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Ministry to the Separated and Divorced

By William H. Boomer, M.A., Director, Department for Marriage & Family Ministry

From *Follow the Way of Love: a Pastoral Message to Families* - USCCB 1994, 2002

Spouses who are separated: the road to healing, reconciliation, and rebuilding of your relationship can be a slow, painful one. If you are willing to begin that journey, the Church has many resources like pastoral counseling, Retrouvaille, and the Third Option program which can assist you.

Divorced Persons: Relationships and circumstances within your fam-

ily may have changed, but God's love for you is ever present and does not come to an end. Grasp the hands of those who reach out to you in loving concern. Extend your own hand to others whom you meet on the road to healing and reconciliation. There is a home for you within our parishes and communities of faith.

- ◆ Divorced Catholics are not excommunicated.
- ◆ Divorced Catholics are encouraged to receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- ◆ Divorced Catholics are full mem-

bers of the Catholic Church and can participate fully in the life of the church.

- ◆ Divorced Catholics seeking to marry again should first request a study of their previous marriage by their diocesan Tribunal. A declaration of invalidity of their previous marriage is necessary before being free to marry again in the church.
- ◆ The children will not be illegitimate if a divorced Catholic is granted a declaration of invalidity of their previous marriage.

The Stages of Divorce

By Michael F. Pavlak, Ph.D., IMFT

While approximately half of all married couples divorce, it is a very private experience with each person realizing the emotional effects of divorce in her or his own way. It can be helpful to conceptualize the time after a divorce as a process that often begins with sadness, anger, guilt, and shame and that can move toward personal growth, coming to terms with the divorce, new opportunities, happiness, increased self worth, and hope for the future. Listed below are three stages that you may go through, the accompanying emotions that may be experienced in each stage, and ways to manage and cope with those emotions.

The Mourning Stage

During this stage you may experience many emotions that can be present day or night. Grief, sadness, anger, rejection, shock, betrayal, shame, loneliness, distrust, insecurity, fear, anxiety, and desperation may be experienced individually or in combination, leading you to feel overwhelmed. Some of these emotions may be foreign to you: "I never saw myself as an angry, vindictive, fearful person but that's all I ever feel now, what's happening to me and the caring person I always believed I was?" Understandably, the sense of mourning or grief comes from the loss of the relationship: "what

I thought was going to last a lifetime is now over." Grief may be felt over the loss of an identity: "I felt fulfilled in the role of wife/husband and pictured myself in that role forever – it's gone now; who am I, what is my purpose?" Further, grief may be experienced over the loss of routines that you had with your spouse or family, the physical property that was part of the marriage, and the loss of friends and acquaintances that you developed over the course of the marriage.

During this phase you may experience shame or guilt, especially if you view the divorce as a failure: "I tried so hard but I couldn't make it work – I failed; I failed not only myself but my

Newsletter for the Divorced--Ministry of Compassion

But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.

2 Cor. 4:7

Stages

(Continued from page 1)

community.” It is also not uncommon, during this stage, to feel emotionally torn toward your ex – part of you may still be in love with her/him (or at least love some aspects of her/him) while the other half of you is angry, resentful, furious, vengeful, or disappointed. For some, this emotional entanglement may lead to the idea that “if I could just get back with her/him, if I could just be married again these painful feelings might go away. While the marriage wasn’t perfect, the pain I’m feeling now is worse than how things were when we were married.”

The emotional work that is to be done in this stage begins with you accepting the reality that a divorce has occurred and that the emotions that you are feeling are also felt by many, many other individuals who have divorced. Divorce is an extra-ordinary event that you have not practiced for and you are, literally, “feeling your way around in the dark” in determining how to feel and act. It is important to seek support from trusted others and to be able to share your feelings with those trusted others. It is also important, during this stage, to care for yourself, to maintain a positive view of yourself, to have faith that these emotions will pass and that there is hope for your future. Developing emotional boundaries with regard to your ex is an important step also; that is, objectively determining how you want to feel about her/him and determining what emotions you want to share with her/him. Stay active in the places that brought you a sense of stability and meaning in the past – the church, a prayer group, or a circle of friends. During this stage you may consider seeing a counselor to help you learn ways to better manage and cope with your emotions.

The Adaption Stage

During this stage the strong, negative emotions that you have been experiencing are lessening, you are able to cope with these emotions more effectively, and you are regaining a sense of power and control in your life. You are establishing new routines, finding new interests, making new friends and are beginning to create a plan for your future.

For many individuals this is a time when they undergo a process of self-discovery - “what is important to me, what opportunities are available to me (work, school, relationships, hobbies), and what do I value?” You may find that talking about the divorce is easier, that you are increasingly becoming emotionally disentangled from your ex and the marriage, and that you are redeveloping trust in others. During this stage a person may feel euphoric that they are single, only to be followed by a feeling of sadness over being alone.

The emotional work during this stage centers on continuing to receive support from trusted others and continuing to talk with them about your feelings. Continue to be part of the places that bring you comfort and strength as you did in the mourning stage. Also, it is important to be flexible in your thinking and approach to life – you will have to adapt to changes in housing, income, friends, and routines, and it important to be open to these changes. Hopefully, you will continue to realize that you are not a failure, that you have many positive qualities, and that you can now view yourself as a single person.

Caution should be exercised in developing a new romance, as many people believe they are ready for a new relationship only to find they “rushed into” it too soon or they attempt to seek solace and healing in another relationship, only to find that the other person was not going to heal them or take the pain of the divorce away.


The Moving On Stage

During this stage you are more comfortable with your identity as a single person and you are not feeling shame as a divorced person. You are finding that you have regained, or increased, your sense of being a capable and strong person. Perhaps you’ve gained greater insight into your marriage and the reasons for the divorce, are more


forgiving of your ex, and while you can have both happy and some sad memories of the marriage, you have been able to put it in the past. You are able to better cope with your emotions, have redeveloped trust in others and may be open to loving another person.

This stage has no formal “ending” but is marked by your ability to manage and cope with your emotions, accept the divorce, see yourself as a capable and strong single person, and, perhaps, develop a new romantic relationship.

There is no set time that a person may spend in each stage, and a person can certainly be in between stages or experience a setback. Also, the emotions or changes that are mentioned in each stage are not absolute – not every person will experience them or will experience them to the degree stated. The key to remember is that you will go through a process of emotions and experiences, that there are certain emotions and behaviors that tend to be specific during the stages of the process, and that with work, support, and faith you can resolve the emotional and practical issues of your divorce.



Michael F. Pavlak is a licensed psychologist and licensed marriage and family therapist and specializes in pre-marital, marital, and relationship counseling; separation and post-divorce counseling; and depression and anxiety disorders. He is a clinical member and approved supervisor for the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy and is in private practice with North Coast Mental Health Associates, 3690 Orange Place, Suite 430, Beachwood, Ohio, and can be reached at 216-464-5330 for appointments.



Spiritual “Make-Over” After Divorce

By Rev. Robert J. Sanson, J.C.D., M.Th.

I have been a Pastor for 17 years, and worked in the Diocesan Tribunal for 13 years, so I have ministered to many divorced persons who needed to be assured that God loves them still and that they can have a new relationship with a loving God that is even better after they are divorced. How could I summarize the spiritual direction I give to the divorced?

Part I. Know God’s presence and strength even more in your weakness.

Divorce always seems like a failure. “I meant my vows for life, but it didn’t work. I let God down, as well as my family.”, etc. In this year of St. Paul, we remember what he said: “When I am weak, it is then that I am strong.” St. Paul thought he had all the answers, and that he was God’s police force. But then he was knocked down by God’s force, and blinded by God’s light, so he could more clearly see that he desperately needed God. By God’s grace and love, he finally understood how he should minister to God’s People – with an attitude of humility, and the empathy that brings compassion to others.

This is the great insight of Alcoholics Anonymous. We are powerless, and when we realize that, even “hitting bottom,” God lifts us up in love—with God’s power, not ours, to minister to others. They speak of themselves as “grateful alcoholics” because they never would have known God’s amazing grace the way they do today, unless they had gone through this experience. They are not grateful that they caused pain to others, or were in pain—and they promise to make amends insofar as they are able from now on.

In a similar way, the divorced are never grateful for all the pain and suffering. But by God’s grace, we see people come to a new spiritual life and appreciation of God as “Abba.” Our Father—our Divine Dad weeps with us, and holds us tight. God also forgives. The divorced can be poisoned with guilt or hatred until they come to reconciliation. Previous spouses may be

guilty or not guilty; aware or not aware of the hurt they have caused. They must stand before God.

As for you—you must forgive (but not necessarily forget the injustice of what happened, lest it repeat itself). Fr. Lawrence Jenco, the priest who was taken hostage in Lebanon, confesses how much he hated his captors. In his book Bound to Forgive, he himself recounts the process of letting go of his anger and grief. For his own sake, he needed to forgive.

Fr. Martin Padovani, who is also a Marriage Therapist, writes about Healing Wounded Emotions, and has a chapter on “Forgiving. Does that mean forgetting?” Forgiving takes time and healing of our emotions. Sometimes, remembering is important, so we don’t get hurt again. The ex-spouse may still be dangerous to me or our children. If I don’t learn the lessons, and get the insight, I may repeat my mistakes. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Others may be malicious—or clueless. My healing does not have to wait for them, but is in “God’s good time.” The hardest person to forgive is myself. I encounter that difficulty often in the confessional, and in listening to those divorced. Sometimes people blame themselves unjustly or excessively, and need to pray to put guilt in balance. We can again learn from “AA” that God is not about “shame or blame.” Take appropriate and healthy guilt—learn and grow from it, and do some constructive mending and amending. Then *let it go*, as God has already done for you—long since!

*Rev. Robert J. Sanson is Pastor of St. Joseph Church in Strongsville, Ohio. Parts II and III of this article will be included in future issues of *Earthen Vessels*.*

*In this year of St. Paul, we
remember what he said:
“When I am weak, it is then
that I am strong.”*

DivorceCare at Chagrin Falls Parishes

By Janice Manno Simmons, M.Ed., Kent State University

The Ministry for the Divorced and Separated at Church of the Holy Angels in Chagrin Falls was formalized recently but has been an idea and conversation for much longer. Wanting to respond to a need within the community, this ministry seeks to reach out to those experiencing the difficulties of divorce and separation and bring healing to their lives. In collaboration with St. Joan of Arc in Chagrin Falls, the churches came together to offer the **DivorceCare** program.

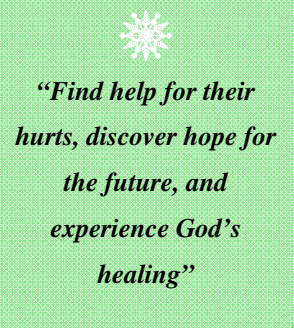
The goal of the DivorceCare program is for participants to “find help for their hurts, discover hope for the future and experience God’s healing.” Founded by a Christian couple, both of whom experienced divorce, the program touches on all of the major issues and emotions associated with this situation. The 13-week program includes topics such as anger, loneliness, financial survival, kidcare, and forgiveness. Each week, participants discover more about themselves, their faith, and ways to move forward in their lives.

Deeply rooted in the philosophy that healing comes from a personal relationship with Christ, the DivorceCare program incorporates biblical principles into the programs, allowing

participants at all levels of faith to grow deeper into it. Each session includes a video teaching program, opportunities for group discussion, and personal study and reflection. The balance this creates allow for participants to learn from one another and discover more about their own personal situation and faith, bringing with it hope and healing.

The DivorceCare program meets at Holy Angels on Monday evenings, with the program starting a 6 p.m., preceded by a pizza dinner at 5:30. The program cycle will begin again and be hosted by the St. Joan of Arc parish starting in November. In the Spring of 2009, the DivorceCare program will return to Church of the Holy Angels and will be joined by **DivorceCare 4 Kids**, a program designed to help children ages 5 to 12 whose families are experiencing separation and divorce.

Contact Holy Angels Church at 440-708-0000 for information regarding this program.



“Find help for their hurts, discover hope for the future, and experience God’s healing”

The Power of Acceptance

Resignation is surrender to fate.

Acceptance is surrender to God.

Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe.

Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny.

Resignation says, “I can’t”.

Acceptance says, “God can”.

Resignation paralyzes the life process.

Acceptance releases the process for its greatest creativity.

Resignation says, “It’s all over for me.”

Acceptance asks, “Now that I’m here, what’s next, Lord?”

Resignation says, “What a waste.”

Acceptance asks, “In what redemptive way will You use this mess, Lord?”

Resignation says, “I am alone.”

Acceptance says, “I belong to You, O God.”

—Creath Davis in *Lord If I Ever Needed You It’s Now!*
Person-to-Person Books, copyright © 1987

The Annulment Process: The Role of Witnesses

By Terri Shawhan, M.A., D. Min. (Cand.), Auditor for the Tribunal

Most people who experience marital problems don't share their problems with friends or relatives. This is especially true if any of the relatives or friends did not approve of the courtship or advised the party not to marry for whatever reason. Why, then, are witnesses needed when submitting a request to the Tribunal for a Declaration of Invalidity?

The person who submits a petition for a Declaration of Invalidity is called the petitioner. The other party to the marriage is the respondent. The petitioner is required to provide the names and current addresses of people who can testify as witnesses regarding the marriage in question. In contrast to our civil law, the burden of proof rests on the person questioning the validity of the marriage (Canon 1526). This means that the petitioner is responsible to identify witnesses who can provide the viewpoints of both the petitioner and the respondent. Witnesses are asked to present the facts of the relationship as they see them. They are not asked to choose sides. The witnesses may be family members, relatives, or friends who knew the parties before and/or during the marriage. Witnesses are contacted by mail and they are asked to respond

to specific questions designed to obtain information regarding the parties' family home life, their courtship, and the marriage.

While the events of the marriage are important to the Tribunal's investigation, the events prior to the marriage are even more important. For this reason, it is critical that the Tribunal obtain witness testimony regarding the parties' families of origin and the events during the courtship as well as events during the marriage.

Some petitioners hesitate to identify witnesses because they believe that the witnesses were not aware of the situation in the marriage. The Tribunal would prefer that the witnesses make this determination themselves. Often, witnesses provide insights and observations about the marriage that the parties may not be aware of. Typically, the Tribunal will not send questionnaires to the children of the parties. In rare cases, however, it is necessary to involve the children but only with the permission of one of the parties.

There are other witnesses that the Tribunal may call upon. These would include professional counselors,

doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, priests, ministers, rabbis, etc. that the parties consulted prior to, during, or after the marriage in question. If the Tribunal determines that a report from a doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist is needed for the case, the party(ies) who consulted the professional would be required to sign a release before the Tribunal could request a report from the counselor.

On occasion, the judge may require the opinion of a court appointed expert before rendering a decision. The petitioner is then required to meet with the court appointed expert for evaluation and assessment.

Terri Shawhan can be reached at the Tribunal of the Diocese of Cleveland at 216-696-6525 www.dioceseofcleveland.org/tribunal/



**O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, you govern all creation
with your strong yet tender care. Come and show your people the way to salvation.**

Read: Isaiah 11: 2-3

Lord, in my world of darkness that could only embrace my loss, my hope comes only from you where the beauty of your creation seeps into my soul. Your presence to us exist in the stars in the sky, the waters of the ocean, the rain from the clouds, the sun that sends forth its rays that dry the rain in the soil. There is order in the magnificence of your creation. As I experience the losses and disorders in my life, open my eyes to this beauty as a reminder of your love and tender care for us.

O, Lord, come let us experience your presence as we seek your ways to salvation.

— from O Antiphons for the Divorced

Catholic Diocese of Cleveland
Catholic Charities Parish &
Community Ministries
Department for Marriage &
Family Ministry



William H. Boomer, Director
7911 Detroit Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44102
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The Department for Marriage and Family Ministry's mission is to respond to the needs of families through development of pastoral programs that are administered through parishes and community leaders that focus on the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family issues. In regards to the Separated and Divorced Ministry, the office has developed a collaborative ministry throughout the Diocese of Cleveland for parish districts to share resources and outreach to divorced Catholics. This would include educational programs, retreats, support groups, single parenting groups as well as provide referrals to counselors and other community resources. There are also brochures and materials published by the office to help families. For additional information, please contact Carol Petro, LSW, Marriage and Family Specialist for the Separated, Divorced and Remarriage Ministry at 216-334-2975 or e-mail at clpetro@clevelandcatholiccharities.org.

Programs and Resources

“A Candle of Hope is Burning” Advent for Those Experiencing Loss Through Separation and Divorce

Monday, December 1, 2008, 6 p.m.
Holy Angels Church, in Michael's Room
18205 Chillicothe Road
Chagrin Falls, OH 44023
Call 440-708-0000 to Register

DivorceCare: Surviving the Holidays

Wed, Dec. 3, 2008, 6-8 p.m.
Free Babysitting
St. Martin of Tours, Education Bld.
1800 Station Road, Valley City
Call Colene at 330-721-7027 to register

Wednesday, Dec. 10, 2008, 7 p.m.
St. Basil the Great
8700 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
Call Colene at 330-721-7027 to register

**Lorain County Area
Hope Workshop
for Separated/Divorced
Mondays, February 2, 9, 16, and 23, 2009 and
March 2, 2009, 7—9 p.m.**

St. Joseph School Library
200 St. Joseph Drive
Amherst, OH 44011
Contact Maria Maldonado
440-988-2848 ext. 205

Lake/Geauga County
www.divorced-separated.net
St. Noel, Willoughby
Call 440-352-8282

**For more workshops and divorce
recovery support groups, please visit**
www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm
Click on **Divorce Ministry**

For **referrals to counselors** in your area, please
contact the Department for Marriage and Family
Ministry at 216-334-2975.

Recommended Resources

**Healing Memories Through the Five Stages of
Forgiveness, book** by Dennis Linn & Matthew Linn,
SJ.

Befriend the Darkness, Welcome the Light
Two **audio CDs** by Joyce Rupp

O Antiphons for the Divorced can be found at
[http://www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm/
O%20Antiphons.pdf](http://www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm/O%20Antiphons.pdf)

**A Candle of Hope is Burning—Advent for those
Experiencing Loss Through Separation or Divorce.
Handbook** to use for reflection or on retreats.
Contact Department for Marriage and Family
Ministry, 216-334-2978, or
clpetro@clevelandcatholiccharities.org

Catholic Divorce Ministry is the ministry of the
North American Conference of Separated and
Divorced Catholics, Inc., sanctioned by the U.S.
Conference of Catholic Bishops and working since
1974 to create a network of support for families
experiencing separation and divorce.
www.nacsdc.org.