



Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

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Dear Brother Bishops:

Greeting and blessings in this new year. The upcoming observances of National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14), World Marriage Day (Feb. 12) and Valentine's Day (Feb. 14) provide an opportunity to celebrate the gift and blessing of marriage and to affirm and support engaged and married couples. On behalf of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, I am grateful to highlight various resources that may be of assistance as your dioceses and parishes continue to build a culture that reclaims, honors and promotes marriage and the family.

As you know, one of the pastoral priorities of our Conference is to strengthen marriage as a Christian sacrament and a natural institution. Among other concerns is evidence of the declining rate of marriage in society and in the Catholic Church. A 2011 report from the Pew Research Center found that the marriage rate in the U.S. declined by 5% from 2009 to 2010. Only 51% of the nation's adults are married. In the Church, the rate of decline has been just as steep. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, since 1972 the number of marriages celebrated in the Catholic Church has fallen by nearly 60%.

These statistics measure a horizon that is meant to be engaged in hope. Our youth and young adults are hungry for the truth and promise of marriage. Families continue to take up their call to be agents of evangelization and to realize their identity as the domestic church. The seedbed for the new evangelization is ever ready.

A vital way to promote and support marriage is through preaching. The Committee is pleased to offer a set of **homily helps** based on the readings for World Marriage Day (please find enclosed). We hope these will encourage and assist your priests and deacons in preaching about marriage, a vocation that is "just as necessary and valuable to the Church as other vocations," as we taught in our pastoral letter, *Love and Life in the Divine Plan*. We plan to offer additional sets of homily helps throughout the year for Sundays when it seems especially appropriate to recognize marriage.

I also call attention to these other resources available from the USCCB:

- A large and varied collection of resources for couples who are married or planning for marriage can be found in English and Spanish at www.ForYourMarriage.org and www.PorTuMatrimonio.org.
- Video and print materials and other educational and catechetical resources that explain why marriage is unique and can only be the union of one man and one woman can be found at www.MarriageUniqueforaReason.org. See also the recent open letter entitled "Marriage and Religious Freedom," signed by leaders of various faith communities (<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/ecumenical-and-interreligious-activities.cfm>).

Resources for celebrating World Marriage Day, sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter, are available at <http://wmd.wme.org>. World Marriage Day, now in its 30th consecutive year, received the Apostolic Blessing of Pope John Paul II in 1993.

Finally, National Marriage Week, now in its third year, is a collaborative effort to influence the culture by faith communities, business, media, education, and non-profit groups. It promotes marriage as a benefit to husbands and wives and to the nation, as well as the best environment in which to raise children. Information and resources are at <http://www.nationalmarriageweekusa.org>.

Thank you again for this opportunity to highlight these resources in anticipation of the celebrations for marriage next month. I would be grateful if you could share this information with the clergy and lay leaders of your diocese. May these upcoming observances be occasions to affirm ever more deeply the gift of marriage and family life, and may the Lord continue to bless all that you do in witness to the beauty and gift of marriage and the family.

With gratitude and prayerful best wishes, I am

Fraternally yours in Christ,

+ Kevin C. Rhoades

Most Rev. Kevin C. Rhoades
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