

## **The Call, the Mission and the Journey:**

*Response from parishioners of St Columba's Church, Chester to the invitation from the Bishops to reflect on the Gift of Marriage and Family Life.*

St Columba's parishioners have met on two occasions (8<sup>th</sup> March and 19<sup>th</sup> April 2015) in response to the Bishops' invitation to reflect and comment on Marriage and Family life. This note records the views expressed (rather than agreed) on the second occasion when 13 parishioners met. We wish to offer to these views to the wider discussions. A note of the first meeting is included at the end.

1. The world is changing/moving and we (the members of the Catholic Church) need to respond to a need with it, to be inclusive of divorced and gay people, using the principles of love, forgiveness and redemption.
2. We don't want to dilute the fundamentals e.g. *marriage is for life*
3. We are living in a plural society with different religions, different branches of Christianity and secular influences. What is relevant to our lives is how the pastoral practices of the church handle the situations where behaviour doesn't conform to the teachings but people are leading good lives (i.e. dealing with the tensions between pastoral practice and living an ideal life).
4. Individual marriages and relationships are inscrutable; how is the church in a position to judge or punish in relation to acceptance of sacraments?
5. Need to consider the nature of compassion, while a marriage is in some ways a public, observable relationship. It's an area not left to an individual's conscience.
6. It is no longer certain that family members will remain practising Catholics. Families are now very spread out and 'family' is found in relationships with friends and colleagues; some are like minded but not RC, others are Catholic. It's hard to bring everyone together. There needs to be an understanding that the nuclear family is not the only place for family-type relationships.
7. Public scandal as a notion is difficult for the church. Someone being remarried and not receiving communion is somehow disconnected from us as a church struggling to articulate the teaching and to capture the compassion in 'go, and do not sin again'.
8. The main commandment is to love one another (after God, of course) yet there are circumstances when it is hard to square this with teaching that marriage is for life. e.g. there are difficulties in sticking to a 'bad' (abusive) marriage. It doesn't feel right to insist.
9. There are concerns about the training of priests who have to grapple with eternal truths at the same time as working with 'cafeteria Catholics' who pick and choose which teachings they conform to by using their own (informed?) consciences. Are clergy being set up so high that only falling short is possible?

10. We should do more with the laity; it's to do with the way the Church is organised. The RC Church is private and not really (consistently or reliably) welcoming.
11. Wanting to see the church being more welcoming to people of faith who are well intentioned but fall short; who need acceptance and support.
12. Children find security in a loving marriage between their parents: it's helpful (for their future relationships) for them to see a good, loving marriage dealing with crises and challenges as well as the happy times.
13. Being in a loving and committed relationship is what is important (for resilience and stability) and having the opportunity to talk over, with someone of faith, about the difficulties of marriage.
14. Christian marriages are meant to be more resilient but often there isn't independent and confidential support which reflects Christian values in marriage. They may not want to share difficulties with friends or family. Priests aren't trained/equipped to deal with those issues.
15. Pastoral work (e.g. supporting good parenting) can be faith-based and realistic. They teach parents to support and reward children and at the same time help them to face up to and deal with the consequences of their choices and actions.
16. The passages we have been given (to reflect on) point to an ideal but are unhelpful if anything goes wrong.
17. Marriages change from moment to moment.
18. The church needs to minister to the people whose marriages break down.
19. Made the observation that the church is not thriving with groups including young people and looking after the elderly. We should set an example (in our communities).
20. We know we need to preach the Gospel anew to each generation: are we relying on teaching that was appropriate a generation or so ago but is not appropriate (or effective) today?
21. We would like to see more support for individuals to be more confident in understanding what love is and can do. Helping people with Christian formation.

## Note from first meeting:

More than fifty parishioners met on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2015, to consider together the invitation from the Bishops of England & Wales to reflect on “the Gift of Marriage and Family Life”, ahead of the second stage of the Synod on the family in October. There were several interesting contributions made during the time for discussion/questions e.g.:

- *in league with other prolife groups, SPUC have drawn attention to what they consider are some disturbing views on Church teaching on marriage and the family, coming from the first stage of the Synod in 2014. We were urged to look into this.*
- *The quotations, choice of readings, questions and format seem to be seeking to guide the responses in a direction that is at odds with what people might want to say about their own experiences. That makes it challenging to say what we want to in the response.*
- *There seems to be a real change in the Church with our opinion asked for the first time. Whilst we might have liked things to have been worded differently or some aspects given more prominence, nothing is perfect and we should grasp this opportunity to make a real change, help the Church to hear directly from its people and so speak to their hearts in the future.*
- *Modern family life is messy. People find themselves in less than ideal situations. I am hopeful that as a Church/parish we can find ways to make the Gospel truly Good News by seeking to answer the question “What would Jesus say or do?”*
- *How do we help single people with “no family” not to feel excluded from the consultation?*
- *Should we not be arranging for our young people, say in the Sixth Form at our High school, to be involved in the consultation?*