

## The National Pastoral Initiative



### United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

#### **What is the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage?**

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has identified **Strengthening Marriage and Family Life** as one of its five priority areas. The Marriage Priority extends the work that the bishops began five years ago with the **National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage (NPIM)**. The NPIM is a multi-year effort to communicate the meaning and value of married life for the Church and for society. The Initiative brings together Catholic teaching and pastoral practice, social science research, and the experience of married couples. It offers guidance and resources, including a pastoral letter, to promote, strengthen, and protect marriage as a human institution and a Christian sacrament.

In developing the Initiative, the bishops recognize that marriage as an institution has suffered in recent years. The persistent high rate of divorce, rapid rise of non-marital cohabitation, and falling marriage rate testify to its social decline. Young people wonder if a healthy, lifelong marriage is even possible. In addition, the issue of same-sex unions has produced heated debate about the nature and purposes of marriage. This is a critical moment to join with others who seek to strengthen marriage. The bishops believe that the Catholic Church can make a distinct contribution to shaping public awareness about the value of marriage.

#### **What activities has the Initiative undertaken?**

- A pastoral letter on marriage, “Love and Life in the Divine Plan,” was approved by the Bishops in November, 2009. The letter is the theological foundation for the bishops’ efforts to strengthen marriage and to defend it against attempts to redefine marriage as other than the union of one man and one woman. The letter, in English and Spanish, is available in print and on the USCCB website (<http://www.usccb.org/LoveandLife/>). An abridged version is also available, as is a Leader’s Guide that can be used with parish-based small groups to explore key themes in the pastoral letter.
- The “For Your Marriage” public awareness campaign, consisting of ads and a website, began in June, 2007. The ads (television, radio, billboards) are based on the theme “What have you done for your marriage today?” The website, **ForYourMarriage.org**, offers practical information and resources for engaged and married couples and people who are involved in marriage ministries.
- A Spanish language website, **Por Tu Matrimonio**, includes many of the resources on the For Your Marriage site, as well as information of particular interest to Spanish-speaking communities.

- “Making the Case for Marriage” is a series of brief backgrounders on specific topics (e.g., cohabitation, divorce, marriage and children), bringing together social science research and church teaching/pastoral response. The backgrounders are available in English and Spanish ([www.usccb.org/npim](http://www.usccb.org/npim)).
- Many dioceses sponsored focus groups with married couples, including interfaith couples, as well as separated or divorced persons, single young adults, and couples in a second marriage. The findings have informed the development of NPIM resources. See [www.usccb.org/npim](http://www.usccb.org/npim) for reports and resources.
- A national research project on Catholics’ understanding of marriage is available at: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/MarriageReport.pdf>.
- With help from the Knights of Columbus, the bishops have begun a campaign of education and advocacy about why marriage is and can only be the union of one man and one woman. Materials are available at [www.usccb.org/marriageuniqueforareason/](http://www.usccb.org/marriageuniqueforareason/)

### **What activities are planned for 2010-2011?**

- The “For Your Marriage” series consists of several brochures, available in print and online, that discuss popular marriage-related topics. The first two deal with healing for those affected by divorce and separation, and the impact of military deployment on marriage. Additional topics will be addressed in 2010 and 2011.
- New radio and TV spots are expected to begin in 2011, continuing the successful “For Your Marriage” public awareness campaign.
- Work is continuing with diocesan offices and national groups to promote and improve pastoral ministries that strengthen marriage and family life. There will be particular emphasis on ministries and outreach that can take place in parishes around the theme “Becoming a Marriage-Building Parish.”

### **How can parishes participate in the Initiative?**

- Link to [www.foryourmarriage.org](http://www.foryourmarriage.org) from your parish website. A variety of animated and static ads can be downloaded from the website.
- Mention the website in your bulletin and promote it when people register for a marriage and family program.
- Promote small faith sharing groups around the theme “For Your Marriage.” Use the website for resource materials (articles may be reproduced with credit to the website).
- Plan a parish celebration of marriage. The Prayer Card for Married Couples and For Your Marriage Bookmark, both available from USCCB Publishing, make excellent giveaways.
- Consult the For Your Marriage and NPIM websites for additional ideas. Both sites are regularly updated with reports on current projects.

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