



“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.”
2 Cor. 4:7

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- Some Catholics Facts on Divorce
- Decree of Invalidity Info
- Coping with Divorce

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Some Catholic Facts

“The psychological pain of loss of a relationship is great and deep-seated. We as a Church want to reach out and support you in your healing. “Relationships and circumstances within your family 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 community of faith.”

“Follow the Way of Love,” a Pastoral Message of the U.S. Bishops to Families.

- ✦ Divorced/Remarried Catholics are not excommunicated. The Church recognizes that the legal process of civil divorce is necessary to determine the civil, legal a financial matters resulting from terminating the marriage.
- ✦ Divorced Catholics may receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation.
- ✦ Divorced Catholics are full members of the Church and are encouraged to participate in the life of the Church.
- ✦ Before a divorced Catholic remarries, a Declaration of Invalidity must be obtained on the previous marriage.
- ✦ If you obtain a Declaration of Invalidity, the children will not be illegitimate.
- ✦ The ex-spouse does not need to participate in the process of the Declaration of Invalidity
- ✦ To help those that are in abusive relationships, the Church law states that if either of the spouses causes "serious danger of spirit or body to the other spouse or the children, or otherwise renders common life too hard," the spouses may separate (c1153.1).

A Continuum of Ministry and Care

By William H. Boomer, MA

When asked, “What does the Catholic Church teach about divorce?” the pastoral minister quipped, “We’re against it.” Too often, this sums up parish thinking, preaching and ministry about divorce.

There is an uneasiness among Catholics that underlies the silence surrounding divorce. How does an educated, enlightened and faithful Catholic uphold the sanctity and permanence of marriage and still show compassion to those who have experienced the pain and loss of divorce?

Contributing to this pastoral dilemma are two polarizing stances that divisively clash.

One position pragmatically accepts divorce as a common feature of the mod-

ern landscape. Giving priority to personal fulfillment and happiness, it sees divorce as the rational solution to resolving intractable power struggles and ending relational pain. It does not anticipate the further pain and problems inherent in divorce, especially when children are involved. Nor does it have much hope in repairing marital disruption.

This implicit acceptance and even expectation of divorce has created a divorce mentality in some clergy and faithful alike. A friend called me a few years ago in great distress because his unhappy wife had asked for a divorce. She did this after consulting with her priest who had advised her too hastily that, “God does not want you to be unhappy.” I suggested my friend ask for a second opinion from another priest

I recommended. Fortunately, they were given hope, referred to marriage counseling and are happily married today.

Another position rejects divorce and those who are divorced in a moralizing, condemning way. Several times, I have heard homilies lamenting the large number of divorces and simplistically claiming that people divorce because they are too selfish. This broad brush ignores the anguish and guilt of those who, in spite of heroic efforts have suffered through the failure of their marriage. This type of homily does not help them. Instead, they feel like their church has painted a “scarlet D” on their forehead.

Divorce is divisive for couples, their children, families, friends and parishes. An effective, comprehensive

**Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay,
Empty and broken, it helplessly lay;
No hope had the vessel that the Master might choose
To cleanse and make whole, to fill and use.
“Ah! This is the vessel I’ve been hoping to find,
I will mend and use it and make it all mine.”**

Taken from *A Chosen Vessel*, Anonymous

“Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay, empty and broken.”





“What does the Catholic church teach about divorce?”

and compassionate pastoral response is needed for all. The Department for Marriage and Family Ministry suggests a *continuum of ministry and care* and is promoting it in parishes and districts. Much good ministry is currently underway in our parishes and districts. More must be done.

This *continuum of ministry and care* promotes the Sacrament of Marriage and offers compassion to the divorced and their families. Its first goal is to help couples in distress reconcile and save their marriage. But it does not condemn nor ignore those who are divorced. God hates divorce because it harms his people. But God continues to love and care for the divorced and their families. The Church can do no less.

The main areas of ministry in this *continuum of care* are:

- ◆ Marriage support, prayer and referrals to professionals for couples in distress.
- ◆ Divorce ministry to the divorced and their children.
- ◆ Single parent ministry
- ◆ Careful remarriage preparation
- ◆ Stepfamily ministry.

Each of these areas will be explored in depth in future articles. For now, here

is a quick rationale for this continuum and some Good News for parishioners and parish staffs:

- ◆ This ministry approach recognizes that divorce is *not* inevitable for distressed couples. Marriages can be mended if couples seek and find timely, skilled help and hope.
- ◆ Divorce is one of the most painful events a couple (and their children) can experience. If divorced, you are not alone. You deserve the compassion and support of your parish. We as a diocese are committed to this.
- ◆ Children suffer long-term from divorce and are at greater risk of divorcing if they marry. Parents, you have extra challenges in caring for them. Parishes can support single parents and counteract some of the negative impact of divorce.
- ◆ Seventy percent of divorced people eventually remarry. Many do not realize they are at higher risk of divorce a second time (about 40% of 1st marriages end in divorce but over 60% of remarriages fail.) Thus, special remarriage preparation is helpful (and required by the *Cleveland Diocese Marriage Policy*.)
- ◆ Couples who are stepparents face predictable growing pains but most don't expect them and are quickly overwhelmed. Stepfamily ministry can share wisdom and

support especially during the tumultuous early years.

This ministry approach follows the 1997 pastoral recommendations in Care of the Divorced and Remarried from the Pontifical Council on the Family which recommends: a) fidelity to the sacrament of marriage, b) being compassionate and suffering with those who experience marital failure, especially the consequences for their children, c) encouraging and helping the divorced and d) pastoral inclusion and care for the remarried. (in *Origins* Feb 20, 1997)

Yes, this is a complex and challenging ministry. And, we cannot shrink from it, we cannot remain silent. The hope of the Gospel and caring Christian communities that continue the healing ministry work of Jesus Christ are needed and available. Current ministry efforts of parishes can be extended and coordinated with other efforts. Parishes can work together to be more effective and efficient. The vibrancy of our parishes depends on the vibrancy of our families. With God's help, all things are possible.

Bill Boomer is the Director of The Department for Marriage & Family Ministry.

Why does my non-Catholic fiancé have to get a decree of invalidity from the “Tribunal?”

By Rev. Charles F. Strebler, JCL

The objection often comes, “Why does my non-Catholic fiancé have to get a decree of invalidity from the tribunal? After all neither my fiancé nor his/her ex-spouse are Catholics and they did not marry in a Catholic Church.”

Part of the answer to the first question is addressed by the second sentence.

If even one of the spouses is Catholic, then it would be required for a valid marriage that they marry according to “canonical form,” the way that Catholics are normally supposed to marry. This usually means with a bishop, priest or deacon as the Church's witness and two other witnesses. In some cases, a permission (dispensation) can be granted before the wedding to marry in another way. For example, when a Catholic marries a non-Catholic or a non-Christian, permission may be granted for the couple to marry in the other person's place of worship, or in some other place.

Those who are not Catholics are not bound to marry in this way. We would not expect two non-Catholics to come to a Catholic church to marry. If they marry in a way recognized by their religious denomination, which can include being married before a

minister, a judge, a justice of the peace, a mayor, etc., then the Catholic Church presumes that they are married and, if both are baptized, that their marriage is a sacrament. This respects the spouses and their consciences concerning religious practice.

According to the view of the Catholic Church, if non-Catholic spouses divorce, they end their civil marriage; however, their natural or sacramental marriage continues. They are presumed still to be married. The spouses do not have the right- or even the ability- to declare that they were not married; that the first marriage didn't count; that they are now free to marry again. Many people do just that. They often move on to a new marriage; sometimes with the blessing of their denomination. The Church would not recognize this as a marriage since the parties are already in a marriage, and you can only be married to one person at a time. But, truth be told, non-Catholics don't spend a lot of time fretting about what the Catholic Church thinks about their marriage. Unless...

...Unless, one of the non-Catholic spouses meets a Catholic and the couple decide that they would want to marry. The non-Catholic who was previously married is presumed to be

still married. Because there is a Catholic person who wants to marry involved, the Church is able to take a look at the marriage and see if it was a true or valid marriage through the process for a decree of invalidity. This is another way of saying, to see if the previously-married person is free to marry in the Church. The Church only gets involved when the spiritual good of a Catholic is involved. The Catholic is not the one who presents the case for the intended spouse, one of the ex-spouses is usually expected to be the one to present the case to the Tribunal.

It may sound like the Church only cares about marriages where a Catholic is involved. While there is a concern about all people entering into subsequent marriages after a presumed valid marriage, the Tribunal process, a legal process, only addresses those under or touched by the law of the Church. So, a previously-married person of any denomination or faith or religious belief wishing to marry Catholic must go through the process for a decree of invalidity so that the Catholic may marry “in the Church.”

Fr. Charlie Strebler is an Adjutant Judicial Vicar/Defender of the Bond—Tribunal.

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The Lawyer's Guild

The Lawyers Guild of The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland serves the counties of Ashland, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Summit and Wayne.

The mission of the Lawyer's Guild is to foster spiritual growth and fellowship within the legal community, encourage observance of high ethical standards, and call

attention to legal and societal issues that affect morality, justice and faith.

Each year, the Lawyers Guild hosts a Red Mass followed by a luncheon at which the St. Thomas More Award is presented to an attorney. The special liturgy invokes the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit upon the courts of the State. This year's

Red Mass and St. Thomas More Award Luncheon will be held on Friday, October 12, 2007.

In addition, the Lawyers Guild has a directory of all its members, to serve those who are seeking an attorney. For more information, see www.cdcf.org/lawyers.

Coping with Divorce

By Paul Foster, LISW Counselor

Although divorce is frequent in our society, it is often anything but something that is routine in one's life. It can be very emotionally and physically draining, wreck havoc with our family and can threaten your very survival. The following can be effective ways of coping with divorce:

Take care of the basic physical needs of yourself and your children

1. Take care of the basic physical needs of yourself and your children. Make sure you have enough money, adequate housing, food, clothing and health care (i.e. by maintaining employment or obtaining employment, taking legal action to get your share of the estate; seeking help from public assistance and private agencies, such as Catholic Charities, Salvation Army and a food bank). In case of abuse, it might be necessary to go to a Domestic Violence Shelter by calling First Call for Help at 216-436-2000.
2. Take care of the emotional needs of yourself and your children. Don't hide your pain. Try to become aware of your feelings and express them to someone you trust (i.e. family, friends, clergy, counselor, support group). It is normal to have feelings

of loss, hurt, anger, failure, guilt and shame. Talking out your feelings with another person(s) will help you feel less lonely and isolated. Whether one on one or in a support group, sharing with supportive people can help. At this time, some family members and friends may also become critical and unsupportive. To resolve this situation, you may want to avoid conflict by limiting conversation.

3. Take care of the social needs of yourself and children. Don't become socially isolated. Reach out to family, friends and acquaintances. Stay active in church, school, social and recreational activities. Build up your social support network.
4. Use this experience as an opportunity to learn, grow and change in a positive way. Don't do things that can be self-destructive or destructive to your children (abusing chemicals, seeing yourself as a helpless victim, acting out your anger at your ex-spouse, or moving impulsively into another relationship). During this most painful period of your life, try to become aware of your strengths and begin to utilize them more. As far as the mistakes that you made, this is a time for change and

They see you as their parents and they love both of you.

evaluation of your life. Take the time to find out how to develop relationships with people who you really care about and also who care about you. The next step then would be to continue to strengthen those relationships.

5. While you are trying to cope with the issues and the pain of divorce, do not forget that the children are also trying to cope with all of their pain and loyalty issues between you and your ex-spouse. They see you as their parents and they love both of you. Your focus should be on parenting your children through one of the most difficult experiences they will ever have in their life and both of you as co-parents should learn how to love them on a deeper level so that love will not be the missing element in their childhood.

Paul Foster offers counseling through the Department for Marriage and Family Ministry. Paul specializes in marital, premarital and relationship counseling (i.e. marriage, separated, divorce and crisis). For appointments, Paul can be reached at 440.885.6038 (pager); office: 216.334.2970. Fees are \$40/session; sliding scale is available if needed.

Reflection/Prayer by Carol Petro, LSW

O Jesus, heal my broken places, the secret spaces of my soul that only you can see. The times that I could have forgiven, but didn't; the choices that I could have made, but didn't; the love that I could have given, but didn't; the mistakes I made



that I could have acknowledged and fixed, but didn't. All of these have been hidden in those secret spaces of my soul and lived out every day in my life. Unlock my heart that has become the prison that har-

bored the hurts, resentments and past regrets of my failed marriage.

Help me to see that our past mistakes can be lessons of love in our life to teach us how to love as you do. AMEN

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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.

Featured Divorce Ministry Support Group:

SUMMIT COUNTY SEPARATED AND DIVORCED MINISTRY

The year 2002 marked the beginnings of the District Plan for the Divorced and Separated in Summit County utilizing the comprehensive district model promoted by the Department for Marriage & Family Ministry and modeled in Lake/Geauga County Ministry to the Separated and Divorced. Now in its 5th year, it is supported by a Board of five members that include clergy, pastoral ministers and the Director of Catholic Social Services. The Board meets to discuss how to provide services and programs that will meet the needs of those that are Separated or Divorced in the Catholic Church.

The Board's mission statement focuses on the following: (1) to make the presence of the Church a part of the journey for the Divorced and Separated; (2) to promote emotional and sacramental healing; (3) to foster support, independence and empowerment. Through monetary support from area parishes, the Board has hired a clinical counselor who runs the "Jacobs Well" support group for six weeks that utilizes the "Divorce and Beyond" recovery series. The support group's purpose is to experience hope and healing through the listening and sharing of

the various stories of the participants. It is designed to offer direction and support not only from the counselor but also from the participants that have experienced divorce. Jacobs Well is conducted at various parishes throughout the district. The next group will be at St. Matthew in Akron on August 19-September 23, 2007 from 6:30-9:30 pm. Other dates for Jacobs Well are November 4-December 16, 2007 at Nativity of the Lord and April 6-May 18, 2008 at Mother of Sorrows. Registration can be made by calling Catholic Social Services of Summit County at 330-762-7481.

The Summit District also has a "Caring and Sharing" group that meets once a month at different parishes that offer information on various topics with speakers. This is done in conjunction with the (DSWC) Divorced Separated and Widowed Catholics of Greater Akron Area. The DSWC is a support group that provides educational talks dealing with aspects of recovery or spirituality, informal rap sessions and many social activities that are provided for members that are listed in

their monthly newsletter. This group originally started at St. Bernard's 30 years ago by Fr. Schindler and Fr. Rosing. They usually meet at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month at Immaculate Heart of Mary, Cuyahoga Falls. You are encouraged to contact Fred Miletta at 330-923-1695 for any information on DSWC.

At the present time, the Summit District is planning on doing a day of reflection in October. Retreats have been offered at Loyola of the Lake in Clinton, Ohio in the past. Details will be presented in the diocesan website, parish bulletins or you may call board member Carolyn Humston at 330-836-2233 ext. 129. Members of the Summit District Board are: Carolyn Humston, District Chairperson; Fr. William Karg, St. Sebastian; Mary Richards, Immaculate Conception; Fred Miletta, Immaculate Heart of Mary; and Pat McGrath, Catholic Social Services, Akron. Anyone interested in joining the board, please contact Carolyn Humston.

Separated/Divorce Ministry Programs and Resources:

Summit County: Sharing & Caring

Evening of Reflection - St. Vincent, Akron

June 10, 2007 - 7:00-9:00 pm

Contact Carolyn Humston at 330-836-2233 ext. 129

Summit County Support Group

Jacob's Well

August 19—September 23, 2007

6:30—9:30 p.m.

St. Matthew, Akron

Contact Carolyn Humston at 330-836-2233 ext. 129

Medina County: Divorce Care Program

St. Martin of Tours, Valley City

13 Weeks—September 12, 2007—6:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Contact Colene Conley at 330-483-3808.

Lake/Geauga Catholic District Cares

www.divorced-separated.net

June/July Support Groups:

Lake/Geauga: St. Mary, Chardon, OH

June 12—July 31, 2007

Contact Bill Glover at 1 800 242 9755 to register.

For other groups please go to website:

www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm - click on *Divorce Ministry* for support groups that are posted online.

Single Parent Groups:

SPARK (Single Parent Raising Kids)

St. Basil the Great - Brecksville, OH - 440-526-1686

Summit County:

SPARK—Single Parent Raising Kids—meets the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month, Holy Family Parish, Stow, in the Lower Church Hall, 6:30-8:00 p.m. Come join us! June's topic is child behavior issues—helping kids deal with loss, discipline, and other topics for discussion. For information, call Lisa Lesneski at 330-819-4670 or e-mail sparkpar-ents@hotmail.com

For resources of counselors in your area - the Department for Marriage and Family Ministry has list of referrals by contacting Carol Petro at 216-334-2975.

Recommended Readings:

Catholics Experiencing Divorce

by Vicki Wells Bedard and William E. Rabior

Healing the Wounds of Divorce—A

Spiritual Guide to Recovery by Barbara Leahy

Shlemon

Finding Your Way Through Divorce by Kathy Brewer Gorman

Catholic Tidbits: Patron of Divorced People:

St. Helen (249-329) had been linked to **devotion** to the Holy Cross. However, after 22 years of marriage, Helen's husband, Constantius, divorced her in order to marry a young woman who was a member of Rome's imperial family. Helen had one son named Constantine the Great.