

# Parish Family Life Apostolate

Archdiocese of Cape Town  
Centre for Pastoral Development



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## Introduction

Thank you for your service as your Parish's Family Life Coordinator!

Archbishop Stephen Brislin and the staff of the Centre for Pastoral Development wish to thank you for your generous service to the people of your parish. The Parish Family Life Coordinator is an essential ingredient of the Archdiocese's renewed commitment to marriage and family life ministry. Through your work, along with the efforts of your colleagues in parishes across the Archdiocese and in collaboration with the Centre for Pastoral Development, you will be helping to restore a culture of life and love where it matters most.

## The Role of the Family Life Co-ordinator in the Parish

As the Parish Family Life Coordinator (FLC), you will work with your priest and deacon and other parish ministry leaders to promote and coordinate Marriage and Family efforts in the parish. The goal of this role is to facilitate opportunities for families in your parish to experience God's love and mercy in the context of their relationships and their homes, and to provide credible witness to it. The work of the FLC is an extension of the priest's ministry and operates with his direction and supervision. It will be very important, therefore, to establish and maintain strong lines of communication with your priest, deacons, and other ministry leaders in your parish.

The Domestic Church Office in the Centre for Pastoral Development carries out the Archbishop's ministry to the families of the Archdiocese, especially through the structure of the parishes. Where we can we provide resources and support for marriage preparation and enrichment, help for hurting marriages and families and those who have experienced divorce or separation, resources for parenting, and other family enrichment resources. We want to help you and your parish be successful in bringing about a genuine renewal of the culture of the family. We also highly suggest being in contact with the other Family Life Coordinators in the parishes near you for ideas and support.

## The Tasks of the Family Life Coordinator

Each parish has its own unique culture, needs and limitations. It will be your task, with the advice and guidance of your priest and other ministry leaders in your parish, to develop a plan that responds to the unique needs and resources

of your parish, and we are here to help you strategize. None of us can do this on our own!

This is a list of some of the areas where you can be of help to those in your Parish.

- Marriage Preparation
- Marriage Enrichment
- Parenting
- Separated or Divorced as well as Annulments and Remarriage
- Widows and widowers
- Singles

Even if your parish is not able to currently provide a strong approach to each, a good understanding of these individual areas will help you form a well-rounded, more effective approach to ministry, no matter how small. The Domestic Church Office will try to focus on each of these areas in detail during the next year in special meetings.

You will be the Family Life **Coordinator** - the most effective ministries are the ones that invite and sustain participation from a wide range of people. As the Parish Family Life Coordinator, consider whom you might invite to take responsibility for one or another aspect of the ministry and select the resources that are most compatible with their strengths. Do not assume that you must run these programs yourself. Your task is to get everyone rowing in the same direction, not to row the boat all alone! Thank you, again, for your generosity to this ministry.

We at the Centre for Pastoral Development believe that the establishment of Family Life Coordinators at every parish is an exciting opportunity for the Church to make a renewed and lasting impact on the marriages and families in our Archdiocese. We look forward to working closely with you and learning from you as we labour in His vineyard together!

## Marriage Preparation

Each couple is required to give the Parish/officiating priest at least 6 months prior notice of their intention to marry.

The marriage officer (priest or deacon) will carry out the pre-nuptial enquiry and refer the couple to one of the Archdiocesan programs.

Engage – the 6 week process is the preferred program

Engaged Encounter is run over weekends under the Engaged Encounter movement.

Evenings for the Engaged – also a 6 week process

There are other programs used by some priests and deacons. There are also many on-line Catholic marriage preparation courses.

Another idea is a parish mentor couple program which pairs engaged couples with married couples in the parish to walk with them through the marriage preparation process. Mentor couple programs go a long way towards establishing a personal connection between the engaged couple and the parish and helps the marriage preparation program to respond to the particular needs of the engaged couple. Without a personal relationship, it can be very difficult for an engaged couple to truly internalize the information they receive in their preparation program. A parish mentor couple can also provide both post-wedding support and a personal bridge to getting involved in parish life.

## Marriage Enrichment

There are Marriage Encounter weekends from time to time run and organised by the Marriage Encounter Movement.

The Centre for Pastoral Development has a program for Marriage Enrichment which has been written, but would need to be piloted and tested in different Parishes. This would run over 5 or 6 sessions.

The key to strengthening a parish is to strengthen families. It is in our families that we first learn who we are, what we are worth, who God is, and what it means to love. The key to strengthening families is to strengthen marriages since marriage is the source of the family and of each member's identity. (Unfortunately, we often only come to understand this reality once the family breaks down.) We must cultivate what St. John Paul II called "conjugal spirituality," meaning the couple's unity in the spiritual life, their real unity in Christ. This unified experience of God's powerful love and mercy strengthens the marriage more than anything else can, and this, then, brings about the changes we've been praying and working for in families and in parishes. God working in families is both the goal we are trying to achieve through our ministry and the way by which we will achieve it!

On a very practical level the promotion and care of marriage and family can start with simple but meaningful gestures such as having the Offertory procession brought up by a family, having those who have wedding anniversaries be blessed after Sunday Mass. Celebrations in the Parish for Mothers and Fathers Days, Prayers of the Faithful for those preparing for Marriage. Mother and daughter evenings, Father and son outings etc. Just as we have Catechetical Sunday, we could have a Marriage Sunday for the renewal of vows of all those who are married. We can encourage families to be part of similar ministries.....children as Altar servers and parents as Sacristans.....joining the choir as a family...

Date Nights: A once- or twice-a-year couples' Date Night that features a nice meal, well-decorated environment, and a good speaker. This is basically a date night with a faithbased speaker. It is an excellent first step for any family life efforts since it requires very little commitment, and the focus is not completely on faith formation. One step at a time! Babysitting will double your numbers (at least!) and this will help many more young couples to attend. Talks should

be testimony-based, and should ideally be a way of connecting couples in the Parish. This will lead to better involvement in other Parish programs.

### Parenting

We have the tried and tested Parenting Skills program which has been run over the past few years in various Parishes. This is available in Xhosa and English.

Some of the suggestions above also apply here. From an early age we need to offer the Parish as a second home to all in the family. Child oriented liturgies and opportunities for children to be part of the community are important. These activities will need to be planned with the Catechetics and Youth teams.

Family days and prayer walks where all ages can be included. Providing strategies, support, and resources for praying together as a family, in all its different stages, is central to any effort at enriching families. This is where each member most learns who God is, what prayer is, and how God responds to prayer.

Special support and help for Single parents is always important. Those who are raising children on their own are usually overtaxed and very much in need of support from their community. However, their ability to show up to parish events or parent participation opportunities is often limited by their hectic schedules. So, efforts toward providing childcare for adult formation opportunities can be very helpful, and specific venues that offer connections with other single parents for support and strategizing would be much appreciated. Babysitting services by the Youth or a special social at the Parish are some ideas.

## Separated and Divorced, Annulments and Remarriage

Since marriage affects us at the deepest levels of our identity and self-worth, the loss of marriage causes destruction at the deepest levels, and any effort at healing must take that into account as well as the effect on the children, friends, and other family members involved. Often, in an effort to uphold the dignity and indissolubility of marriage, those in the Church may hesitate to put sufficient energy into outreach to those who have experienced divorce. However, there are excellent approaches to providing fruitful healing while still recognizing the beauty and gift of Catholic marriage. We must, as the Body of Christ, reach out to those who are suffering so deeply and are often so isolated. What is most important is that while we must always support and encourage Marriage, we must never make those who are divorced and remarried feel marginalised or in some way inferior. This is a sensitive area.

Help for hurting marriages is available through the Retrouvaille Weekend Program. Many Parishes also have lay community counsellors trained by CWD.

A very large number of couples in every parish find themselves in “irregular” situations concerning Church law with respect to marriage, very often having been married outside the Church. Couples in irregular marriages are not considered in full communion with the Church, meaning they are unable to receive the Sacraments, though they may (and should be invited to) participate in parish activity to the fullest extent possible. Many end up leaving the Church because of a sense that they no longer belong, and it can be very difficult in the current culture to both communicate a welcoming invitation to deeper participation and to lead them to recognizing the need to correct their situation. We all have a duty to ensure that individuals both have access to and are accompanied through the available processes and personal conversion necessary for this.

Parish events and programs often help those who are alone to mingle with caring friends.

The whole area of Annulments is poorly understood and is often a real ordeal for those who go through this process. Accompaniment and support from those in the Parish can be of great assistance. The Archdiocesan Marriage Tribunal is formulating ways to assist and accompany those seeking annulments.

## Widows and widowers and Family bereavement

Bereavement is a whole new area of support that is required in the Parish. Mornings of support and reflection are held from time to time in the Archdiocese.

Many parishes have a bereavement committee who provide hospitality and/or meals for the families who have lost a loved one, and some have a structured way to help them through the grieving process. Family Life Co ordinators should be ready to help to bring about greater parish participation and companionship during such a vital time in the life of a family whether this means working to start a program if one does not exist, or work closely with those already involved. Only Christ can provide what a family truly needs when faced with the death of a loved one, and the Church is the way He established for us to get full access to Him!

## Singles

Often, those who are single request a parish structure to provide for their specific needs since they no longer fit with the youth or young adult groups, and are not married. Programming usually consists of social, formation, and service elements, and different age groups may need to be considered. Single parents should also be given special consideration since they are usually very limited in their ability to participate with any regularity in community activities and often need support specific to parenting issues (see above). It is important to keep in mind that those in the single state still have a vocation to holiness and love. This vocation will look different from that of a married person, and it is uniquely able to provide a kind of self-giving service that married people cannot. For this reason, any singles group should be directed to develop their formation, spiritual lives, and even connections to one another in such a way that they are pointed outward in service to their community. A single person is often able to give the time and energy to individuals in need (elderly, disabled, poor, lonely) that a married person is committed to giving to their family. Without the service of those who are not currently committed to a spouse and children, many are left without the love and attention they need. But, with good formation, good connection to the parish community, and an active prayer life, single people can provide a deep and lasting relationship that will lead many others to God and to a fuller life.