



“The Heart of the Deepest Truth”

An Inter-deanery Report on Marriage and Family

Fr Vincent Nichols, 14 July, 1979

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Introduction

SINCE the Inter-Deanery meeting of the Archdiocese of Liverpool on 10th February 1979, discussions have been taking place on questions of importance facing the Church today. Similar discussions are taking place as preparation for the National Pastoral Congress. One of the areas of discussion has been ‘Marriage and Family Life’.

This report is offered, in the first instance to the second Inter-Deanery meeting of the Archdiocese on 14th July, 1979, as a contribution to these discussions. It is hoped that an Archdiocesan policy for Marriage and Family Life will be one of the fruits of these discussions.

The comments, views, suggestions and proposals in this report come from a wide variety of sources. The discussions which have taken place in parishes and deaneries are reflected here, especially in the first two chapters. The suggestions and experience of many people actively involved in these areas of work both in this country and abroad are reflected in the later chapters. There are, however, certain underlying convictions. Two are important:

1. That marriage and family life is first and foremost a human reality and a personal experience. In seeking to serve the quality of marriage and family life we must pay our full attention to this experience. We must acquire all the understanding we can of its stages and patterns and equip ourselves with the interpersonal skills necessary for this apostolate. Also we must be concerned to provide this same understanding and skills for those in our care who are preparing for, or living through their marriage.
2. That this same human reality and experience is a saving mystery, one of the places above others where the salvific love of God is made visible and experienced by His people. So, as well as promoting the

human reality, we must also be ready to explore its depths, interpreting our lives in the light of the Gospel, declaring God's saving presence in the homes of our people.

These two principles are at the heart of the methodology of this report.

The first chapter seeks to express the hopes and vision contained in the heart of people as they approach marriage. The second chapter presents an inclusive but not analytical survey of the reality they live through, the problems facing married couples and families today. These chapters are addressed to everyone and the hope is that they will find their own hopes and anxieties reflected there. The third chapter is concerned with the full span of the pastoral response of the Church to Marriage and Family Life. All those concerned about the quality and extensiveness of this response will find suggestions for their consideration in this chapter. The final chapter is addressed to specific groups of people already fully involved in this Apostolate and makes concrete proposals for immediate consideration and action. Sections are addressed to Parish and Deanery Groups, to Priests, to Educators especially Teachers and finally to Parish Helpers, Support Organisations and Counselling and Advice Organisations. An outline of these proposals is included as Appendix 1.

The scope of this paper is far from complete. There are vast areas of study, experience and dedication outside the Church to which only superficial reference has been made. Statutory bodies such as probation and children services, the Courts, Magistrates and Judges, the Medical and Legal professions at real depth have yet to be fully involved. Some more consistent contact must be established with these bodies and with others, like the Institute of Marital Studies, if our ministry is to be well founded and systematic.

The paper, then, seeks to open out the full scope of this vast area of Ministry. It seeks to suggest the principles by which we are motivated to action and by which we must guide our work. It attempts to suggest immediate proposals or policy. Above all it attempts, in parts, to speak to the hearts of married men and women, hoping that they can find here some reflection of their own experience and sounding for them a note of support and commitment to their cause by the Church in this Archdiocese.

Vision of Marriage

It is with great joy that each of us attends a wedding. Even the passers-by slow down to catch a glimpse of the bride. Such a day is full of the evident goodness of people, full of trust and of the promise of future happiness. By our attentive presence, by our shared joy and hopefulness, even by our photographs, we acknowledge that this day is one of the pinnacles of love and hope in this couple's life and in the lives of their families. We are also aware that they set out on a journey full of risks and threats and yet they do so confidently and eagerly. The complex truth today is 'Marriage - never more popular, never more risky.'

Who can express the hopes that fill the hearts of a couple coming to the altar to marry? (70% of first marriages are in Church). It is difficult to articulate their deep feelings. But is it important that as a couple they can acknowledge and celebrate as fully as possible the reality of their love for each other and the meaning of their mutual hopes and promises.

It is here that the Church can speak. Attentive to God's presence in the Words of Scripture, in her teaching and traditions and in the hearts of men and women, the Church believes that she can give words to the couple's deepest aspirations. The Church's best vision of marriage is a "reading" of the highest hopes and longings, the instincts and dreams of the couple who are marrying. It is an interpretation of the human heart according to our Christian message (Christ, the Incarnate Word) in whom we put our trust. Such a vision of marriage, at its best, is not first of all a command, but a revelation of who we really are, and of what we are called to become.

Pope Paul said, "Marriage is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations or selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his marriage partner, loves not only for what he receives, but for the partner's self, rejoicing that he can enrich his partner with the gift of himself." (Humanae Vitae No. 6). It seems beyond dispute that marriage holds out the hope of a close personal relationship, a promise of a greater realisation of love expressed in feelings, emotions and instincts.

If we look more closely at this relationship as it is experienced, then certain characteristics can be pointed out. One way of highlighting these essential qualities is to say that this deeper yearning seeks sustenance, healing and growth.

First of all, the couple look at each other for basic emotional support and sustenance. It is in the heart of the other that each hopes to find that accepting love without which life is cruel and at times, unbearable. It is in each other's company that they feel most at ease, can most easily "be myself and know that it is "all right". There they feel recognised, wanted and appreciated. They also look to each other for material and financial sustenance. They are sure they can look after each other, providing the basic material support each one needs, gradually improving their lives materially.

Further, such accepting and sustaining love and interdependence is the source of much needed healing. Each comes to a relationship of love scarred and wounded by the past. Each has suffered rejection, confusion and fear in an inner-most heart. It is in the constant love of a marriage that such hurt is gradually eased and a damaged self-confidence restored. In the course of each day too, we are hurt in many and different ways. It is of the essence of the hope and promise of marriage, that such experiences can be brought to the loved one and in being shared, eased and healed.

Also, as couples marry they sincerely hope that from now on life will be better. They have an instinct for growth. And so it will be, because the sort of love in which they are trusting and hoping is a fruitful love. The heart of their love is that as husband and wife they have faith in each other. They believe in each other's goodness and talents. They recognise each other's strengths and abilities and they care that each makes the best of his or her abilities. They are committed by their love to each other's growth. They will encourage each other's interests and hopes and will co-operate in allowing opportunity for each to develop as best they can. They hope then, to mature together, to deepen in their capacity to love and to know continued support and acceptance through all the changes life brings.

And further, their love will be fruitful in new life. They will come to know the amazing creativity of their love, not only in terms of their own lives, but as creative of a new person or persons, their children. Then they have the immense pleasure, coupled with the responsibilities of parenthood of watching the growth of their own children. Children are indeed the completion of married love or as people say. "The best thing that ever happened to me."

Their growth will reach beyond the confines of their family, too. Together they hope to face the world. They hope to deepen and enrich their current friendships by the presence of their loved one. They hope to form new friendships in which they can offer and receive the help and support needed through life. They hope to be "good neighbours", living not exclusively for each other but, from the stability of their home and love, reaching out to those around them. They are ready, at their best moments, to share the happiness they have found, gradually becoming thoughtful and generous members of society at many different levels.

It is also of the heart of love and of the Church's vision of marriage, that this intimate sharing of life celebrated at a wedding, is at its deepest levels, equal, exclusive and permanent. Husband and wife seek an equal sharing in the joys and responsibilities in their life together. Increasingly today, they will reject "traditional" roles, by which responsibility is divided in a fixed way, and strive to arrive at a sharing of tasks which properly respects the abilities of each while realistically accepting their responsibilities.

They long too, for a quality of love which at its deepest and most intimate levels, will free each other from the restless search for love and acceptance elsewhere, becoming for each other a faithful and reliable source of "living water". In this way they seek and promise a deeply personal and sexual faithfulness and exclusiveness. It is the ultimate integrity of this encounter, which is the key to moral issues and this integrity includes body, mind, feelings and soul.

At the centre of their hopes and promises lies their wish to offer and to receive each other unconditionally and permanently. Permanency means continuity and reliability, no matter what. This is the fundamental commitment and trust of "my continued presence with you", which is built up gradually through the shared sufferings and happiness of married life and which is longed for and promised at the wedding.

This dedication of husband and wife is both reflected and strengthened in the affection their children have for them and in the need they all have for each other as a family. Everyone agrees that conditions of loving permanency are the best for the care and upbringing of children. Without this experience of continued and reliable care the children will be handicapped when in their turn they attempt their own permanent and intimate relationships.

Continued dedication of husband and wife, in a love that overcomes selfishness, makes a marriage indissoluble from the inside and gives form to that immense promise, “until death do us part.”

In seeking to interpret the hearts of men and women in their experience of love and marriage, the Church is seeking to serve God. For, viewed with the eyes of faith, the qualities of love which are expressed in the hopes and promises of marriage are sure and recognisable signs of God’s presence. The Scriptures, our traditions and teaching, help us to be perceptive to the working presence of God. They direct us to recognise that where men and women promise faithfulness, with the whole of themselves and their destiny, then they are opening themselves to God. Their commitment of one to the other can only point to what is infinite and unconditional—the unfathomable depth of the other human being - which is truly “held” by God alone. Such commitment, not only reflects, but makes real in an imperfect way the eternal covenant of God and His people.

Our sources direct us to recognise that where men, women and children offer forgiveness and healing to each other the reconciliation which is so central to the work of Jesus is being effected. Here the “loving kindness of the heart of our God”, who is infinite in mercy and forgiveness, is made tangible at this moment. Moments of quiet forgiveness between mother and child, or father and teenage daughter: moments of comfort and reassurance between brother and sister or grandma and child: these are moments to be celebrated and recognised as “full of grace”.

Similarly, when the love of husband and wife is creative of the new life of another person, made in the image and likeness of God, then the mystery of life is realised in such an immediate way that we are moved both to be almost frightened of our immense capacities and to be full of the praise of God. The “miracle of each birth” is rightly to be celebrated at baptism, when, with solemnity and symbol, we proclaim that it is God’s life in this child that evokes our praise and wonder.

So it is that when these are all brought together in a wedding and in a life of fidelity then we can be so sure that God’s love is being made present that a sacrament is declared: the visible tangible sign and reality of God’s grace among men. So it is that marriage is a sacrament. So it is that husband and wife, in the love they offer to each other, in all its concrete, daily, intimate and profound forms, make real to each other the saving presence of God’s love. It is they who, day by day, administer the sacrament of matrimony to each other, a sacrament publically celebrated on the day of their wedding.

The public nature of these promises, and their wider concerns for neighbours and society, find expression and nourishment in their parish communities. It is there, most clearly at the Sunday Parish Mass, that families are helped to read the true depth of their grace-filled lives. Through their constant commitment to be part of the Body of Christ, the Bread that is broken to give life, they are inspired to reach out from the intimacy of their love in loving concern to those around them, in the name of Christ.

This vision of God’s presence, perceived by the eyes of faith, enables us to proclaim His name in the richness, wonder and in the sufferings experienced in our close and lasting personal relationships. Faith is crucial to marriage. Further, faith names for us too that deep and almost inevitable sense of loss that accompanies the breakdown of an intimate relationship. No matter the hardship that may have been suffered, in a marriage breakdown we have some sense of loss; we are losing a presence, a potential presence of God in our lives. So a deliberate turning away is precisely an infidelity—a turning from the God who is present.

This perception of God’s presence in our lives is the heart of the challenge of the faith. It is the vision of the true depth of reality, of the full meaning of experience, that moves the Church to treasure marriage and to be concerned for the well being of married couples. It is this vision which inspires believing couples to realize that the love they offer each other, that the tolerance and patience they try to show each other, that the faithfulness they live for each other, is a saving reality, one of the most precious means of our salvation. They are inspired, also, to interpret their suffering and hard times together as a central core of human experience expressed in the cross of Christ and to know that by living through their pain they can, in Christ, give birth to deeper love.

This is the ‘Mystery of Salvation’, spoken of by St. Paul, a living ‘mystery’ making visible the reality of Christ’s love for His Church: (Eph. 5.32).

Reality of Marriage

This much the Church can speak. In fact the Church has a duty to proclaim the true depth of man's hopes and aspirations and in as much as our hearts become dulled and insensitive, then the Church can point again to the often hidden truths of ourselves. The Church does so with the authority of Christ, who above all announced the presence of the Kingdom of God and called men to its light.

However, the realisation and working out of this vision is to be spoken of more tentatively. The experience of marriage, the story that starts on the wedding day, invariably contains degrees of

disappointment, suffering and loss. It is married people first and foremost who know the heartache and the pain involved in living out this vision. They know not only the joys and happiness, but also the suffering and disappointment: the cost. By their lives they bear witness to the demands of this vocation; their living speaks eloquently of the generosity of their hearts and the depth of their faith.

The majority of marriages in the country and in the Archdiocese do not break down. Tribute must be paid to the great number of people who are dedicated in their marriage and gradually deepen their commitment and love. Many, many people enjoy the rich love and satisfaction of a happy married and family life. They know the almost endless joys that can come in marriage and can recognise 'a foretaste of heaven' in their happiest moments. Even though most of this chapter is concerned with the difficulties facing people today, the vast amount of dedication and selfless commitment that is present today must not be forgotten.

Today the stresses and pressures on marriage are greater than ever. This is to be seen not least of all in the dramatic increase in the number of divorces, and the statistical estimate that one in four marriages are likely to breakdown. But underlying these figures is a picture of considerable personal suffering, loneliness and daily tension. Divorce figures in fact report years of difficulty and deterioration.

In sheer numbers alone the present rate of divorce affects an alarming number of people. For instance, the 120,522 couples in England and Wales granted a decree absolute in 1975 (last year's figures were considerably higher, at 140,000) had 202,475 children, of whom 145,096 were under 16 years old.

The total number thus directly affected in 1975 was 443,519, nearly equivalent to the total population of Bristol.

So it is that at least one in every twenty marriages at any moment of time, is experiencing serious problems which, if left without help and support will lead to the death of a relationship. Although there is an absence of research and information about marriages involving Catholics as such and of the pattern of marital breakdown, there seems to be no reason for assuming that this picture does not apply in principle to each parish of the archdiocese.

However, it is not possible to know the nature or the source of these problems without attending closely to each particular relationship and circumstance. Factors influencing marriage are many and complex and in the face of such evidence of widespread but often hidden suffering and failed expectations, we must attend carefully to them. Here are some of the factors:

Many features in our society today point to ways in which values have changed. It can be said that in the recent past, institutions such as the Church, provided a certain unity of experience, interpretation and value of life. So it was that to know the group to which a person belonged (e.g. Catholic) was a reliable indication of much about that person's thinking and living. Today couples, families and individuals appear to live at more of a distance from institutions. It is they, the individuals and families, who strive to achieve a unity in their life, and to live by interpretations and values which are personal. They hope that their belonging to any institution or group will be based on a personal commitment to the values, ideals and behaviour upheld by the institution. Personal commitment and faith have a current priority.

One result of this is that there is a considerable pluralism in our society. People strive to 'follow their conscience' and shape their lives according to their best beliefs and convictions. They certainly

look for the support, the belonging, of the group but are prepared, in general, to go it alone much more than in the recent past.

So it is that when people marry and grow into self-directed family life, they are left more and more to their own resources: they have to make many decisions about the kind of life they are trying to lead, about the way they will relate together, about the values they wish to pass on to their children. Even values of friendship are hard to maintain. There is real pressure on couples to become a self-contained unit, ending former personal friendships and to acquire all the material possessions necessary for self-sufficiency. Couples often report how difficult it is to keep up their separate friendships once they are married. They will often feel alone in many of the decisions they make, sensing that society does not give them the support it used to and even that the Church as an institution is not as close as it used to be. There is a sense of having to make a world of our own rather than being able to step into an almost ready-made environment.

Undoubtedly this pluralism, conflict of values and different fundamental decisions and life-styles, is powerfully reflected by the media. Often the picture presented by the media reflects the exceptional rather than the usual and increases the sense of isolation of the 'common man' who knows instinctively that the values he is trying to live and create are correct, yet feels strangely alone in doing so. So it is that greater emphasis is placed by the media on the immediate satisfaction of personal needs in a short term only. Marriage is reflected as only one of many alternatives and sexual intimacy is not linked with profound personal commitment, or with the long term fruitfulness and responsibility such love can bring.

Values in sexual relationships are presented to young people which are in sharp contrast to parents' best instincts and they feel helpless as to how to protect themselves and their children. Pressure groups such as S.P.U.C. and the Responsible Society bring to light the ways that values basic to stable marriage and family life are attacked and alternative values promoted, often with substantial

financial and political motivation. This sense of isolation, of distance between 'theory' (hopes, expectations, teachings) and experience, is of vital significance in people's relationship with the Church. It is often said that the Church, in her official statements and spokesmen, 'doesn't really understand' the actual lived experience of its people and does not spend sufficient time making contact and building understanding with them at a day-to-day level.

It is difficult to sustain the fundamental Christian vision of marriage and family life when society readily accepts alternatives, positively promotes apparently easier solutions to many of the difficulties which emerge and does not thoroughly support the family at every turn.

The change in divorce laws has brought to light the distress in many marriages and calls for much greater support and concern for the quality of family life. Certainly one result of these laws has been a massive increase in the number of one-parent families, (it is estimated that there are 750,000 one-parent families, of whom 415,000 have arisen because of divorce) reaching the figure that one in ten families with dependent children have one parent only.

Difficulty with housing, is a particular problem affecting family life, especially in urban areas. Often the quality of housing makes it impossible for members of a family to maintain that minimum of private space which human beings require. Further the availability of housing, especially for the newly-married, presents them with particular problems. Whenever council accommodation is insufficient or not wanted, house-ownership is the best of the alternatives. In fact 52% of houses are now owner-occupied. Yet the levels and means of obtaining mortgages often means that both partners are required to work. Sometimes it is a condition of the mortgage. This places considerable stress on the development of a deepening healthy relationship between husband and wife, especially in their early years and if they are thinking of starting, or have started a family. (Recent statistics show that 75% of couples marrying between the age of 20 and 24 in 1973, were childless after 2 years of marriage. Economic pressure must play a large part in this).

This is just one of the factors which has led to the growth of a 'two-wage economy'. The stresses and strains on a family where, for a variety of reasons, both husband and wife are at work, should not be under-estimated. Constant tiredness, lack of relaxed time together, increased anxiety about a work situation, tension when a child is sick or during school holidays are but some of the effects. Yet questions of this sort must be examined in terms of the economic and social pressures which make two wages necessary or desirable.

On the other hand a preoccupation with the standard and quality of the house is one facet of a trend in our society referred to as 'materialistic'. It is evident that those who have materially splendid houses are far from sheltered from marital disharmony and great distress. Indeed material progress by itself often creates as many human problems as it solves.

Other forms of social poverty, such as environmental and cultural deprivation do indeed impose great stress on marriage and family, just as they contribute to other social problems such as violence, vandalism and delinquency. All such wide-ranging issues have to be considered if we wish to gain an accurate picture of the reality of marriage today.

Another factor which affects some areas of the Archdiocese more than others, is the isolation of the family unit away from the support of parents and childhood friends and neighbours. This absence of the extended family shows itself particularly in times of stress, such as the arrival and first few months of a new child, (especially the first), moving house, sickness or death in the family. At times like these, the help offered by older trusted members of the larger family is invaluable support. New towns and housing areas seem particularly vulnerable to this isolation, for often people of the same age and experience find only themselves in the one neighbourhood.

In contrast, in the older areas of the city and some rural towns, 'mum' is near at hand or school friends are not far away. Such terrible loneliness is one of the most damaging factors in parts of our modern society. Thus 25% of mothers with pre-school children receive regular tranquillisers from their doctors.

Another result of this isolation seems to be a loss of confidence among parents in face of some conflicting values which influence children today.

Many aspects of parenting today pinpoint the difficulties facing families. Some parents find that the army of helpers and professionals who are concerned about their children in fact sap their confidence as parents. They describe their role as 'getting my child ready for the next specialist'. Parents of very young children, of handicapped children, of adolescents often pin-point anxiety about their children as the main difficulty they face. Single parent families face these issues in particular isolation. Often, however, the problem is not so much that people have problems, but that they are sometimes isolated from each other and from the help that is in fact available and ashamed to let themselves be known.

We have already pointed to the changes in patterns of authority which lay much more emphasis today on the role and authority of the individual, couple or family, in many decisions and values concerning themselves and their children. Another more hidden isolation is present within a marriage itself, and intensifies the stress and isolation experienced. Often husband and wife fail to

work as a team. Critical areas of life and critical decisions are left to one partner alone. Maybe it is the care of the children, or their schooling, or their religious education. Maybe it is finance, or maybe the difficult area of birth regulation and responsible parenthood. When concerns and decisions are left with one partner then an element at the very heart of marriage has been lost.

Often this lack of communication in one area spreads throughout their relationship. An inability to talk over one delicate area is the start of a definite gulf. It is hard to go on loving when where it really counts, you don't feel understood or loved yourself, is how one lady put it. It is clear, too, that often difficulties in the sexual expression of marriage relationship have their origins in an initial breakdown in verbal communications. Once such a breakdown occurs then alternative sources of understanding are sought or returned to.

These can be many and some illusory: drink and pub companionship, bingo, over involvement in other activities or a return to 'Mum'. (It is not rare for a mother to know about a daughter's pregnancy long before her husband). Further this breakdown of communication sometimes give rise to marital violence, affecting both men and women. Such violence involves all strata of society, is verbal as well as physical and emotional, is indeed a 'wide and difficult subject', complex in its origins and hidden in its manifestations.

So it is that some people accurately use the term 'married singles' to point to this lack of co-operation, trust and good communication within a marriage and subsequently, a family. It is well known that the development of a good relationship between husband and wife calls for many adaptations. The exact and profound nature of

these adaptations is not always so well appreciated. The physical, emotional and organisational changes that a person has to make in the first years of marriage are quite far-reaching. A further profound series of changes has to be made when the first child is born too. The ability of each person to adapt to their changing style of life is deeply influenced by the expectations they bring to their marriage. While these are almost impossible to observe and detail accurately, it is clear that we are living in a time of change.

The comparatively clear expectations of “father” and ‘mother’ role have been left in favour of an expectation termed ‘companionate marriage’, in which ‘we will do everything together’. Yet, at the same time, women, especially, have much clearer ideas of the sort of personal fulfillment they are seeking especially in terms of work or career, personal pursuits and leisure. This certainly has changed the style of relations between men and women and it seems, left more of a gap about the precise role of men in the domestic aspects of their marriage.

Today the more elementary economic and material needs are more readily taken care of, and so more central does the satisfaction of these higher and more personal needs become. Also longer

life expectation, in which the care and rearing of children occupy a relatively short time, puts further emphasis on the quality of a couple’s personal relationship and fulfillment.

Many factors today, especially in the media, encourage a couple to expect an immediate and satisfactory sexual relationship at the start of their life together. These expectations are not only often unrealistic, but also compounded by a deep sense of shame and failure if they are not quickly realised. Although it is difficult to judge the actual effects of specific Church teaching it does seem that much personal distress is associated with the popular presentation of the teaching of the Church in sexual morality. This is particularly true of the teaching on birth regulation. The inclination is to dramatise and isolate the sexual aspects of a marriage relationship, rather than to see it as an intimate and powerful means of communication which is of vital importance and will be acquired and enjoyed gradually at deeper levels.

In these matters, many find that their initial expectations are not easily fulfilled and there seems to be a lack of lasting appreciation that a successful marriage is going to involve a great deal of hard work. Added to this there is a lack of practical understanding and working knowledge of the different physiological, mental and emotional reactions of men and women and of the normal patterns of development and change through life. So the possibility and effects of post-natal depression, for example, are often not appreciated in the home, where understanding is most needed. In fact, many people by their behaviour implicitly deny there is any difference between men and women, having confused equality with being the same.

At no time then, have expectations about marriage been higher in material and personal terms. Yet at no time have marriages faced such a complex of difficulties and hostile influences. Fortunately, there are signs of a growing public concern for marriage, both in society and in the Church. No doubt this is in response to an apparent crisis in the quality of family life today, and to the huge amounts of human talent and finance drawn into these complex and unhappy issues and services. It is estimated that the full scope of services involved in marital and family breakdown cost the nation £5 million per week.

Such concern is sorely needed, but it will be effective only if it helps to generate a widespread and informed appreciation of the potential and problems present in this area of life. Generalised comment and worry are of little practical value and those truly concerned must be prepared first of all to study the facts and to learn as much as they can, from all reliable sciences and sources, of the true patterns of family and married life and of the exact nature of the problems faced.

It is in face of this complex challenge that each marriage develops its own unique character. The settings of each marriage—the wider family the neighbourhood, the city, town or rural setting—have first of all to be appreciated, for it is in that environment with its particular combination of support and threat that the marriage must survive and grow. At this level, the parishes of the diocese vary enormously. In some areas certain problems predominate: in others those particular problems are little in evidence, but others are to be seen. There is no overall picture. So attention must first be paid to the conditions of each neighbourhood and parish.

Then each relationship develops in its own way in response to those external conditions and response to the people involved in the marriage: husband and wife, their parents and family and their own children. Areas of strength and weakness are particular and while it is possible to point to certain generalised areas of potential problem and stress, the particular story of each marriage is different and calls for attentiveness and individual response.

Those who stand and speak as 'the Church', then, must be sure that, as a basic stance, they are attentive to the particular circumstances and 'culture' of each area or neighbourhood and to the personal experiences of each person and couple. The 'vision of marriage' must be constantly presented, but the Church must give as much emphasis to helping individuals and couples understand and reflect on their own personal experience as it does to upholding its teaching.

In other words, the Church must be seen to be both drawing strength from the marriages and families which make incarnate the Word of God today and dedicated to using that strength for the salvation of all men. The Church must also be dedicated to studying attentively all aspects of these problems, preparing and supporting people and willingly co-operating with those who are committed to working for a similar vision of Christian marriage and family life.

Overall Vision of Pastoral Ministry to Families and Married Life

In seeking to assist men and women in their development and growth, the Church seeks to serve God. The Church, in striving to be 'His obedient servant', must be sensitive to the pattern of people's lives, for God is at work there, shaping, forming and developing their lives according to 'His own purposes'. (Eph. 1.5)

The Church's involvement and concern is accentuated when a couple marry within the scope of the Church's dispensation, for their marriage is proclaimed a sacrament of God's presence. So, as the community of believers, we are concerned that marriage today should indeed be a saving reality, for those living each marriage and for those who witness it.

It is in marriage and family that the foundations of life and faith are laid. The core realities celebrated in all other sacraments are first experienced there: new life consecrated to God: affirmation and daily confirmation; forgiveness in failure: care and prayer for the sick; the dedication and consecration of life and home to God; the care and faith that surround death.

So it is for the sake of the purity of our service of God, for the sake of the well-being of people and for the sake of the wholeness of our sacraments that we must seek ways of ministering to every facet of married and family life.

The response of the Church to people facing these many problems spreads over the whole spectrum of pastoral activity. Care for the sick, the housebound, the dying: care for children, for the youth and for single people; for the handicapped and even for those in hospitals almost inevitably involves reference to the family as a whole. So much of our work is implicitly a form of ministry to family life.

However, at the present time the focus of attention shifts to family and marriage as such. This 'vision' is offered to help people to integrate their activity and hopes around this focus, being clear about what is already being done and about what properly can be our long-term aims.

In the following "areas of ministry" many will recognise activities which they already undertake and priorities which they hold. It is useful to see these as part of an overall picture and to see other complementary areas of work which can be developed in response to local needs.

The success of many local activities means that much could be gained from their being monitored, and the fruit of their experience passed on as suggestions and advice.

1. Ministry to the Quality of Local Community

The quality of family life depends directly on the environment. Housing conditions, the provision of employment, the standard of property, all influence family life. There is a real and urgent need to bring people together in networks of personal contact, forming and strengthening local community. There is also a need to

be vigilant to the influence of public policy and the activity of pressure groups which work against Christian moral standards.

Activities here can include:

- Local action groups on housing and environment issues; support for resident and community associations.
- Job creation and youth opportunity projects, especially at this present time when government finance is available.
- Schemes of parish visiting, house groups, society and associations which actively strive to form community: Mass centres etc.
- Pressure groups such as S.P.U.C., the Responsible Society and ad hoc groups of parents or adults.

2. Ministry to Single People

Many people are not married yet their lives are intimately linked with the experience of marriage. There are children and young people, who have to come to terms with their own experience of family, acquire necessary skills and be presented with realistic ideals for their present and future relationships. There are adults who have never been married for one reason or another and who may be seeking a sense of dedication in their lives. There are those whose marriages have failed and are living on their own with or without children, trying to cope with their distress, their own sense of failure and live out the highest ideals of Christian teaching. There are those whose marriage partners have died and who are constantly reminded of the absence of the loved one.

Activities in this area include:

- The provision of Catholic schools, where both children and parents can be helped, (cf. p11)
- The whole range of Youth Activities—groups, clubs, school and college chaplains, holidays, sports and a whole range of activities. These attempt to assist young people, letting them know basic goodwill, encouraging them towards responsible adult life.
- The support of single men and women through societies and clubs, involving them in social and pastoral work.
- A ministry for those who are separated or divorced, carried out by those who have had a similar experience, offering them support and assistance, especially at the difficult times which follow decisions and legal proceedings.

3. Ministry to Couples approaching Marriage and Married Couples

Immediate preparation is one opportunity for helping couples to deepen their understanding and commitment of themselves to each other and their choice to marry, clarify their expectations and prepare spiritually for their marriage. The early years of marriage are also recognised as a vital time, since 50% of all marital breakdowns have taken place before the 10th wedding anniversary. These are years of adaptation and change, and can bring confusion and distress to a young couple. Later in marriage too, couples report the need to renew and deepen their relationship and their spirituality, often seeking some time together as a couple, away from the pressures of everyday life.

Activities here can include:

- Many marriage preparation courses, (cf. p9)
- Invitations to all the young couples in a parish or deanery to celebrate anniversaries together, especially in groups who prepared together.
- Retreats and renewal for Married couples—renewal days, Marriage Encounter, renewal promises.

- Talks and discussions about particular topics, especially Christian approaches to questions of sexuality and economics.

4. Ministry to Parents

The problems and stresses facing parents today have been noted. Parents need considerable support, opportunities to share and resolve anxieties together, good information and practical training about how to handle and relate to their children and encouragement and guidance in their tasks as the first teachers of the faith, especially at times of reception of sacraments. Particular attention needs to be paid to the parents of young children, especially in pre-school years; the parents of adolescent children when tensions and anxieties are often at their height; and the parents of handicapped children. Single parents, too, need special attention. In all these issues of parenting, great thought needs to be given to the role of the father, who is often absent from current schemes and who may feel increasingly insecure, especially with regard to the due exercise of authority.

Activities in this area are many:

- Pram Clubs, Mother's associations and clubs, eg. 'Baptism groups' (cf. p11)
- The provision of education opportunities for mothers during the day, helping them to develop themselves as parents, including religious formation. (Adult Education Centres, etc.)
- The Family or Parent groups where problems can be discussed and even role-played, (cf. C.M.A.C. Bulletin No 66).
- Planned support for Parents by the school and vice versa, P.T.A. etc.
- Mentally handicapped groups and holidays, including some instruction for parents, with attention paid to receiving the sacraments.
- Sensitive and systematic visiting.

5. Ministry to the growing family

The family as a group is spoken of as the Church in miniature. Families today need great encouragement as they strive to form that way of life which truly reflects God's presence and our faith in His loving kindness. Families need to be given many opportunities to deepen their own spiritual life, to exercise a role or ministry together, becoming a vital part of the Church's missionary work. Families need to know that the Church depends on them and is only as holy as they are.

Activities here can include:

- House and Family dedications.
- Instruction and formation through family discussion groups, family week-end retreats and preaching.
- Family participation in the parish liturgy—as readers, at the offertory procession. Family 'in memoriam' masses, attended by the whole family.
- Good liturgical and pastoral direction on special family occasions—baptisms, weddings, funerals etc. These are times when above all others the family is 'realised' as a unit.
- Renewal days for the whole family, using the pastoral and educational centres of the archdiocese, giving an opportunity for the family to be together away from home in a 'retreat' setting.
- The use of families and both marriage partners in parish life eg. committees, associations, projects etc, rather than one partner only.

6. Ministry to Families in Stress and Disharmony

A time of crisis or particular tension can be a time of disintegration or growth for a family. The outcome can depend upon personal resilience, but also on the support and guidance available at

the appropriate moment. Constant vigilance at all levels of community is required so that early signs of stress are caringly noted. Continuing pastoral care is often needed long after the drama of a death, a break-up, a personal tragedy has faded. Particular care must be paid to the needs of the children of broken marriages, as the long-term effects and suffering caused there are becoming increasingly evident. Co-operation between the agencies concerned with the care of children is called for.

Activities here can include:

- Good neighbour or street warden schemes in parishes.
- The provision of good referral to counselling agencies.
- Self-help groups for many different groups of people in neighbourhood and parish.
- The active support of counselling organisations, especially the C.M.A.C. and COMPASS.

In the light of this overall view of possibilities and with knowledge of local circumstances and existing provisions, each parish or deanery can consider where its own particular needs and priorities lie. It can appreciate how much is already being done and also become more aware of some of the unanswered needs.

In considering these general aims, a number of points have to be remembered.

1. The pastoral care of the married and families belongs to the whole community. People who are themselves married and have families have a great deal to offer from their own experience and dedication. The task of developing and promoting ways of enabling couples and families to minister to each other, to support and heal each other, is essential to this vision. Bodies such as Marriage Encounter, F.S.A.. have experience in this field and must be given every support.
2. The role of the priest is vital to the effectiveness of each of these areas of ministry. At certain times he has a unique contact with people—times of preparation for and participation in the sacraments, when visiting, when attending the sick and dying. His responsibilities then range from highly personal matters, to liturgical, canonical and moral issues. In other areas he is called upon to encourage and direct the work of others and without his support this work will often fail to develop or to last. In all these matters it is essential that the diocese gives realistic support and help to the priest in every parish to enable him to fulfil these requirements.
3. The informed awareness needed to develop each area of this apostolate can only be sustained and promoted by a renewed liturgical celebration of marriage which goes beyond the wedding ceremony and becomes a regular feature of the parish liturgical cycle. Consistent celebration of God's presence in our marriages and families, prayerful reflection on our readiness to respond to Him, occasional renewal of marriage vows, will be at the heart of this renewed pastoral care.
4. In many of these areas of work, ecumenical co-operation is both possible and recommended. Certainly the pastoral care of mixed marriages calls for joint pastoral activity, but also preparation for marriage and most schemes designed to support parents and couples can be based on co-operation between the Churches. Since today 'mixed marriages' are almost the norm then some form of ecumenical co-operation can also be considered the norm.

There already exists the skeleton of regular contact between a couple and the parish. In the first ten years of shared life, a couple will probably come for preparation and marriage, for baptism, for admission to schools, for reception of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is on this basis that some aspects of this overall ministry can be developed. As well as these general aims or possibilities, many of which are already being achieved in some places, certain concrete proposals are to be made. These are addressed to groups of people actively involved in ministry: to parish groups, clergy, educators, helpers and counsellors. These proposals are presented as the immediate steps that can be taken in order to achieve a more deliberate and co-ordinated service for the married and for family life, and open up some of the longer term possibilities.

1 PARISHES—Parish and Deanery Groups

THE Twelve Apostles, the N.P.C.. discussion groups, parish and deanery meetings have contributed to an increased awareness of problems, opportunities and resources existing in the Archdiocese. The move to dedicate ourselves effectively to the service of marriage and family must build on these strengths. If our ministry is to be effective, if it is to serve the growth and development of married and family life in the Archdiocese, first of all, those who speak and act as the Church must be sure that they are all attending consistently and systematically to the particular realities and needs of each parish, each neighbourhood, each social group, even each marriage.

The discussions and questions which have taken place in parishes and deaneries and which lie behind this report, have been valuable in producing the personal and heartfelt experience and opinions of those involved. Some may have been more systematically representative of the realities of marriage in a parish, but for the most part, generalisations are likely to be intuitive rather than systematic. For effective ministry a clear and continual picture of needs is required. In the past this can have arisen from the contact of regular visiting between priest and people. Today so many changed factors make alternative and complimentary means of contact necessary. Therefore, it is of priority importance that each parish is certain that the picture it has of married and family life is truly representative of the actual reality lived by people in that area. Only a careful and systematic study of each area will make clear the story of each parish, or each part of the parish.

Areas of attention will include most of the factors influencing marriage which have been mentioned. Questions such as the following cannot be left unanswered, if an effective apostolate to the married and families is to be developed.

- How many marriages a year in your parish?—How are people prepared?
- How many young couples in this parish?
- How many mothers at home with children?
- How many single-parent families?
- What are central points of stress — housing — finance — isolation etc.
- What are major concerns of parents for their children in each area of the Parish?
- What is level of contact with Church i.e. how do they see Church supporting them and vice versa.
- Who do people turn to in stress?
- What is the provision of support services in this area?
- What is the quality of personal care for people in stress?
- How many suffered the breakdown of their marriage and what support did they receive
- What are the potential resources in this parish which are not fully used?

These and many similar questions cannot be usefully answered in general terms. They cannot be answered for the Archdiocese as a whole, but only for parishes and areas of considerable similarity. Unless we are constantly attentive to these issues and directly concerned about the accuracy of our information and impressions, then not only will plans probably be haphazard but our concern will not be taken seriously. Or, as one lady parishioner said, 'If the Church calls me to respect her teaching about marriage, she must show she respects my trying to live it'.

Clarifying a picture of the lived experience of marriage and family is the first task which needs to be completed by parish and deanery groups. Not only is such accurate information necessary, but the process of obtaining

it will continue to stimulate interest, much as discussions to date have done so. The development of the parish and deanery teams ready to tackle this work is of great importance. Members will need some training and guidance if their efforts are to be well managed and effective. Clear guidance can be given as to ways of elaborating a local picture of needs and services. Many sources of information exist which can be used to build up this picture. It has been commented often that there is considerable ignorance among people of the provisions and services which are already available in some measure.

In the light of such soundings it will then be possible for each team to draw up plans for immediate action, aimed at meeting local needs, in the light of the full range of possibilities (cf. Chpt III) and of existing services. The success of the study of the local situation can only be measured by the action it promotes.

Unless these parish or deanery teams are given adequate back-up from a central or specialised body, then it is less likely that they will sustain effort or action.

Overall Archdiocesan proposals can never be a substitute for local initiative. Structures that provide support and direction must be provided, but realistic objectives can only emerge from careful study of the local situation, assessment of available resources and informed co-ordination and assistance.

Proposals:

- That each parish continue to develop systematically a clear picture of the needs of families and married couples, attentive to the particular complex of problems faced in each area.
- That in the light of these soundings and in the light of the resources available both locally and in the Archdiocese, particular projects be started and supported in each area.
- That this survey and planning be carried out by already existing groups in the parish, groups whose concern and interest has developed through recent discussions. OR that people be invited by the priest to form a parish team for this purpose.
- That an Archdiocesan office for marriage and family life be formed in order, amongst other things, to offer informed guidance and training for members of parish teams concerned with the development and execution of these proposals.

2 ROLES OF THE PRIEST

A. In General.

The priest has a unique position regarding marriage and family life in the parish, especially if he has been there for a considerable length of time. Therefore his support and commitment to a careful study of marriage is of vital importance. He is needed to encourage and guide the work, having an overall view of what is being attempted. The terms of these proposals do not imply that all these tasks must be done by the priest. Some are specifically his: others he must ensure are carried out, rather than do himself. The survey is also important for the priest, because it can help him to correct and fill out his impressions of how things are in the parish.

In his everyday contact with people, the priest must strive to help people understand and interpret their experience, especially in close relationships, marriage and family life. He must help them to discern the presence of God, recognising the goodness in their lives and drawing them gradually to face the challenge of our Christian faith as it applies in each concrete circumstance.

Both seminary and in-service training for priests must provide him with basic interpersonal and counselling skills, some understanding of the patterns of human development, as well as proficiency

in the traditional sources of revelation: Scripture, Tradition and Church teaching. There is a constant need to revise and develop the quality of in-service training offered to the priests of the Archdiocese and its practical availability. This is particularly urgent in the area of Marriage and Family Life where problems are pressing and potential for growth so great.

B. In Particular.

(1) Preparation for Marriage

A clear distinction must be made between two functions to be carried out prior to wedding. They are not totally distinct in practice, but they are clearly separable:

A. Assessment: It is the priest's responsibility to assess that this couple is capable of validly celebrating the sacrament of Matrimony.

B. Preparation: It is the priest's positive responsibility to ensure that the couple are adequately prepared, so that their reception and living of the sacrament is not merely minimally valid, but as full as participation and commitment as possible.

A. Assessment: The terms of valid marriage are properly developing with increased understanding of human motivation, freedom and maturity. Therefore, the priest must give considerable attention to the careful assessment of the individual capacity of each partner to enter a valid marriage. This must be done at least in minimal terms: he may presume that they are capable, but be alert to any sign that suggests a lack of this basic capacity and, therefore, possible invalidity of the marriage.

The main areas of consideration must be:

- Basic understanding of what is being undertaken.
- Basic freedom from coercion and freedom of consent.
- Basic maturity in life, appropriate to age and position.
- Basic capacity for marriage relationship, realised to some degree already with this person.

In order to accomplish such a basic assessment time must be spent with each individual and with the couple. The pre-nuptial enquiry forms must be completed satisfactorily. It is often the case that before the forms can be completed, certain explanations and instruction need to be given. These are by way of remedial work, attempting to bring a couple's capacity for and understanding of marriage up to minimum standards. In certain cases, postponement or delay will be advised—or thought best—by the priest. It is difficult for him to effect this advice on his own, and a priest can often feel trapped into officiating at a wedding against his better judgement. Referral, at this point, is an important option for the priest.

The following are situations in which particular care must be taken in assessment and the need for further instruction and/or delay faced squarely:

1. Immaturity of years of at least one of the partners. The marriages of young people are at serious risk, so if one partner is under 18 years of age particular attention must be given to them and their family circumstances.
2. Immaturity of attitudes to the realities and responsibilities of marriage.
3. Pre-marital pregnancy, especially if a young couple, calls for accurate assessment of motivation and freedom.
4. Substantial lack of spiritual awareness, such as it seems incongruous that a Church wedding is being requested.
5. The apparently unsuitable couple, especially if some personality disorder is apparent in one of the partners.
6. When prolonged separation is imminent and the couple will not have the opportunity of establishing married living conditions.

7. Hostility or unwillingness to co-operate by one or both of the partners.
8. Hostility of both families to the marriage and to each other.

The process of assessment (and preparation) needs to be handled sensitively by the priest. More often than not one partner will not be a catholic and so a respect for the sincere beliefs, anxieties and questions of each person is called for. A careful explanation of the practices and obligations of the catholic faith is necessary, too. One deanery reported that many people married to non-catholics

had found that the spiritual side of their marriage had never really developed, partially because of 'the insensitive and insulting attitude the Church used to adopt to mixed marriages.'

Proposals:

1. A revised pre-nuptial enquiry form which more realistically covers the grounds for the valid reception of the sacrament.
2. Six months notification of intended marriage to allow the priest first of all to carry out proper assessment and subsequent preparation. In the absence of this notification reference must be made to the Archbishop's delegate before proceeding.
3. An Archbishop's delegate to be appointed to whom reference can be made in all situations concerning the delay of Church marriages. As these issues are directly concerned with the area of marriage validity then a person of competence in this field is required.

Preparation:

Subsequent to positive assessment—i.e. a reasonable certainty that there is no lack of basic requirements for validity—then each couple is strongly urged and expected to spend some time in preparing for marriage. The goals of this preparation can be fairly clear:

- a) To help the couples explore and deepen their mutual understanding and love. Means of good communication must be explained and taught and the importance of communication for continued growth in marriage made clear.
- b) To help the couple deepen their commitment to each other, including the sexual aspects of their commitment.
- c) To help the couple to view their marriage in the context of the larger community of society and Church and from the strength of their love to look caringly and responsibly towards others.
- d) To help the couple develop their awareness of God at work in their lives in their past and present, i.e. develop a personal spirituality.
- e) To help the couple to develop their personal understanding of the sacrament of Matrimony which they are soon to celebrate and live.

This preparation is best carried out in a group setting. It is not the responsibility of the priest to do this work himself, but rather, by calling on the resources available, to ensure that it does take place. It is here that co-operation at a deanery level opens up more possibilities and the experience and support available in various organisations (C.M.A.C., Marriage Encounter etc.) can be enlisted. The particular style and detailed content and arrangements for such marriage preparation will vary from place to place according to local needs, decisions and resources. Cooperation with other Christian Churches is desirable and the possibilities of offering preparation courses open to all must be seriously considered. Such projects could possibly attract local Education Authority finance and support. It is quite clear that this is an area of priority importance. An overall review and service will be provided through the proposed Archdiocesan office.

Overall view of Preparation for Marriage.

- (1) Initial contact with priest, six months before (if not, then deferral to delegate).
- (2) Assessment interviews—number as necessary—for completing pre-nuptial enquiry.
- (3) If necessary, remedial instruction of the couple, especially in the listed circumstances.
- (4) If necessary, in case of desired delay, referral to the Bishop's delegate.
- (5) Formally fix date of wedding and arrange a preparation course.
- (6) Preparation course—local, parish, deanery level.
- (7) Liturgical preparation.
- (8) Wedding.
- (9) Inform parish of future residence of the arrival of a newly married couple.

(2) Liturgy

(a) The Wedding

Most adult Catholics find themselves as the very centre of a liturgical celebration only on the occasion of their wedding. They are, on this occasion, the ministers of the sacrament and all attention is rightly focused on them. The wedding ceremony then, is their ceremony, and as far as possible, should reflect their hope, their love, their faith that God is vividly with them at this important moment of their lives. It is of great importance, then, that the wedding ceremony be composed and prepared by the couple with considerable help from the priest officiating at the ceremony.

Time will be needed to explain the basic shape of the ceremony, to deepen understanding of the richness of words and gestures and to explore the many possibilities and choices open to the couple. Not only is this preparation important for a dignified and mature celebration of the sacrament, but it is also a useful opportunity for completing the whole process of preparation for marriage, ending suitably on the note of marriage as a sacrament.

Further guidance in the Liturgical preparation and celebration of Marriage could be provided by the Liturgical Commission, possibly in the form of a priest's manual, which could also include all aspects of an Archdiocesan policy, when it is formed.

(b) Liturgical Celebration of Marriage and Family Life.

The regular Sunday Mass provides the priest with one of the best opportunities for highlighting and celebrating the good qualities of life in the parish. The Mass gives sacramental expression to the parish's love of God and of neighbour. It is also the time when the parish regularly renews its faith, its dedication and is called to a deeper love and service. The Sunday Mass, then, can be an occasion to celebrate the good qualities of family life in the parish and to focus on the need for constant renewal and deeper dedication.

So it is that some parishes occasionally celebrate a renewal of wedding promises as a parish. Some parishes use the occasion of the season of Pentecost to celebrate the marriages of that year, inviting the couples to take an active part in the Liturgy, seeing their love as one of the greatest gifts of the Holy Spirit. So it is that regular support and encouragement can be offered explicitly to married couples by means of a Sunday Liturgy dedicated to these and similar themes.

Suggestions here include:

A Sunday set apart each year for renewal of marriage promises, including adequate preparation and suitable presentation.

A Sunday set apart each year for the Celebration of Family Life, directed to the discernment of God's love made visible in family love, to the encouragement and upbuilding of the families in a parish.

The gradual development of a regular celebration of different stages of marriage and family life set into the Liturgical Cycle of each year, inclusive not only of those who marry, but also of those people who remain single members of their families.

Suggestions such as these would help:

- To give constant support to families through the Liturgy.
- To bring about an awareness of God's presence in our everyday lives, linking Sunday Mass more directly with daily experience.
- To put before the congregation some of the difficulties and the ideals related to their state.
- To open up the possibility and opportunities for further meeting, such as after Mass, to discuss and learn about the issues.

There are many difficulties involved in using and developing a liturgy of this sort. The Theology of marriage is a process of bringing together the Word and man's experience of marriage in all its aspects. Some of the qualities of married love—its freely given spontaneity, its demands and call to suffering, its creativity, its faithfulness, its victory over death—are a revelation of God's love for man and can be celebrated liturgically as such. Preparation for preaching in this manner calls for a shared reflection on experience by priest and people.

(3) Pastoral Care to the Divorced and Remarried

Much discussion has taken place on this topic recently, and its urgency recognised. It is a meeting point for the moral, canonical, pastoral and sacramental dimensions of the Church, with deep underlying theological implications. It is not surprising then, that many priests and people recognise this as a crucial area and do not feel confident therein. In terms of these suggestions and proposals, three points seem important.

1) Each parish become conscious of the need to ensure the provision of support and care for people who experience marital breakdown, separation and subsequent divorce. Resources, such as the C.M.A.C. must be explored and practical proposals for bringing realistic help to people be developed as relevant to each parish, (cf. p14). It seems to be the fruit of experience that those who have experienced breakdown or divorce themselves are often able to offer the required support and help.

2) The best possible moral and canonical guidance must be offered by the parish clergy, reflecting the current pastoral and canonical practice of the Church. For this to take place full use must be made of the retraining facilities available at U.N.I, and further possibilities opened through the proposed Archdiocesan Office. Also reliable referral and advice must be available to the priest in the parish through the establishment of a deanery 'consultant', who will be well informed and supported by the Archbishop and Archdiocesan office.

3) An effective Marriage Tribunal service must be supported with strong deanery roots, such that more preliminary legal work be carried on at a local level, also creating the opportunity for a continued pastoral care for the parties involved at a parish level during the legal proceedings.

ARCHDIOCESAN PROPOSALS concerning Priests.

1. In each deanery a priest be nominated to act, when necessary, as 'consultant' or advisor to the local clergy in matters applying current pastoral practice to particular marriage problems, especially to do with divorce and remarriage and the sacraments. These priests must receive support and training from those more thoroughly involved in pastoral and moral theology and marriage tribunal proceedings.

2. In each deanery a priest be nominated to act on behalf of the Marriage Tribunal so that with support and training from the Tribunal Officers he can:

- Give support to priests in their important tasks of screening potential Tribunal cases.
- Develop the part played by the local clergy in the Tribunal proceedings themselves.
- Try to ensure adequate pastoral care for those involved in legal proceedings and marital disharmony.

3. An Archbishop's delegate be nominated to whom reference will be made by priests in cases of:

1. Insufficient notice of intended marriage.
2. Doubt about the capacity of the couple to validly celebrate the sacrament at this time, and therefore concerning a decision to delay marriage.
4. An Archdiocesan team be formed over the next 12 months with the task of promoting and developing all these aspects of training and education for marriage and family life. The appointment of an Archdiocesan director is the first step which must be taken.
5. These activities be brought together as an Archdiocesan Office for Marriage and Family Life and that a senior member of the Archdiocese (eg. assistant bishop, episcopal vicar or chancellor) be asked to take overall responsibility for this ministry and to oversee the implementation of an Archdiocesan policy.

In more detail, the work of the Archdiocesan Office would involve the development of two main areas of work:

(1) In the person of the Archbishop's delegate and the deanery consultants, it will seek to meet the needs of the clergy in the areas of canonical and pastoral practice so that as good as possible administration of Church law and pastoral practice be maintained throughout the Archdiocese. This includes:

- Questions of delay in marriage, especially in special cases.
- Questions of impediments, dispensations which are out of the ordinary.
- Questions of divorce and remarriage, where the Tribunal is not involved.
- Questions of admission to the sacraments in these cases.
- Assistance to priests in their assessment of the capacity of couples to validly celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage.

It is important that this area of work be separate from the educational work. These administrative issues will sometimes involve decisions based on law which are hard to take and painful to pass on. It would be a definite hindrance to those working in the education and training area to be faced with the implementation of these decisions too.

(2) In the person of a Director and a team of lay men and women, the education and training section would be concerned to:

- Awaken an awareness throughout the diocese of the importance of all dimensions of marriage—not only in terms of local community and society but also in faith terms; seeing marriage as the focal point of personal and family spirituality.
- To promote study and discussion of the situation and problems facing marriage and family life.
 - at a local level, helping in the assessment of real needs by parish and deanery groups.
 - at a national level, by keeping in touch with the best research and study.
- To provide diocesan encouragement, co-ordination and support for those organisations already at work in this apostolate especially the C.M.A.C., Marriage Encounter, F.S.A., S.P.U.C., Catholic Social Services and Marriage Renewal movements.
- In conjunction with U.N.I, to develop and promote in-service training courses in all aspects of this ministry for the priests of the Archdiocese.

- To promote the development of courses of preparation for marriage, to suit local needs, co-ordinating the work of interested groups and organisations, so offering a service to deaneries and parishes.
- To develop a deeper spirituality for-the married and ways of renewal in marriage, based on a renewed theology of marriage.
- In conjunction with the Liturgy Commission, to promote good liturgical practice at wedding ceremonies and to develop a continuing liturgical celebration of the life stages of marriage and family life.
- To monitor and promote schemes of pastoral care for newlyweds and young couples, in co-operation with interested organizations and groups, at the service of deaneries and parishes.
- In conjunction with those involved with Adult Education, to promote programmes for adults about the qualities and skills of marriage partnership, the care and upbringing of children, about the patterns of development of married life and about the care and deeper dedication of single people, (cf. Educators Section, p11)
- To promote at local levels adequate counselling provision for people in stress, in close co-operation with the C.M.A.C., Compass and other interested groups, (cf. Counsellor's Section, p13)
- To develop co-operation with statutory and voluntary bodies working in these same areas.

The work of this office would be instrumental in bringing about a gradual change in some popular images of the Church as being basically negative in its attitude towards sexuality, basically 'out of touch' with the realities of personal relationships and 'somewhat lacking in understanding' of the hard personal experience, choices and decisions of many people.

The constitution of this team must bear in mind:

- The demands of time required to carry out this work.
- The theological understanding needed in the team.
- The experience of marriage needed in the team.
- The educational, psychological and sociological expertise needed too.

Therefore, a team consisting of:

Priest: Who can offer theological reflection, time and maybe educational expertise and experience.

Lay people: Who can work at least part-time and who can bring; experience of married life and competence in other disciplines.

This team must be offered realistic financial support, both for staffing and administration. It should be constituted for a period of six years, after which its progress and existence be re-assessed.

(3) EDUCATORS

Discussion about marriage and family life often turns quickly towards childhood, family and adolescent experiences. It is well recognised that the influences of our early life are very formative of our expectations, needs and achievements as adults. A group discussing particular failures or successes in a marriage relationship looks to a person's early life for some of their explanations.

In fact we do well to remember that 'Childhood is the first act of a two-act play, where the theme is intimacy, the principle actors are parent and child in the first act and lovers and spouses in the second.'

Married people today, are bringing to their 'act-two' many attitudes values, abilities, limitations, fears and expectations, that they acquired as children and adolescents. The problems we face today were made yesterday. Similarly, the way children are being brought up today will play a significant part in their ability to form relationships in marriage in their turn. The problems we will face tomorrow we are making today.

'Act-one' begins in the earliest moments of a child's life and stretches through adolescence. Its detailed scenes are too many to mention here, but the main and well-known themes are these:

—An early sense of trust, trusting and being trusted, which derives from physical intimacy between parents and child.

—An early sense of one's own body and the pleasure it gives.

—A sense of being recognised, wanted and appreciated while also acquiring early independence and basic autonomy.

—A continuing physical and emotional sustaining and healing through the many developments and hurts of childhood.

—A sense of continuity and reliability or faithfulness in life and parental care.

—A personal sense of physical, emotional and intellectual growth and achievement in adolescence, contributing to an emerging personal identity in the larger world.

—A background support in early attempts at peer relationships, especially with mixed company.

—A gradual acceptance and due familiarity with body changes and the intensified physical pleasure now present.

—A development of a personal capacity for value clarification and decision making, with due regard for personal autonomy and proper authority.

These and other issues and themes are taking place in the life of every child. It is issues such as these that play such a large part in their future adult life, when, in 'act-two' they come to form relationships of personal and sexual intimacy, open to the generation of new life and all the responsibilities that love gives rise to. The traditional emphasis given by the Catholic community to

education is a measure of our recognition of the importance of these early years. In terms of an apostolate to marriage and family life, here are suggestions and proposals.

1. General

The fact that many people today would not consider coming to the Church—in the persons of Catholic organisations and Clergy—with marital and relationship problems is often partially attributed to the general impressions of the Church formed in their early years. Although it is impossible to accurately assess these reports, people often say that they have been left with impressions that the Church is intolerant of weakness, suspicious of pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, inflexible in its moral teachings and condemnations and lacking in understanding of the stresses of their circumstances. One of the most important general tasks of all those involved in the education and formation of young people today, is to ensure that these attitudes, which do not correspond to the heart of faith or its good expression, are not present today.

Parents, teachers, priests, youth leaders etc., must strive to embody the compassion, care and attentiveness of Christ especially in their relationships to young people. The effort of all those concerned in this work must seek to present to the young people a true experience of the parish as a caring community where, despite misgivings and failure, one can be sure of acceptance, understanding and guidance.

A chaplain working in a school can have as a basic aim: to establish the sort of relationships with staff and pupils alike that if necessary each will feel able to approach him today or in the future with their problems or anxiety.

Attention must be given in each parish or deanery to the needs of young parents, as the first educators of their children. Sometimes if support, information and advice is not available in the pre-school years, much of the work of teachers is seriously handicapped.

Families whose children were baptised in the same period can be brought together and become a mutual support group. Sometimes this group, and the support and learning it engenders, can last through the pre-school years and provide the basis of a group in which preparation for the next sacraments can take place.

Attentiveness, ingenuity and co-operation with other interested bodies, especially other Christian Churches, are called for in the planning and offering of services required by parents of young children.

2. Schools

The massive investment of resources into Archdiocesan Catholic Schools places considerable attention on their effectiveness as a vital and necessary means of contributing to the upbringing of children. Sometimes there is the temptation to expect everything to be accomplished through the school and to lose sight of their subsidiarity to parents. Also there is the temptation to think of marital breakdown as a Catholic problem, having a Catholic answer which lies mainly within the confines of the Catholic school.

It is important in terms of our service of marriage and family life to have some clear picture of the role played by schools and of the possibilities they offer.

A) Primary Education

The potential strength of many parish infant and junior schools lies in the close contact that can be established between school and family. It is in the context of this relationship that these schools can best serve the needs of the growing child and young parents. The strength of this relationship between school and family depends upon the school's awareness of family circumstances and an informed sensitivity to the factors influencing the learning and behaviour of the child. Often the fact that all young members of the family come to the school can lead to a strengthening of this relationship, but this, and all these matters, depends upon the professional competence and commitment of the teachers. Nursery Education can serve to strengthen this relationship and increase the opportunities for service and support offered to parents. In the light of these relationships every Primary school, through its Governors and Teachers, must be sure that it:

- Actively assists a child through the current stages of his her development, especially with the way a child learns to establish relationships in increasingly widening social settings.
- Actively assists the child to reflect on and accept his her own experience of home life and family relationships in the light of contrasts with other children.
- Actively provides for the child the complementary models of relationships—both relationships between adults and between adults and children. This can be done by the example of staff relationships, in direct explanation, and most importantly in many forms of play.
- Actively help the child to know the mystery of his own life as the presence of God at work in the world of the child, revealed in Christ, drawing everyone into His family, made visible in the community of the Church.
- Give full consideration in the appointment of heads and staff members to each candidate's ability and willingness to work with parents.
- Promote the deliberate involvement of parents in all aspects of the school life, starting, wherever physically possible with the provision of a 'parents' room', where they can meet when coming to collect their children.
- Deliberately strive to meet the needs of young parents for support, instruction and advice in the upbringing of their children, both on an individual and informal level and in an appropriate manner, at formal and group meetings.

The first reception by children of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist should be times of continued contact between schools and families. Preparation for these sacraments is best rooted in the experience of family life, its sustaining and forgiving love and can begin with an exploration of these themes by parents. Then these meetings rightly can be occasions for deepening awareness and appreciation of family

life, discussing its joys and difficulties, and drawing on to our explicit awareness of God's saving presence in our lives, celebrated in these sacraments.

Note:

In Inner City Areas, new possibilities for developing links between parents and schools are being opened up with the Partnership Schemes. Certain schools are being designated 'parent support Centres' and are being provided with an 'outreach teacher worker' and 'resource/community worker' as additional staff. Steps must be taken to ensure that these developments work well and to the advantage of the faith of parents and families.

B) Secondary Education

As in Primary Education, the ability of secondary schools to serve the good of marriages and family life seems to lie in the quality of relationships established within the broad world of school. Here, however, the emphasis lies on the relationship between teacher and individual pupil. Only in the context of a relationship of trust and respect can the sort of personal support, example and education be offered to growing adolescents.

Much is written about the precise aims and objectives of this aspect of education, which seeks to assist and promote personal development. General descriptions must suffice:

e.g. 'A process of helping young people towards an understanding of their own attitudes, emotions and behaviour, thereby enabling them to build up acceptable relationships with peers and with adults, in the home, at school, at work and in the community. This implies a developing ability to come to terms with their own limitations, experiences and the demands placed on them and the acquisition of new skills, revealing their potential and having confidence to make responsible moral choices.'

Or 'Attention to improving each individual's general ability to cope with life is a chief issue and a primary objective in schools. Emphasis should be placed on skills in interpersonal relationships,

in communication and in helping children to understand themselves and the world around them.'

Therefore it is proposed that, in pursuit of such aims, every school through its governors and teachers, checks that the following areas are dealt with sensitively:

1. Personal Development—patterns of individual growth.

Physically.—including understanding of personal hygiene, food and nutrition, fitness and leisure, sexual growth and development, dangers to health—alcohol, drugs etc.. elementary first aid.

Emotionally,—including the stronger emotions—fear, anger, loneliness, capacity for love, jealousy etc.

Psychologically—changing patterns of understanding and questioning changing patterns of deciding and moral development, changing capacity for relating to others, especially as adolescents.

2. Relationships

Friendships—Our needs, expectations, standards and experience.

Self-understanding and creativity realised through friendship.

Skills—needed for good and lasting relationships.

Breakdown of relationships—intolerance, prejudice.

Self-Sacrifice and generosity required by friendship.

Sexual Relationships—attitudes, values and problems.

Difference between the sexes—physically, emotionally and psychologically, as this affects relationships.

3. Marriage and Family

Experience of marriage and family.

Attitudes to marriage—choice of partner, engagement etc. values involved in marriage.

Practical issues in marriage, preparation and living.

Parenthood—the joys and responsibilities of child-care.

Patterns of child growth and development.

Patterns of change in marriage relationship.

Breakdown in marriage—divorce etc.

4. Authority and Freedom

Value clarification as a personal process—listening to legitimate authorities.

Decision making as a process.

Relationship with authorities—parents, society. Church etc.

Exercise of responsible freedom—in school, at home, in society.

These topics can be handled in an immense variety of ways, formally, and informally, in a full class, partial class or with individuals. However, the quality of relationships experienced by each pupil underlies the effectiveness of this work. It is essential that in areas as personal as these, the pupil knows that there is in the school a respect and care for him or her, reflected in general attitudes and atmosphere and centred upon one or two teachers, who through circumstances and personalities, offer him explicit understanding and acceptance. (Ways and means—finance and responsibility—of encouraging some teachers to live in the school neighbourhood need to be explored. A greater integration of school and local life is needed if education in school is to help children grow through their actual experiences.)

The means and structure used to offer this aspect of education vary from school to school. What is important is not a uniformity of structure of method, but a certainty that these responsibilities of teachers are being effectively carried out.

The suggestion at present put forward by the Liverpool Education Authority seems important: that every school should have a senior teacher nominated as a co-ordinator for this aspect of education, with responsibility for ensuring that this work is carried out. but not unnecessarily repeated, that resources are available and that the necessary development within the school takes place, (cf. TACADE, Headteachers Seminar. Jan. 1979.)

This suggestion seems particularly appropriate in schools where size makes it difficult for the required co-ordination to take place spontaneously.

There are many headings used to denote this work. These include: Education in Personal Relationships, Health Education, Family Life Education. Social and Personal Education. Moral and Social Education etc. Under each of these headings material is available.

Many of these topics are dealt with under the heading of Religious Education also. The Archdiocesan R.E. Syllabus provides material for some of them, including many of the topics to do with friendship, marriage and family. It is gradually becoming the case that all schools use this syllabus as the guide and basis of their work.

The relationship between Education for Personal Relationships and Religious Education is the most crucial of all in this area. It is the focus, in schools, of the relationship between life experience and religious language, truth and practice, a relationship which is critical in the life of every person and parish.

It is important that this relationship continue to be explored in every school so that Education for Personal Relationships is not seen, on the one hand, as a merely secular concern, nor, on the other, as a matter to be decided by direct reference to Church tradition and teachings alone.

The two poles of good education in our schools, in terms of preparation for adult life, marriage and family are:

1. Point to and explore areas of human experience especially those that indicate the presence of mystery in life, before which we stand in some awe.

2. Draw out and name the religious presence and meaning of life in each concrete situation, developing ways of integrating experience and our Catholic faith, worship, traditions and teaching, which can then be presented clearly and with certainty.

Or, in other words, education for marriage and family life is preparation for intimacy and it is precisely the quality of our interpersonal relationships that shows us to be “made in the image and likeness of God”. So we must be able to recognise God’s presence in our relationships and be open to the challenge of the Christian Gospel in shaping them.

Faced with these tasks, support for teachers is of vital importance. Teachers require the ability:

- To handle the material of Education for Personal Relationships sensitively and creatively.
- To use a variety of settings, group discussion, open question sessions, individual ‘counselling’ sessions.
- To explore ‘here and now’ class-room relationships rather than talk about relationships ‘out there’ only.
- To train pupils in interpersonal and communication skills.
- To call on and present the teaching and traditions of the Church to interpret current human experience.
- To reflect theologically on current experience, being aware of the patterns of God’s presence from Scripture and Church teaching.
- To assist with understanding the processes of decision making, incorporating the guiding influence of Christian teaching.
- To work together effectively and with visible co-operation, respect and tolerance as a staff.
- To work effectively and skillfully with groups of parents.

Clearly, not all teachers possess or can acquire all these skills. But this repertoire is required in a school. The provision of on-going training for teachers in these areas is of great importance. Much is being done in these areas already:

—By the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education.

—By the Christian Education Centre.

—By Upholland Northern Institute.

—By local Education Authorities, especially Lancashire Education Authority (cf. Booklet called ‘Pastoral Work and Education in Personal Relationships in Lancashire Secondary Schools’).

—By other organisations (C.M.A.C.) and ad hoc groups.

It is suggested that this work be assessed and developed according to the principles and lines presented here.

Secondary schools, as Primary schools, also serve the qualities of family life by the work they do with the whole families, talking with parents, individually and in groups and promoting the active involvement of parents in the school projects and associations.

In this area particular thought needs to be given to the involvement of the fathers of children as it seems to be a general concern that they come forward less readily than mothers.

It seems particularly beneficial to all concerned that whenever possible people from the local community be invited to share in the personal education of children. This can be done successfully in the preparation for Confirmation and when looking at Marriage, when individuals and couples are asked to share their experience of life as Christians with the children, (cf. Marriage Encounter’s ‘Matrimony—Jesus invites us to love’, as a formal and structured approach to this).

Note on Sex Education

1. It is important that sex education always be seen as a part of preparation for relationships, for love, marriage and family.
2. Today certain organisations and groups present sexual information and advice which is contrary to the Christian vision and morality. Agencies such as the Family Planning Association, Brook Advisory Centre and certain N.H.S. centres, offer contraceptive advice and services, sometimes to young people, seemingly reducing the responsibility of sex in simply avoiding the conception of a child. Care must be taken to 'protect' children from this sort of publicity. For younger children this 'protection' means shielding them from the material. For older children (probably IVth, Vth and VIth forms) 'protection' is sometimes best given through open discussion of the values behind this material and of how they fall short of full human and Christian values.
3. Sex education must always be given at a level appropriate to the development not only of the class as a whole but of individual children. A teacher should be sensitive enough to each child to recognise individual needs and respond to them by additional conversations and help appropriate to the pupil.
4. Full co-operation and assent of parents is to be sought in these matters. Their involvement in programmes of sexual education can be to the benefit of all and is to be desired.
5. A service to teachers including guidance, material and seminars is offered by a variety of sources: C.E.C., C.M.A.C.. Local authority. The availability and quality of this service is a matter for consideration and development.

3. Youth Workers

1. Proposals for the care, education and guidance of young people are being made by the Archdiocesan Youth Service.
2. Suggestions for developing the guidance and counseling offered to young people are made in the next section 'Helpers and Counsellors',

4. Adult Educators

Many organisations and groups in the Archdiocese are concerned with the education and formation of adults. They have their own proper aims and objectives. This work of Adult Christian Education is the subject of another report, under the coordination of Sister Magdalene Randall and Mgr. G. Mooney. However, as is clear from the scope of this document many matters concerning the development of marriage and family life are in fact questions of adult formation. Mature adult Christians will be formed by programmes concerned with marriage, and programmes of adult formation will be of benefit to the family life of the participants. Close co-operation is called for between people responsible in these two areas of concern in the development of programmes corresponding to the overall vision of ministry to the needs of people in marriage and family life.

Most importantly it is clear that basic to mature faith for every style of adult life is the development of a deeper personal awareness, an understanding of self through relationships, and the ability to integrate life experience and faith. It is at this level of basic training in relationships and in fundamental spiritual reflection that closest co-operation between those working in Marriage and Family Life and Adult Religious Education is called for.

SUMMARY PROPOSALS FOR EDUCATORS:

1. That in the survey of parish needs, particular attention be paid to the needs of parents of young children of pre-school age and real efforts be made to provide them with the support, information and advice they need.
2. That the governors and staff of every school, primary and secondary, review their activities and curriculum according to the appropriate suggestions and priorities presented here.
3. That the provision of in-service training for teachers be reviewed and developed according to the principles and guidelines suggested here.

4. That close co-operation be developed between those responsible for developing a Ministry to Marriage and Family Life and those responsible for Adult Formation in the light of their extensive common interests.

(4) HELPERS, PARISH VISITORS, SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND COUNSELLORS

The growth of each person and of every marriage is a natural process, taking place within the confines of each person's life and all its influences. For the most part we make our own decisions, shape our own lives as best we can and seek out for ourselves, from family and friends, the help and support we need. The provision of outside help, by the Church, State or local groups, must always be at the service of the individual or couple, assisting them in their life-long tasks without threatening their fundamental autonomy except where life itself, or fundamental well-being is at risk. Excessive interference, though hard to define, is not uncommon and it is a real danger to be guarded against at all times, especially when it is in the guise of well-intentioned assistance.

Outside help is often required, especially in times of crisis. Evidence shows that large numbers of people do seek support, advice and help with personal and marital difficulties. This section is addressed to those who seek to provide contact, support and help for people-at many levels. Therefore, it includes;

(1) Those who in the course of their work face the personal difficulties of other people: for example, priests visiting their parishes, other parish visitors, doctors, teachers, health visitors, social and community workers, probation officers, child welfare and guidance, to mention but a few. It also includes many individuals who because of their gifts act as helpers in their neighbourhood.

(2) Those who work in the groups and organisations which seek to provide support for and promote the growth of married couples and family, e.g. Marriage Encounter, Family and Social Action, House groups, Mother and Pram Clubs, and many community and educational groups and organisations.

(3) Those who in fact provide a more formal advice and counselling service: C.M.A.C., N.M.G.C., Compass, C.A.B., Liverpool Personal Services Society, Samaritans and many others.

These three areas of individual contact and help, support through organised groups, and advice and counselling are included together in this way because they belong to an interdependent spectrum of activity. To a considerable extent each complements and depends on the work of the other. The 'visitors and helpers', have the most immediate contact with people and awareness of their needs. They, more than anyone else, can provide for the support and counselling organisations the 'grass roots' contact essential for their practice. The organisations (formal or informal) provide additional support, expertise and resources beyond the capacity of the 'visitors and helpers'. Co-operation, mutual respect and support is the most urgent need in this area of work. To take each area in turn:

A. PARISH VISITORS AND HELPERS.

The importance of regular contact with people, sharing their everyday concerns, as the basis for all the work of support and counselling is difficult to over-state. It is not surprising that the vast majority of people first mention their problems, worries or crises to another with whom they have already established trust or confidence. Sometimes, no more than this is needed. Often it is. The qualities of the "helper" and "visitor" are:

1. A sharp awareness of the signs of stress in a person, in their relationship and especially in their marriage. It is to be expected that people who regularly visit or have close contact with others in their homes or at a personal level are well aware of the patterns of stress, the stages of life and relationships and the tell-tale signs that something may be wrong. They must also be aware of the real strengths in each person and in each marriage and encourage people to build on and develop their strengths. In a word, an attentiveness to the needs of their people.

2. The ability and skills to respond accurately, sensitively and constructively, in such circumstances, enabling the person to deepen their understanding of their situation and feelings and together search out a way forward, a next step.

3. The knowledge and courage needed to make 'referrals' when they realise that issues have emerged which will best be dealt with elsewhere. This applies to problems and crises which are beyond the capacity of the individual visitor or helper to deal with constructively. It also applies to a desire in people for further growth, development and dedication.

The knowledge needed is that of the various organisations, groups or individuals who can provide the required advice, counseling or support and opportunity. This knowledge must not be merely factual, but also 'convincing', conveying to the person a certain confidence in the referral which the helper must have.

It follows that 'visitors and helpers' have certain needs which must be provided for:

—A working knowledge of the typical patterns of development and crisis, especially in relationships, marriage and family.

—Training in the basic skills of good communication between individuals and in fundamental 'counselling' skills.

—Information about and personal, convincing contact with the various groups and organisations which are at work in these areas.

—Support for themselves which recognises the stresses and dilemmas of working with people at such close quarters.

The provision of these requirements must be surveyed and assured, in conjunction with the main people already working in these fields, e.g. Parish Mission Sister courses. Skills Training courses. Social Services courses. (C.M.A.C., Compass courses) As stated above, this task could be co-ordinated at the proposed Archdiocesan Office.

B. SUPPORT GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS.

The effectiveness of many small groups and organisations in offering support and growth is one of the great strengths in the Archdiocese. The promotion of this type of work is also one of the most recognised ways of meeting some of the needs of people, especially in marriage and family life.

The tasks of these groups and organisations is to deepen the personal, spiritual and communal life of our people, using all the additional resources, experience and power that a group and organisation possess.

The pattern and shape of these activities vary immensely. Groups are formed for formal discussion or informal chats; for mothers alone, for fathers, for young people, for couples, for families: for long and regular meetings, for short or occasional meetings: supported by an international or national body, or local initiative or simply spontaneously; for prayer, for company, for information, for mutual support, for planning activity, etc. Many different styles of work and approach are advocated but certain needs and characteristics emerge.

1. Leaders.

A great deal is asked of every group leader, both as the organizer of the activity and as the "animator" of discussion and work within the group. The leader is also responsible for relationships of the group with the parish and its priests, visitors and helpers, people who can best put the group in touch with its potential members. There is a need for well-trained leaders, who, in terms of this report, are able to work well within the parish and also able to refer people from their groups for further help and advice if this becomes their need.

Training group leaders must be a priority work. They need to acquire competence and confidence in organisational tasks, in group skills and in the use of certain specifically Christian 'instruments': Scripture. Church teaching and prayer, (cf. Adult Education, p13)

2. Recognition and Support.

People working in organisations and small groups need recognition and support in the locality in which they are operating. The parish priest is the person best situated to offer recognition, encouragement and support. Sometimes, this need be no more than regular enquiries about progress, or occasional presence at their meetings. It can be a fuller commitment on the part of the priest, time and energy permitting.

A concrete expression of encouragement and support is a willingness on the part of the Parish Priest to offer accommodation in 'Church controlled' buildings. It is suggested that each parish looks again at how its premises are used and considers whether space could be offered to encourage the formation of small groups. Decreasing numbers in some schools open up some new possibilities, especially for day-time activities.

Financial support from parishes is also important, often in the practical form of the provision of duplicating facilities and equipment and the shared use of other parish or school resources.

3. Co-operation and Contact.

Different groups and organisations sometimes work away in the same area with little contact or co-operation. Similarly, groups can exist in a parish or deanery without the parish or local 'helpers' and "visitors' being aware of them. Some benefit is gained by all parties, when a free-flow of information and referral is achieved. Parish co-ordinating bodies, newsletters and good personal contact must be encouraged, in order to break down these types of isolation.

C. COUNSELLORS AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS.

The importance of good counselling especially in times of crises is increasingly recognised. It is an area of considerable interest among 'helping' people, although this interest is not always matched by the response of many prospective 'clients'. Considerable study of the skills and organisation of counselling is made and the recent consultative document by the working party on marriage guidance set up by the Home Office in consultation with the Department of Health and Social Security, titled 'Marriage-Matters', is provoking continued discussion.

A detailed picture of counselling practice in the Archdiocese is not available. It is a topic which requires close attention: the provision, patterns and effectiveness of counselling. However, if national figures are reflected, then it is generally true that only a small percentage of the many married people who are in stress or crisis actually see an official counsellor. Further, figures and local experience indicate that the counselling resources of the C.M.A.C. in the Archdiocese are underused.

Without attempting to account for this here, it is important that steps be taken to achieve a fuller use of these resources as the present situation is both wasteful and disheartening.

Each counselling organisation is clear in its objectives. The C.M.A.C. seeks to provide:

1. A good counselling service for couples or individuals experiencing marital disharmony.
2. An educational and training service for teachers, for premarriage preparation, for priests and for their own staff.
3. A Medical Advice Service, which specialises in methods of Natural Family Planning, available locally and by post.

In order to make more effective use of their counselling and advice service in particular, certain tasks face the C.M.A.C. and Counselling bodies.

(1) All links with 'parish visitors' and 'helpers' must be explored and strengthened. It is important that all those who are meeting people regularly and informally are fully informed of the availability and value of the services offered. Meetings, discussions and publicity are required, concentrating on key people and places, e.g. clinics, surgeries, social services offices, parish centres, schools, etc.

(2) More and varied means of availability of counsellors to clients must also be explored and established so that a referral does not have to involve a journey to a central office, but interviews can take place as locally as possible.

Two attempts are worth noting:

- The presence of a counsellor in the same premises as the doctor's surgery, making collaboration in the care of people possible, to the benefit of all concerned.

- The close association of one or two counsellors with a group of parishes or deanery. Not only are links of personal knowledge and confidence built up between clergy and counsellors, but counseling can readily take place in the presbytery, which is often acceptable to client and counsellor alike.

Other imaginative steps are required to make available to people the dedicated and trained personnel of the counselling organisation. In addition, this closer association of people and counselor will help to provide prospective counsellors for these organisations.

(3) The provision by the C.M.A.C. and other bodies, of good training and education for others, especially leaders of parish groups concerned with preparation and support of married people and parents. The internal training of counselling organisations is a matter for their concern, but it is important that their experience and knowledge in these matters is made available to a wider audience. So instead of being the providers of a service of education and preparation direct to the public, they can possibly act as trainers and consultants to other people who, at a local level, can provide the leadership in programmes of preparation and education for marriage. So the possibility opens up of experienced and mature couples helping in a deanery to prepare people for marriage and to support and educate them, especially in the early years, with the experience and guidance of the C.M.A.C. behind them.

(4) Close co-operation between different counselling and advice bodies themselves is always desirable. This is called for in "Marriage Matters" (4.95) in terms of "some continuing system for exchange of ideas and flow of information between the organisations"

and details some special areas for consideration by the N.M.G.C. and the C.M.A.C. (cf.4.30)

In these three areas of 'visiting and helping', of groups and support organisations, and of counselling and advice, particular attention needs to be paid to youngsters in their years between school and marriage. The provision of support and guidance for them is of utmost importance.

The establishment of 'Youth Counselling Centres' and 'Open Door Centres', (such as 'Youth Listening Group' in Rodney Street, Liverpool), is one set of possibilities. Centres such as these can have 'out-reach' personnel, able to go into schools and youth clubs, making centres known and inspiring confidence in youngsters to approach them.

Continuity with the care of young people at school is desirable here. Often those working at counselling in schools establish good relationships with troubled youngsters, only to lose contact when they leave school. The possibility of the parishes responsible for a school appointing, or obtaining, a full-time Youth counsellor, to work in the area as well as in the school, could be profitably explored.

Proposals

1. That each parish review and if necessary expand its team of parish visitors, so as to establish good personal contact with all its parishioners.
2. That training and support be offered to those working as 'visitors' and 'helpers' in parishes to enable them to accomplish their tasks more effectively. This provision is to be made by those responsible for Adult Education and the proposed Archdiocesan Marriage Office in co-operation with interest groups.
3. That support and encouragement be given to those groups and organisations which seek to support married people and promote their growth and development. This support must be practical and personal.
4. That the training of group leaders be given particular attention by those working in the field of adult formation.
5. That the Archdiocesan Office explore with the C.M.A.C., Compass and other bodies, way of connecting their work with the mainstream of parish activity.
6. That in connection with the Youth Service, ways of providing a service of personal support and guidance to young people be explored and established.

Conclusion

Every discussion about marriage and family life sooner or later comes to realise how wide-ranging and inclusive a subject it is tackling. Any one aspect of the topic quickly flows into another: hopes of marriage to housing; care of children to working mums; moral standards to schools and television. Not surprisingly this report is wide-ranging in the areas of concern it attempts to address.

This report is offered as an attempt at an integrated approach to this wide-ranging topic. It looked first at some of the qualities of marriage and family life which we treasure and hope to support and promote. Then it turned to the experience of the realities and difficulties of life encountered by people. This is what we are up against. These are some of the realities in which most people strive to 'make their marriages work' and most often do so with some considerable success. In the face of these realities, and spurred on by a vision of faith, certain suggestions and proposals were then presented.

First of all, suggestions of a wide variety of activities all of which contribute to the well-being of family life; then came very concrete proposals for those directly concerned in these areas of service: parish groups, priests, educators, visitors and helpers, and organisations which offer support, growth and counselling.

In thinking about this wide-range of suggestions and proposals it is important to appreciate the co-operation that is called for: between priest and people; between counsellors and a whole range of 'helpers'; between the various organisations already at work here: between schools, parents and parishes.

It is also important to have a good sense of time. Most of these are long term proposals. Some of them are already in initial existence, but the full scope of ideas presented here entails many years work. Beginnings should be quiet, building on the many strengths that exist, both in Church organisations, among the clergy and among people as neighbours and friends. Not much can be achieved overnight.

The complex and far-reaching nature of this challenge facing the Church in the Archdiocese today is an indication of the depth of commitment demanded of us. Only a clear view that here, maybe more than in any other area of ministry, we are in touch with the sensitive heart of peoples' lives, will bring about the dedication we need. Here, in marriage and in family, we experience the most profound and total joy, love, pain and sorrow that life offers. And secondly, only the deep faith that recognises the face of God in this human reality will sustain any effort and initiative we undertake.

To conclude: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realises that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history." (Gaudium et Spes, No1)

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

Appendix 1. Summary of Outline Proposals

1. That the work of elaborating a clear picture of local needs be carried on systematically in each area, using parish and/or Deanery teams. In the light of these needs, plans for local action can be drawn up and implemented, (cf. p8)
2. That an Archdiocesan Office for Marriage and Family Life be established in order to serve the parishes and priests of the Archdiocese in this and all the following proposals, (cf. p10)
3. That the process of preparation for Marriage be clarified and appropriate provision made. (cf. p9)
4. That the Liturgical celebration of weddings and the regular celebration of Marriage and Family Life be renewed and expanded, (cf. p9)
5. That the pastoral response to people experiencing marital breakdown and court proceedings be strengthened and coordinated, and likewise to those who have been divorced and remarried, (cf. p10)
6. That particular attention be paid both in parishes and in the schools to the needs of parents of young children as the first educator of their children, (cf. p10)
7. That Governors and Teachers of schools review their activities and curriculum according to the check-lists in this report, (cf. p11-12)
8. That those working as 'visitors and helpers' in parishes be given the training and support they need. (cf. p13)
9. That organisations which promote the development of Marriage and Family Life be given every material support and encouragement, (cf. p14)
10. That Counselling Organisations receive renewed support and that they strive to integrate their resources more readily into the main-stream of parish life. (cf. p14)
11. That a long-term commitment be given to the research and study of Marriage and Family Life, in conjunction with national bodies, in the service of Archdiocesan projects and ministry, (cf. p10)

Appendix 2: Consultation

To date (27-6-79) material has been received in reports, letters or discussions from the following sources:

Deaneries:

All Souls, (No 2), Liverpool 3.

Mother of God. (No 3), Liverpool 7.

St. John Almond, (No 4), Liverpool 17.

St Jude. (No 5), Speke and Halewood.

St. Brigid. (No 11), Huyton.

Prescot, (No 12), Knowsley and Whiston.

St. Aelred. (No 19), Newton-le-Willows.

St. Ambrose Barlow. (No 28), Netherton.

Skelmersdale, (No29),

St. John Plessington, (No 30), Ormskirk.

St. Ignatius, (No 31), Maghull.

St. Maughold. (No 33), Isle of Man.

Parishes and Groups:

St. Anthony of Padua. Liverpool.

St. Austin, Thatto Heath.

St. Christopher, Speke.

St. Cuthbert, Pemberton.

St. Edmund, Waterloo.

Holy Family, Southport.

Holy Trinity, Garston.

St. Julie, Eccleston.

Our Lady, Lydiate.

Our Lady and St. Bernard, Liverpool.

St. Mary, Woolton.

St. Oswald, Liverpool.

Sacred Heart, Liverpool.

Southport Catholic Society.

DIOCESES:

Arundel and Brighton —Fr. B. Whymes

Liverpool

Christian Education Centre —Fr. G. O'Mahoney SJ.

Marriage Tribunal —Fr. R. Daley

—Fr. P. Benbow

—Mar. R. Brown

Southwark —Fr. P. Keavaney

Westminster

Catechetical Centre —Fr. J. Brand

Marriage Tribunal —Mgr. R. Brown

Pastoral Affairs —Mar. R. Brown

Boston —Policy on Marriage Preparation

Dublin —An Invitation to Priestly Concern, with Directives.

Houston —Office for Marriage and Family Life.

Wisconsin Catholic Conference —Common Policy for Marriage Preparation.

ORGANISATIONS:

Canon Law Society Reports	—Mgr. Brown
Catholic Marriage Advisory Centre	
National Headquarters	—Fr P. Rudman
North West Region	—Fr. C. Budd —Fr. F. Handley —Counsellors at work in the Archdiocese.
Citizens Advice Bureau	
Family Social Action	—Mr. M. Foley —Mr. F. Lane
Lancashire Education Authority	—Mr. K. David (Advisor in E.P.R.)
Liverpool Personal Service Society	—Mrs. Lewis
Liverpool University (Sociology)	—Dr. N. Kokousalakis
Marriage Encounter	—Fr. E. Alyward —Fr. M. Hickey
Responsible Society	—Miss S. King
U.K. Marriage Research Centre	—Dr. J. Dominionian —Mrs. P. Mansfield
Upholland Northern Institute	—Dr. K. Kelly
World Federation of Doctors who Respect Human Life	—Dr. P. Morris

SPECIAL DOCUMENTS:

The Western Family and the Future of the Church—Pro Mundi Vita.

The Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry—National Conference of Catholic Bishops. United States.

Sounds of the Family: A Pastoral Listening and Planning Workbook. United States Catholic Conference.

Marriage Matters. A Consultative Document by the Working Party on Marriage Guidance. Home Office and D.H.S.S.

Changing Patterns of family formation and dissolution in England and Wales. Richard Leete. Studies on Medical and Population Subjects.

Individuals:

Mr. J. Callaghan

Mr. B. Coxhead

Mrs. A. Jones

Mr. F. Joyce

Mr. P. McDowell

Mr. & Mrs. Maher and family

Mr. & Mrs. K. Muir

Mr. & Mrs. G. Leadbetter.

Many other individuals have assisted by patient conversation and tolerance, especially the clergy. Christian brothers and some of the Teachers in St. Anne's parish, Liverpool, 7.

Produced by CATHOLIC PICTORIAL LTD., Media House. 34 Stafford Street, Liverpool L3 8LX.