. Instead, ideas such as moral relativism, skepticism, secularism, and other "modern" ideas tend to shape decision making and judgments on moral behavior.

There is a need to educate believers about natural law and its consequences for human life.

2b: Is the idea of the natural law in the union between a man and a woman commonly accepted as such by the baptized in general?

For many a union between man and woman is "normal," there is also an understanding that other unions are common, even if they are not accepted by the Church. Many experience homosexual unions as a reality in their own families or among their close friends. It is noted that a number of state governments are moving to recognize same-sex marriages.

Marriage is seen in merely secular terms, reflecting the notion that civil marriage entails a number of rights and benefits. Marriage tends to become divested from procreation and sacramentality.

2c: How is the theory and practice of natural law in the union between man and woman challenged in light of the formation of a family? How is it proposed and developed in civil and Church institutions?

The gender of the person is not as important to some as their capability to form a loving relationship with another. Current political movements are making same-sex unions widely accepted across the nation, meaning that the "typical" understanding of a family among all peoples is changing. Modern developments in science have challenged the classical understanding of the human person. As a result, some feel that Church teaching is out of step with the current understanding of genetics, psychology, and other areas of human development.

Many feel that Church institutions are ineffective at communicating the natural law understanding of marriage.

2d: In cases where non-practicing Catholics or declared non-believers request the celebration of marriage, describe how this pastoral challenge is dealt with?

Pastoral response varies from place to place. Some parishes welcome anyone who requests marriage; others do not have a welcoming attitude towards those who are not members of the parish. Many priests feel they do not have clear guidelines to follow in some situations, while others feel that they use such opportunities as a time to educate these people about the Church's understanding of marriage. Most agree that there should be a minimum of "good will" on the couple's part before marriage preparation can proceed.

3a: What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation? What efforts are there to stimulate the task of evangelization of the couple and the family? How can an awareness of the family as the "domestic Church" be promoted?

Marriage preparation is a positive move by the Church preparing engaged couples for marriage. This has taken the form of written evaluations and the use of sponsor couples who bring their experience of marriage to the conversation. They are able to explain how they deal with difficult subjects and situations.

Married couples show by example, witnessing to their faith by their actions. Priests, deacons, sponsor couples deal with more than sacramental side of marriage and by this show how God is part of marriage. Spiritual programs are being developed that establish firm foundations for families in faith formation.

Better explanation is needed to define domestic Church. Family-centered events by the Church need to be promoted that involve catechesis, activities and opportunities to learn for all age groups and families as a whole. Special attention needs to be given to support young families that would benefit them emotionally and spiritually.

3b: How successful have you been in proposing a manner of praying within the family which can withstand life's complexities and today's culture?

The diocese has been moderately successful, especially for families who are attending and engaged in parish activities and who are attending Mass frequently. Our Faith Formation Office continually puts forth and invites participation in programs that have prayer components.

3c: In the current generational crisis, how have Christian families been able to fulfill their vocation of transmitting the faith?

The model of parents being the primary teachers of faith has shifted to parish religious education programs being the primary source. Parents provide the greatest influence and set examples as the witness of their faith by their commitments of attending Sunday Mass and assisting with issues such as social justice. Often times it is the older generation caring for the children on helping to transmit the faith.

3d: In what way have the local Churches and movements on family spirituality been able to create ways of acting which are exemplary?

Again, our Faith Formation Office offers opportunities in the area of family spirituality. Many parishes also offer these on the parish level. Two programs stand out as developing family spirituality: the Knights of Columbus and social action programs provided by the parish and diocese that reach out to the poor.

3e: What specific contribution can couples and families make to spreading a credible and holistic idea of the couple and the Christian family today?

The most powerful is by example in providing role models in all the areas of family life not only for their own families but especially nurturing new families.

3f: What pastoral care has the Church provided in supporting couples in formation and couples in crisis situation?

Pastoral care is provided to couples in formation through diocesan and parish programs such as sponsor couples and pre cana. Pastors, other clergy and laity involved in marriage preparation also provide different levels of pastoral care. There are support groups available. Pastors, other clergy and laity also provide pastoral care for couples in crisis on an individual basis and through parish support groups.

4a: Is cohabitation *ad experimentum* a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage?

Cohabitation outside of marriage is most definitely a reality in this Church. It seems to be particularly common among young people, but is not limited to that age bracket. Based on the information contained in premarital investigations processed by the Davenport Tribunal, I would approximate that a significant majority of couples preparing for marriage cohabitate—perhaps even 85% or more.

4b: Do unions which are not recognized either religiously or civilly exist? Are reliable statistics available?

In addition to couples who live together prior to marriage, there are other situations which lead couples to cohabit with no intention of necessarily marrying, either civilly or religiously. These may be same-sex couples (especially those in states in which same-sex unions/marriages are not civilly recognized), senior-citizen couples who choose not to marry due to the fear of losing retirement benefits, common law marriages, or those individuals who, for a variety of reasons, simply do not intend to marry. I have no reliable statistics concerning this matter.

4c: Are separated couples and those divorced and remarried a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage? How do you deal with this situation in appropriate pastoral programs?

Divorced individuals, particularly those who have attempted a subsequent marriage, often feel marginalized in the Church. There is no way to realistically guess a percentage of such persons but, given the prevalence of divorce in our society, it is likely 20-25%. There are a few pastoral programs which attempt to reach out to divorced or divorced and remarried individuals but sadly this is an area of great need in the Church today. There still exists the notion of civil divorce as a "sin," and many divorced persons do not feel "welcome" in the Church.

4d: In all the above cases, how do the baptized live in this irregular situation? Are they aware of it? Are they simply indifferent? Do they feel marginalized or suffer from the impossibility of receiving the sacraments?

There seems to be a growing trend of divorced and remarried couples being either ignorant of their "irregular" living situation or indifferent to its effects relative to their faith. Those who fall into either of these two categories will typically continue receiving the Holy Eucharist to the extent they had done so before the beginning of their irregular situation. Those couples who are aware of their irregular marital situations generally abstain from the Eucharist or seek out another faith tradition which is accepting of divorce and remarriage. Those who refrain from receiving Holy Communion often feel sadness and isolation at being cut off from the Body of Christ.

4e: What questions do divorced and remarried people pose to the Church concerning the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation? Among those persons who find themselves in these situations, how many ask for these sacraments?

It is likely that relatively few divorced and remarried people pose questions concerning the reception of the sacraments. Many are too ashamed or are fearful of further rejection by

members of the Church. Those that do, for the most part, are grappling with understanding the Church's position of their exclusion from the sacraments. They may ask what they need to do to rectify their situations. Once the canonical process of petitioning for a declaration of nullity is explained, some will initiate such a petition and others will walk away, feeling the process is too lengthy, too invasive, or too costly.

4f: Could a simplification of canonical practice in recognizing a declaration of nullity of the marriage bond provide a positive contribution to solving the problems of the persons involved? If yes, what form would it take?

A strong majority of the faithful favor a simplification of the canonical practice recognizing a declaration of nullity of the marriage bond. Those some have commented that granting them to easily could lesson the sacredness of indissolubility of marriage. The strongest sentiment is the opinion that a person divorced and remarried should be allowed to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, celebrate marriage in the Catholic Church and then return to a full practice of the sacramental life of the Church. A form similar to that practiced in Eastern Orthodox Churches.

4g: Does a ministry exist to attend to these cases? Describe this pastoral ministry? Do such programs exist on the national and diocesan levels? How is God's mercy proclaimed to separated couples and those divorced and remarried and how does the Church put into practice her support for them in their journey of faith?

The most common and effective form of pastoral ministry to the divorced faithful is through individualized assistance by clergy (priests and deacons) and pastoral staff. There are a couple of areas or parishes in the diocese which provide for a type of "in kind" or "like-to-like" ministry to separated, divorced and widowed persons in group settings. Essentially, however, the diocesan Tribunal is the primary ministry to divorced and divorced and remarried individuals. Tribunal officials attempt to approach each marriage situation with compassion and sensitivity while observing canonical procedures. Although much healing can be achieved through the canonical process, it is safe to say that most individuals who avail themselves of the Tribunal proceedings find the process to be long, arduous, and invasive.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding and lack of knowledge as to Catholic teaching regarding marriage and to the adjudication process available to investigate whether a union may be declared null.

5a: Is there a law in your country recognizing civil unions for people of the same-sex and equating it in some way to marriage?

Iowa has a state law that permits same sex marriage. There is no national law that applies uniformly throughout the United States. The number of states that are enacting these laws is increasing.

5b: What is the attitude of the local and particular Churches towards both the State as the promoter of civil unions between persons of the same sex and the people involved in this type of union?

Many people recognize that the Catholic Church along with some other churches are opposed to civil unions of same sex couples and certainly oppose recognizing these unions as “marriages.” Many of the laity within and outside of the Church view same sex marriage as a civil right. This has caused some confusion and opposition against the Church. While there is a small minority of people in society that oppose the people involved in this type of union and of homosexuality in general, most people can distinguish between accepting the person and supporting their lifestyle.

5c: What pastoral attention can be given to people who have chosen to live in these types of union?

The Church needs to respond to the people who have chosen to live in this type of union with compassion while not recognizing these unions as valid. The Church should accept them into the community as individuals if they are willing to move toward accepting and following the teaching of the Church. Celibacy should be encouraged in keeping with Church teaching.

5d: In the case of unions of persons of the same sex who have adopted children, what can be done pastorally in light of transmitting the faith?

Particular attention should be given to the children involved in same sex unions. The children should be accepted into the community of the Church regardless of the sexual orientation of the parents. The teaching of the Church should be promoted to the children, to the adoptive parents, and to the community according to recognized catechetical principles

6a: What is the estimated proportion of children and adolescents in these cases, as regards children who are born and raised in grularly constituted families?

The US Census for 2011 reported approximately 1% of couple household are same-sex households with 19% of them having children. If the national date applies equally to southeast Iowa and in particular to Roman Catholics in southeast Iowa there would be approximately 178 families with children. However, specific statistics for southeast Iowa are not available.

6b: How do parents in these situations approach the Church? What do they ask? Do they request the sacraments only or do they also want catechesis and the general teaching of religion?

There are no accurate findings of whom or how parents in these situations approach the Church. Many probably leave and do not approach the Church, while others keep silent. Same sex couples maintaining a relationship with the Church seek the sacraments and wish their children to be catechized to the same extent as those in marriages.

6c: How do the particular Churches attempt to meet the needs of the parents of these children to provide them with a Christian education?

Most of our parishes are welcoming. Most people offering pastoral care provide parents appropriate support. The children deserve the teachings of faith and the sacraments regardless of their parents' sexual orientation. It would be my hope that these children take part in the parish activities, faith formation and sacraments of the Church.

6d: What is the sacramental practice in these cases: preparation, administration of the sacraments and the accompaniment?

I presume and expect it is the same for all children. Certainly all should be treated with dignity, respect and especially kindness.

7a: What knowledge do Christians have today of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae* on responsible parenthood? Are they aware of how morally to evaluate the different methods of family planning? Could any insights be suggested in this regard pastorally?

Many Christians/Catholics have little or no knowledge of the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*, apart from the fact that it forbid the use of artificial birth control. There is little understanding of the reasoning behind this teaching and, accordingly, little awareness of how to morally evaluate different methods of family planning apart from personal feelings on the matter. The issue of family planning is clearly still a very divisive issue. Many people are openly critical of the Church's teaching in *Humanae Vitae* because they feel that it is "out of touch," that choosing a method of family planning is a personal decision, or that having more children leads to poverty and other social ills. At the same time, not an insignificant number of Catholics are favorable of the Church's teaching and lament that so little catechesis on it is available in their parishes, especially in the marriage preparation process. In regard to pastoral insights, many feel strongly that the Church's teaching on this matter should simply change, while those who are more ambivalent or who are favorable to the teaching feel that more catechesis is needed as well as opportunities to learn about current methods of natural family planning.

7b: Is this moral teaching accepted? What aspects pose the most difficulties in a large majority of couple's accepting this teaching?

This moral teaching is not accepted by a majority of Christians/Catholics. Reasons for this vary greatly, but can generally be put into two categories: ideological and practical.

On the ideological side, many feel that this teaching is “out dated” and “unrealistic,” and note that the purpose of the sexual act is greater than procreation. Many feel strongly that this is a deeply personal choice for the woman and/or couple and that the Church should not interfere. There is also clearly strong cultural and societal pressure to have smaller families and a pervasive “contraceptive mentality” which views children as burdens rather than blessings. Having more than two or three children is often seen as irresponsible. Some object that the proposed natural methods of family planning interfere with a couple's expression of married love. Other ideological barriers include a desire for greater self-determination or freedom of lifestyle and general moral complacency.

On the more practical side, many cite growing financial burdens placed on families due to such things as an ever-rising cost of living, the needs of aging parents, etc. Some point out that large families are no longer the necessity that they once were in a more agriculturally based economy and that the inability to easily regulate births hampers the educational and career opportunities of parents. Another significant practical barrier to the acceptance of this teaching is the complexity and perceived ineffectiveness of natural methods of family planning as compared to artificial contraception. At the same time, there is little education on the negative effects of artificial contraception and a general lack of catechesis and practical instruction on natural methods. Lastly, many feel there is little support from extended family, the Church or the community to practice natural family planning.

7c: What natural methods are promoted by the particular churches to help spouses put into practice the teachings of *Humanae Vitae*?

While natural family planning is generally known about (though often only an outdated form of it, i.e. the “Rhythm Method”), opportunities for learning natural methods of family planning are sparse. Many are unaware of what resources are available. What is required of couples in marriage preparation can vary greatly from parish to parish. Often natural family planning is only mentioned in passing in marriage preparation or in other faith formation settings and little or no practical training is available. Where training is available (such as the Billings, Sympto-Thermal and Creighton Methods) courses are offered sporadically and are only held in certain locations, often a great distance for couples to travel and, therefore, impractical for them to attend. Many believe natural family planning is ineffective for reliably regulating births and/or is even harmful to the couple relationship.

7d: What is your experience on this subject in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance and participation at the Eucharist?

Lack of participation in the Sacrament of the Penance has almost no bearing on participation in the Eucharist. This seems especially the case in the regard to use of artificial means of birth control. Many have flatly rejected the Church's teaching on this and do not consider it a sin and, therefore, do not feel a need to bring this matter to the Sacrament of Penance, if they participate in the Sacrament at all. Or, they appeal to the love of God who can forgive outside the sacrament and the primacy of personal conscience. Those who do feel that it is a sin and desire to confess it often feel deeply ashamed and tend to shy away from the Sacrament. This issue is rarely addressed by the clergy. Some priests have told people that use of artificial contraception is not sinful and, therefore, it should not inhibit a person's participation in the Eucharist. The few priests who have addressed the gravity of this issue have at times done so in less than delicate ways.

7e: What differences are seen in this regard between the Church's teaching and civic education?

In most civic education, the emphasis is placed on "safe sex" practices to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. To this end, any and all methods of artificial birth control are taught, promoted and, often, freely dispensed. There is little discussion of sex as a moral issue. Rather sex is treated as inevitable, normal and even healthy from adolescence onward. Sexual activity is seen as a deeply personal choice for those who "feel ready" to express their love in this way (regardless of marital status or gender). There is, therefore, a great disparity between civic education and the Church's teaching on these matters. Some view civic education as more "open," "realistic" and understanding of societal pressures, while the Church's teaching is seen as restrictive. Some view the promotion of sexual abstinence until marriage to be futile or even harmful to the person and/or society.

7f: How can a more open attitude towards having children be fostered? How can an increase in births be promoted?

Many feel that a more open attitude toward having children and/or an increase in births is unnecessary and even undesirable, citing the economic impact on families and society, the effect on the role of women in marriages and in society and the environmental impact on an a planet already perceived to be overpopulated.

Those who do see this as important suggest that greater support for families in the Church and in the culture at large is essential. Many people feel that working to eliminate financial burdens (due to such things as rising student loan debt, increased cost of living and economic injustices) would go a long way to foster greater openness to children in families. Particular emphasis should be placed on recognizing families, making them feel welcomed and supported by their parish communities and, in general, celebrating the blessings of family life. Special attention should also be paid to youth and young adults and to faith formation. Certain attitudinal changes will also be necessary to foster greater openness to

children, including a move away from materialism, self-centeredness and careerism and toward a deeper sense of Christian vocation and more pervasive trust in God.

8a: Jesus Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the human person. How can the family be a privileged place for this to happen?

Such an encounter requires an intentional spiritual life on the part of parents as well as their formation in the vocation of marriage and parenthood. Parents help their children grow into their vocations as human persons by example, by teaching, and most importantly by creating a loving, caring, and supportive home environment—an environment which includes shared worship and prayer. On the part of the Church, we need to better form individuals for the vocation of marriage and parenthood, support them once they have formed a family, and honor the vocation of marriage as in no way inferior to celibacy. In particular, our teaching and preaching needs to be more relevant, our outreach to families needs to be more intentional and practical, and we need to be more welcoming of all families, even those that may not be structured in a traditional manner.

8b: What critical situations in the family today can obstruct a person's encounter with Christ?

Factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the family may have a negative impact on a person's ability to encounter Christ. The lack of time—which may be due to the need for both parents to work (and even hold multiple jobs) It is also due the involvement of children in multiple activities. This lack of time as a family is further exacerbated by the emphasis placed on technology (especially entertainment and social media). A discrepancy in the faith commitment of parents (including mixed marriages and marriages in which one spouse is especially disaffected with the Church)—or a complete lack of faith commitment on the part of both parents—also negatively impacts the children's encounter with Christ. Other factors that include: financial pressures (underemployment, unemployment, poverty); domestic violence and other forms of abuse or neglect; addictions in whatever form; health issues; divorce; and the surrounding culture (discrimination/racism, a sense of pessimism or hopelessness, materialism and consumerism, individualism and self-centeredness, indifference to religion and atheism, violence, permissiveness). It must be acknowledged that some find in their experiences of the Church an impediment to an encounter with Christ, especially in current law restricting access to the sacraments by those in irregular unions as well as what is perceived as a lack of authentic witness to Jesus.

8c: To what extent do the many crises of faith which people can experience affect family life?

Most certainly have a profound impact on family life is a crises of faith . For most, this impact has been negative; but, for some, such crises can, in the long term, strengthen family life. It must also be said that the relationship between crises of faith and family life is not unidirectional: many of the crises in family life can impact one's faith, especially negatively.