

PROCEEDINGS

~ Round Table ~

Marriage Counselling
in the
Catholic Context:
Opportunities & Challenges



Convened by
PMRC Australia

Friday Oct 1st 2010

St Joseph's Spirituality Centre
Baulkham Hills | Sydney

From the Convenors

Marriage is fundamentally important to the mission of the Church. By it life is procreated through the interpersonal communion of spouses. Within it future generations are nurtured in faith and in virtue. Through it the Trinitarian reality is proclaimed to the world. On it the Church depends for the seeding of new vocations to the priesthood, religious and married life.

Without the solid bedrock of marriage, everything about the Church becomes harder - harder to profess, harder to initiate, harder to sustain. On the other hand, when marriages flourish, so also does the life of the Church community.

Yet marriage seems to be in free fall these days. Divorce reform has undermined the permanency of marriage. The ready availability of contraception has established a culture sexual promiscuity and infidelity. Children are no longer viewed as the supreme gift of marriage but as a financial and recreational liability. Marriage and surrogate 'marital' relationships are so plentiful that the general public no longer knows what marriage really is.

In midst of such challenges, the Church has wisely held firm to the truth about marriage and boldly continues to proclaim it. Among the many wise supporters of an authentic understanding of marriage are those who work at the pointy end of business: helping couples on the brink of divorce. These vulnerable families need and deserve the very best the Church has to offer. They deserve both compassion and truth; a pastorally sensitive, theologically informed and effective response. We salute the many devoted counsellors who give so generously and with great commitment to their work.

It is with great pleasure that we present these Proceedings on Marriage Counselling in the Catholic Context. Attended by dedicated experts from a variety of fields including, psychotherapy, counselling, education, canon law and marriage formation, the discussion was both lively and informative. We extend our deepest gratitude to the participants and pray for the success of their endeavours.

Francine & Byron Pirola,
Convenors

Context

This round table event was convened in October 2010 to address some of the issues relating to marriage counselling in the Catholic sector.

The roundtable was anchored by three experienced professionals of diverse experience including:

- Dr Gregory Popcak, a psychotherapist in private practice in the US (visiting Australia as a keynote speaker at the Renaissance of Marriage conference).
- Ray Reid, a psychologist with Centacare Paramatta.
- Peter Watt, also a psychologist and founder of Catholic Counsellors Professional Network, Australia.

The Participants included:

- Byron & Francine Pirola (convenors)
- Derek Boylen
- Adrienne Connaghan
- Fr Mario Debattista ofm
- Bernadette Devine
- Gail Godfrey
- Peter Holmes
- Ann O'Brien
- Anthony Steel
- Mary Ticinovic
- Bishop Peter Elliott

The Round Table was moderated by Tricia Casey.

Objective:

To gather professionals working in marriage counselling and related fields to discuss the unique aspects of supporting Catholic marriages under stress.

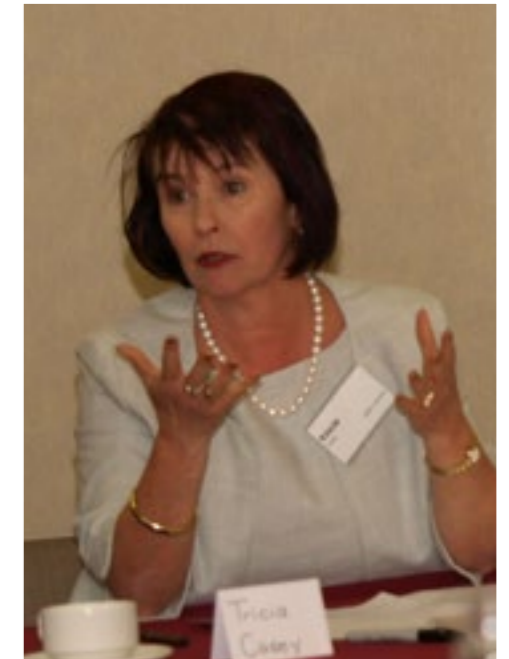
Tricia Casey



Moderator

PMRC Australia

Tricia has been married to Michael for 28 years and they have 3 young adult children. Tricia has a background in a variety of fields. She is a qualified and experienced teacher; she managed a large general practice for over 10 years, is qualified and experienced in the counselling arena and is a consultant in enabling leadership with integrity. The holder of postgraduate qualifications in counselling from the Institute of Counselling, Tricia worked for Centacare Broken Bay as a counsellor and group work facilitator. With her husband, Michael, she has conducted Celebrate Love seminars for the past 13 years. She and Michael are on the Leadership Team for PMRC and she is responsible for team development and HR in the PMRC office. Her main work is now as a consultant with Integro Partners as she works in partnership with organisations in bringing about transformational change and developing leadership skills through facilitation, leadership training, coaching and supervision.



Tricia Casey



Ray Reid addresses the Round Table (middle). Also pictured, Dr Gregory Popcak (USA) and Peter Watt (WA).

Gregory Popcak



Round Table Anchor

Pastoral Solutions Institute, USA www.exceptionalmarriages.com

Dr. Gregory Popcak is an internationally recognized Catholic psychotherapist. He is the author of 11 popular books and the director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute, an organization providing books, audio productions and telephone-based counselling services to Catholics worldwide. He and his wife Lisa co-host two syndicated radio programs: Fully Alive! airing across North America and Heart Mind and Strength. Greg & Lisa have three children and have been married for 21 years.

Gregory K. Popcak, Ph.D., MSW.

Executive Director: Pastoral Solutions Institute

Co-Host: Heart, Mind & Strength--Ave Maria Radio

Co-Host: Fully Alive! with Dr. Greg & Lisa Popcak Sirius 159/ XM 117 (10p-Midnight Eastern /7-9Pacific)

www.CatholicCounselors.com

Dr Popcak is the Executive Director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute in the US. The following extract is taken from his website.

About The Pastoral Solutions Institute

The Pastoral Solutions Institute was founded in 1999 as an organization dedicated to providing the resources religiously-committed Catholics need to live more faithful and abundant marriage, family, and personal lives. Since that time, The Pastoral Solutions Institute has become nationally-recognized for its leadership in integrating cutting-edge counseling psychology with solid Catholic theological principles.

The Pastoral Solutions Institute offers a wide variety of resources and professional services intended to help committed Catholics overcome problems like marital conflict, childrearing problems, depression, anxiety, stress, and the difficulties associated with major life transitions.

The Institute developed two television series that aired on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and, with Ave Maria Radio, PSI co-produces the daily radio broadcast, Heart Mind and Strength, heard on Catholic radio stations (as well as on the internet and via podcast) throughout the country. We also produce the Heart Mind and Strength Weblog a popular online source for Catholic news and information.

Our highly-qualified, licensed, Catholic pastoral counselors provide over 4000 hours of telephone counseling services annually to Catholics all over the world and we are looking at expanding our services to meet the growing demand. We have an advisory board consisting of faithful moral theologians, canon lawyers, and clergy with whom we consult to make certain our services are as faithful as they are effective. Additionally, the Pastoral Solutions Institute is doing its part to contribute to professional research in the effective integration of Catholic teaching and counseling psychology and to assist in the training of many more Catholic counselors to serve local communities across North America and beyond.

The Pastoral Solutions Institute is an independent, non-profit organization which has earned a listing in the Official Catholic Directory.

Ray Reid



Round Table Anchor

Psychologist, Centacare Parramatta.

Ray Reid, M.Soc. Stud., M.A., is a Catholic psychologist / social worker and has worked as a counsellor and in a variety of leadership roles, clinical and administrative, in Sydney Centacare agencies for the past 32 years. He currently works for Centacare Catholic Social Services Parramatta. He has been counselling married couples since 1973 and supervising relationship counsellors since 1978. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Social Work Department at the Australian Catholic University and is sessional lecturer there. In 1996 he was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to travel to the USA and Canada to research ways in which to promote congregational healing when a pastor or church leader has been accused or found guilty of sexual abuse.

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My Personal Vision of Catholic Marriage Counselling

Ray Reid, Centacare Parramatta, October 1st 2010

Vision of Marriage

- The fulfilment of each human person comes in truly loving, in the giving of the self to another and in the receiving of true love from another. Love aims at reciprocity and is completed when there is mutual self-gifting.
- Each spouse in marriage is called by Christ to love the other and their children so that all may grow in the love of God and of other people and, in doing so, find a deep and lasting happiness. The calling is quite specific; the love is to be given to and received from specific persons.
- The love of Christ is present within the very being of each spouse and each member of the family. Christ wishes this love to flow among the family members. It is His aim to heal the pain which results from the blocking of this flow of love in misunderstandings and conflict.
- The essence of love is committed self-giving. Love is not fundamentally a feeling. It is a decision, a movement of the personal will to live in communion with another so that both can grow in love of themselves, of each other and of others in the world.
- Committed love lays down a secure dependable structure of love on which members can rely in tough times. There is what I have termed an experience of loving presence.
- Committed love brings a deep feeling of peace within the lover, even when less pleasant feelings such as anger, sadness, frustration, disappointment are experienced.
- Marriage is a never ending journey towards the discovery and sharing of the personal truth of

each of the spouses. The security and warmth which pervades the loving marriage relationship enables each of the spouses to recognise their weaknesses and inadequacies, to have them accepted by the other spouse and thus, to be strengthened in their efforts to overcome the weaknesses and faults and thus live more fulfilling lives.

- Loving presence thus promotes the growth of each individual spouse as a separate and unique person, who lives in ever increasing unity with the other spouse without losing any aspect of individual identity.
- In marriage, physical loving is a vital and necessary component. Making love is truly that. Not only is love expressed but it is increased. Other not explicitly sexual physical loving communications are vital as well.
- A truly loving couple and family will not be able to contain that love within the confines of the family.

Vision of Marriage Counselling

- I stand within the vision I have outlined. The effort I have made to live within it has brought me great joy and peace. My belief is that the solution to marital problems must include at least the concretization of some part of that vision.
- I believe that unless the vision is truly embedded in me, my expression of it will have little power to attract and engage other people.
- I am willing to reveal how I have learned the beauty of the vision and how, at times, I had had to really struggle to stay within it. I hope such personal revelations are not imposed on other people but flow naturally within our conversations and leave them free to accept or reject the vision.
- All problems in marriage and family life can be reduced to this: the love does not flow properly. All counselling is aimed at restoring the flow of love and increasing it. I aim to have the love flow in the counselling room. Since I am in the room love must flow within me and from me as well as to me. I must only enter into the life of a couple or family if I, for a time, am willing to, as it were, live and love with them.
- My vocation as a counsellor is to bring the healing love of Christ to people in emotional pain. That love of Christ is mediated to me in a very fundamental way through the love of my wife of 36 years, Jean. Without her, I would not be able to be the counsellor I am.
- I do not easily accept that separation is best for a particular couple. My effort is to see if it is possible for love to flow in a shared life. If this seems not possible, I will attempt to help them separate with the least possible hurt to each other and to any children of the marriage.
- Within the above framework, I use a wide variety of psychological theories and techniques. My aim is to have as a good an understanding of the clients' experiences and circumstances as I possibly can so that I can make the best possible contribution to having the love flow increase between (or among) them.

Peter Watt



Round Table Anchor

Psychologist in Private Practice, Perth WA. Founder of Catholic Counsellors Professional Network.

Peter Watt is the founding member of the Catholic Counsellors Professional Network: catholiccounsellors.info, and director of Christian Psychologist (Pty Ltd): christianpsychologist.info. He is a registered Psychologist and professionally-trained Psychotherapist, and has practised at a variety of government, community and private settings, in urban and rural regions, and inter-state.

Peter is married with 5 children and currently practices in Perth Western Australia. Professionally, Peter incorporates the psychoanalytic, existential and inter-personal therapies in his work, and has a special interest in Intensive Short-Term Dynamic Psychotherapy, having trained overseas in this approach.

Peter likes to work with a broad range of people and presenting problems, in a collaborative effort towards lasting change, always within an implicit Catholic/Christian framework and understanding of the human person. Peter continues this interest by linking with Christian colleagues, and in striving to create the structure and environment necessary for this to occur.

www.peterwatt.com.au | www.catholiccounsellors.info

I have been looking forward to being here among you all. By way of introduction I am married and have 5 children, and live and practice in Perth. My professional background is in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy and I was fortunate enough to complete a residency in Pastoral Psychotherapy at the Catholic Hofbauer Institute in Victoria, before it closed in 1998.

An early interest in the Faith/Profession interface, led to forming a group of like-minded professionals, an initiative which came out of my own floundering attempts at integration, and a lack of alternatives within the Church. I had reacted to the obvious limitations of undergraduate behaviourism, with a humanism which on closer examination, (through the insights of Kilpatrick and Vitz), turned out to be anti-Christian. Meanwhile my clinical experience was leading me to recognise the benefits of depth psychology, but again this came with provisos, and despite this receiving very adequate treatment at the Hofbauer Institute, due the complexity of clinical practice, questions continue to this day.

In 1995 the Catholic Counsellors Professional Network became an official Catholic organisation when a Code of Ethics was endorsed by Archbishop Hickey. Initially a local group, the network became national with members in most states, and then more recently, international when it went on-line. In between times, schedules became tighter and it fell into abeyance, and we lost contact with each other. I am consequently now looking to build up our membership, with its clinical Register, which will be of interest to referring bodies as it reinforces the accountability of Counsellors as individuals, apart from the organisations and professional bodies that represent them.

There is a practical reason why a Catholic professional network is so necessary. It is that a declared and shared Faith, faithful to the teaching authority of the Church, provides a common language and reference point, from which to debate a diversity of clinical applications, most of which are complicated. As Kugelmann points out, (in the recommended reading), such approaches are inevitably complex due to that fact that authentic psychotherapy, influences but does not force the will, or presume full knowledge of the subject. This will necessarily relate to actual flesh and blood persons with highly specific experiences, and not inapplicable abstractions (however true they may be).

This certainly reflects my usual clinical experience, and the waters are muddied further by the fact that in many cases the clients we see are more affected by the sins of others than their own, and already have the courage and humility to face treatment, but present with a deficit self-concept reinforced by punitive self-judgement. In this context, what good does it do to identify unselfishness as a virtue, except perhaps to identify its lack in others, and factor-in its lack in society generally.

The prophetic and necessary criticism by Catholic academic psychologists towards the Church's adherence to secular-humanistic therapeutic psychology, appears to have been accompanied by

a counter-emphasis on abstract principles not immediately translatable into actual therapeutic practice, which is inclined to be dismissed as an illegitimate endeavor. Hence Catholic practitioners, who can see the value of therapy, have been left with precious little to go on.

We therefore need each other in order to be able to tease out the fine distinctions required in actual pastoral practice, and we need the teaching authority of the Church to avoid inviting further confusion in what is already a complicated field. Over time, within the limitations inherent and proper to the profession, contributions to the Church's pastoral response and understanding of human nature can then be fed back from the ground up, and contribute to the life of the Church.

A Catholic professional network also contributes to an understanding of health, as Brugger points out, and, by its absence, sickness, and by inviting the wisdom of the Church, defines the very terms needed for a constructive debate to occur. For example, in the current socio-political climate it is necessary to specify a definition of marriage itself, this cannot be assumed. The Church has a great deal to say about marriage elucidated by the likes of John Paul II.

A Counsellor with a grounding in the Theology of the Body, is well placed to approach any Couple seeking treatment, even if clinical judgement suggests the therapist understanding remains implicit rather than overt, because similarly, the Church also has something to say about the virtue of Counsel, and the importance of exercising sensitivity and discretion.

A professional group that pools its resources and at the same time is faithful to the good authority of the Church will be well served, as will the client on the receiving end of this collective wisdom. For this reason the Church's response to need should avoid viewing its potential taskforce in terms of a false dichotomy between 'professional' practitioners and 'faithful' ones, as if they are mutually exclusive propositions. Why not have it both ways?

Postscript.

On behalf of all the Members of the Catholic Counsellors' Professional Network, I would like to sincerely thank Byron and Francine Pirola for raising awareness of our network. I will be presenting a brief summary of this meeting to the Renaissance of Marriage conference this weekend, and I believe proceedings from the meeting will be published at a later date.

I would like to invite all Catholic mental health practitioners to join us as Clinical Members. The invitation is also extended to anyone else who would like to become an Associate Member to have access to the referral Register, and to students of the counselling field to become Student Members.

If you are in agreement with the Network's Aims and Code of Ethics please consider joining us online at www.catholiccounsellors.info



Peter Watt (above) & Dr Gregory Popcak (right)

Byron & Francine Pirola



Round Table Convenors

Directors of Marriage Formation, PMRC Australia

Well known for their work spanning twenty years in marriage formation, Byron & Francine are the coauthors of several marriage formation resources and author the My School Diary range. They are members of the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council, and Francine serves on the executive of the Catholic Society of Marriage Educators. They are the Directors of Marriage Formation for the Pastoral & Matrimonial Renewal Centre, Australia.

Byron and Francine are popular speakers at conferences both in Australia and abroad. Their marriage formation programmes and resources have been adopted in a number of countries including Great Britain and New Zealand.

PMRC Australia

www.thepmrc.org

Marriage Formation and Marital Counselling

Dr Byron & Francine Pirola

Directors of Marriage Formation, PMRC Australia

Almost everyone agrees that the divorce rate in our society is too high. Every divorce is a tragedy to a greater or lesser degree and it affects not just the spouses and their children but also extended family, friends and the community more generally. In the Catholic community there is an added dimension to the tragedy; the breakdown of the marriage presents an anti-message to the prophetic witness of God's enduring love that is revealed and celebrated in the Sacrament of Marriage. In a divorce culture it becomes increasingly difficult for the Gospel message of God's love to be believed because the powerful sacramental witness of marriage is undermined.

We offer the following suggestions as practical priorities for strengthening Catholic marriage against the divorce culture.

Valuing Moral Commitment

In a consumer culture, marriage as a lifelong commitment has been reframed as a serial monogamy arrangement. Instead of 'for as long as both shall live', the vows now are popularly understood as 'for as long as we both shall love'. In other words, for as long as we both feel like it. Spouses are seen as disposable items – something that one trades in for a better model whenever they get a bit unreliable or demanding.

Counsellors are not immune to the influence of the culture and unfortunately, even within Catholic organisations, this 'disposable spouse' mentality is commonplace. Catholic couples seeking support for their troubled marriage, need to be confident that the professional they have engaged to help them restore their marriage will honour the moral commitment they made on their wedding day. Spouses should never be led to feel inadequate or cowardly for choosing to put the welfare of their children or spouse before their own happiness.

Harnessing the Power of Sacramental Grace

A Catholic marriage is not just a legal agreement to a life-long commitment; it's a sacrament. This means that spouses have access to supernatural grace that empowers them to extraordinary generosity, forgiveness and selflessness. In circumstances that would normally leave most secular marriages terminally wounded, God's grace can heal and restore.

While this grace is readily available to couples, like all gifts from God, it has to be freely sought. Ideally, marriage preparation and ongoing marriage enrichment will teach couples how to access this grace through prayer and spiritual discipline. Catholic counsellors need specific training as well as spiritual maturity in order to assist couples to seek this grace with effectiveness.

Life-long Marriage Formation Culture

Regrettably, most engaged couples approach mandatory marriage preparation with resentment. While less demanding courses enjoy greater popularity among these reluctant attendees, they often compromise on the important spiritual formation that most effectively equips couples to manage the demands of married life. Moreover, there is a general reticence among couples to partake of the many opportunities for enrichment and empowerment offered to them as married couples.

This culture of pampering to the lowest common denominator undermines the church's mission in seeking to raise couples up for leadership. Thus there is a pressing need to establish a culture of uncompromising quality marriage formation for both engaged and married couples. This formation needs to teach not just the valuable relationship skills and models, but also theology, and in particular, the Theology of the Body. In addition, courses should provide an experience of spiritual healing and community so that the couples' educative experience is grounded in an awareness of their ecclesial belonging and calling to leadership.

Undercover Marriage Support Network

By the time a couple shows up on a counsellor's door-step, most couples are in the desperate death-throes of the marriage. Often one spouse has emotionally abandoned the marriage and is irreversibly committed to leaving. At these terminal stages, the likelihood of recovery are low even with a very skilled counsellor. It is simply a case of too little, too late.

Usually, couples such as these have been sending SOS signals for years. These signals in the form of complaints and bitter jokes about their spouse are generally either ignored or encouraged through the misplaced sympathy of friends. But what if in the years before such a couple got to this desperate state, there was a network of "undercover" marriage supporters in our Catholic parish communities; couples who, formed deeply in marital theology, were alert to the early warning signs of a marriage heading for trouble. When a wife or husband expressed negativity about their spouse, instead of the well-meaning sympathies of friends that tend to reinforce their grievances, such 'undercover marriage support' couples would counter the negativity with loving and effective suggestions to respond more positively to their challenges. Genuine friends who offer support to the husband and wife and are also a friend to the marriage.

These couples do exist though not in nearly enough numbers as needed. Mainly, these are the couples who have participated in marriage formation programmes such as Celebrate Love, Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ and others. With additional support and encouragement at the parish level, the numbers of such couples can be multiplied for an effect divorce prevention strategy.



Ray Reid and Ann O'Brien
of Catholic Social Services, Parramatta



Above: Gail Godfrey, Peter Holmes
Left: Dereck Boylen
Below: Bishop Peter Elliott

Derek Boylen

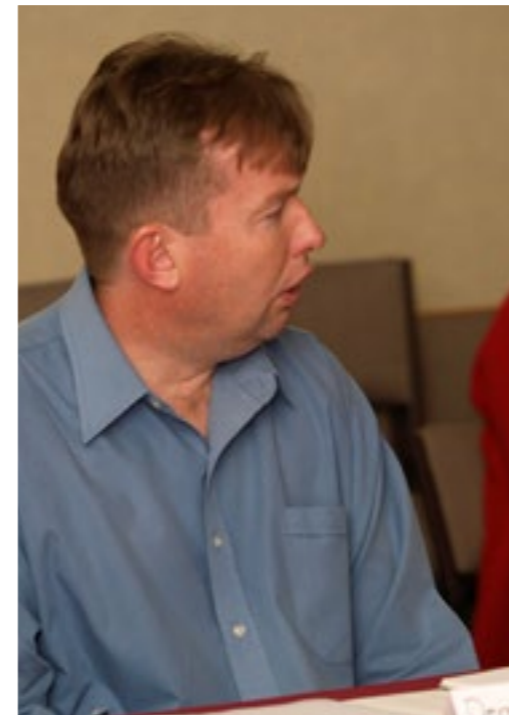


Director of Marriage Education Services, Archdiocese of Perth

President of the Catholic Society for Marriage Education in Australia, Derek is also the Director of Catholic Marriage Education Services and Natural Fertility Services for the Archdiocese of Perth. He is the former Chair of the Bishops' Committee for Family and for Life for the Archdiocese of Perth as well as former Vice President of the Australian Council for Natural Family Planning. Together with his wife Karen, they coordinate Ministry to the Newly Married in Perth and write a regular column for The Record on marriage and family.

Catholic Marriage Education Services

[no written submission]



Adrienne Connaghan

Canon Lawyer, Tribunal Administrator | Tribunal of the Catholic Church

Adrienne is a civil lawyer who has worked with the Tribunal for the Archdiocese of Sydney for 25 years. With the support of Cardinal Clancy, she completed a masters degree and licentiate in canon law at St Paul University, Ottawa Canada in 1999. She has been appointed by the Bishops of NSW & ACT as a Judge on their Regional Tribunal for the past ten years and, apart from regular monthly Tribunal sessions, she continues to work in Sydney as a case instructor and administrator of this office.

Her contribution at the round table will be drawing on her experience as a Judge and also in the Tribunal's efforts to implement appropriate preparation and/or counselling for people who enter a new marriage after an annulment.

I am speaking from my experience as a Judge of the Regional Tribunal of NSW & ACT and a Case Instructor working in the Tribunal office of the Archdiocese of Sydney. In our work at the Tribunal we are dealing with the result of marriages under stress that have not been able to be resolved. They are marriages that have ended in divorce. We are approached not just by divorced Catholics but also divorced non-Catholics who wish to contract a marriage with a Catholic. They must go through some process that will give them the freedom for a new marriage. The majority of applications are for a formal annulment of the previous marriage.

It is surprising to be confronted by many Catholics who have no understanding of marriage as an indissoluble sacrament for all the baptised, not just for Catholics. We wonder at times about the level of instruction on this aspect in religious education programmes given at Catholic schools. Although the emphasis should be on the positive aspects of marriage and the nature of a marriage relationship, we consider there should also be open discussion with students about marriage breakdown, divorce and annulment.

One concern arising from many of the cases presented at the Tribunal is the superficial approach to marriage on the part of young people. It is akin to a throw away attitude, "if it doesn't work, then it can be thrown out". At the first sign of any difficulty they are prepared to walk away from the marriage without any commitment to resolving their differences. We find in these cases that personal needs and expectations have taken priority over the needs of one's partner or indeed of the partnership. Indeed, we are presented with marriages that have lasted just a year or more and immediately after the divorce one of the parties expects a "rubber stamp" annulment in order to contract a new marriage.

How do we overcome this attitude? Of course good marriage preparation is essential. Sadly however, we find that many Catholic couples have managed to avoid any preparation, with the attitude that they know what they are taking on, or they simply can't make the time available. There is also an overemphasis on the preparation for the big expensive wedding that takes priority over the real preparation for the marriage itself. It is important for clergy and the agencies that conduct marriage preparation to market the product in a way that makes it more appealing to couples preparing for marriage. A major challenge for us arises in our interaction with parties who are hostile to the process, especially those who have been badly hurt by the breakdown of the marriage and are now faced with the possibility of their former spouse being free to marry another person. We see marriages where one party has worked hard in their effort to save the marriage but has been disappointed by the, perceived, attitude of the marriage counsellor whose focus is more on advising them to end the marriage than to work towards saving it. For that reason it is important for counsellors in Catholic agencies to have a clear understanding of the Catholic theology of marriage, without falling into a modern form of pessimism that people are not able to make lifelong commitments.

On the other hand, we must be realistic in acknowledging that marriages do breakdown. Where it is obvious that this is the case, the parties should be discouraged from feeling guilty or that they have failed as individuals. They need empathy and assistance in coming to terms with their situation. It is in this context that the Catholic Church's outreach through the Tribunal could be explained. However, it would not be advisable for the counsellor to offer an opinion on whether an annulment would be possible.

It is not always possible to give an individual the answer they are seeking from the Tribunal. The reality is that not every marriage that ends in divorce is null. This is the difficult and most challenging aspect of Tribunal work in our interaction with people whose cases are not successful. We are the legal arm of the Church so we are not able to provide a pastoral solution. In that instance we rely on the local pastor to work with the individuals concerned and in some cases counselling may be suggested.

Although the Tribunal is the legal arm of the Church, we regard our work as pastoral with a positive outcome for so many people. Indeed, the process has a healing effect for many people who have been through a divorce process that offers little if any emotional support and generally affords the parties no opportunity to speak about their marriage and how they feel about the breakdown. Obviously, not all parties find the process healing although we receive positive feedback from many who have also benefited from their personal reflection on their past life. This opportunity for reflection enables many individuals to think seriously about the quality of their new relationship and how they would approach a new marriage.

When a case has a successful outcome we are always concerned that any new marriage has a greater chance of success. Unfortunately most people who approach us already have a marriage planned and resent any suggestion that they should engage in a suitable programme of preparation. In some cases, where we have real concerns about an individual's capacity for a new marriage, the Judge may impose a requirement of counselling. In that respect, as with the psychologists from whom we request assessments in some nullity cases, we consider it important for the counsellors to have an understanding of and a positive attitude towards the Catholic theology of marriage.

Adrienne Connaghan JCL

1 October 2010



Adrienne Connaghan addresses the Roundtable (also Fr Mario Debattista, Bernadette Devine, Gregory Popcak)

Mario Debattista ofm



Family Relationships Counsellor

Fr Mario is a Franciscan Friar, ordained in 1990. Since that time, he has worked in parish ministry and the formation of candidates to his Order both in Australia and for eight years in East Africa. After his return to Australia in 2000, he completed a Bachelor of Social Work and a Masters in Couple and Family Therapy and up to the present time, has continued working in formation and parish ministry as well as with CatholicCare, Sydney since 2003. Since July 2008, his particular ministry focus with CatholicCare has been as a part-time family relationships counsellor.

CatholicCare

Finding Meeting Points between Couple Therapy and Gospel Values

I offer these thoughts as a Catholic Priest and a practicing counsellor who has only in recent years completed training in couple and family therapy through a public university. A question that has arisen for me is of how to better integrate the theory and skills which have been offered me through my professional training with those values and beliefs that underpin my life and commitment as a Catholic, a Franciscan Friar and a priest. I am asking about the points of meeting between therapy and the Gospel, and where these points might be found in the special field of couple or marital therapy.

Firstly, I wish to state my starting point as being of an Incarnational spirituality which says that because "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), so it is that the presence and action of God is already present and is to be discovered within the life and experience of human beings, including of course in their attempts to relate to one another. Being subject to sin and its effects however, we know that these attempts to relate will often times fall short of the ideal, including the ideal to which Catholic sacramental marriage invites a couple. It is at such times that I believe we can find one of the privileged places for encountering our loving God, namely in the call for husband and wife to arrive at mutual forgiveness. The capacity and willingness to forgive are clearly central to the Gospel life to which all Christians are called. But to what extent are they also part of good therapy, for individuals and for couples? I believe that forgiveness is one of those meeting points between the field of couple therapy and the Gospel.

At this point, I now wish to offer some thoughts based on my research into the role of forgiveness in therapeutic intervention for marital infidelity. By necessity, the following material is taken out of a larger piece of work which I completed last year, so my apologies if clarity is lessened due to the loss of the larger context.

Firstly, I would suggest that understanding forgiveness as a 'process of discovery' is perhaps the most helpful in terms of both therapeutic practice and its application as a Gospel value. This understanding is not the dominant view in the literature of therapy, but rather forgiveness is often times more regarded as "a voluntary choice or decision at a certain point in the betrayed person's life (that) involves the active rather than passive remission of angry feelings over time." (Legaree et al. 2007: 200) However, considering the strong negative reactions that injured partners generally experience following an infidelity, it would seem that attempting to move them towards a 'decision' to forgive is perhaps unlikely to elicit a positive response from them (Gordon & Baucom 1999: 392) and greater therapeutic efficacy might result from adopting a 'forgiveness as discovery' stance. So it is that Patton (1985: 16 cited in Hill 2001: 371) declares that "human forgiveness is not doing something but discovering something - that I am more like those who have hurt me than different from them." He maintains that the process of discovering forgiveness usually means that

in the difficult task of asking for forgiveness, the partner who has performed the infidelity must re-experience and embrace the shame of their infidelity. This leads to the surprising discovery that expressed shame facilitates personal wholeness and relational healing which is the essence of having been forgiven (Patton 1985 cited in Hill 2001: 372). Similarly, Kurtz and Ketcham (1992: 222) hold that for the injured partner, forgiveness comes from letting go of resentment by surrendering one's vision of 'self-as-victim.' By seeing the injury in the perspective of one's own imperfections and gradually realizing that one has been forgiven of these, one arrives at the discovery of having already forgiven others. The authors assert that,

forgiveness is spiritual: it is one of those realities that cannot be 'willed,' that becomes more impossible the harder one tries to will it. Forgiveness, in fact, becomes possible only when will is replaced by willingness; it results less from effort than from openness (Kurtz & Ketcham 1992: 216).

The above quote can remind us that the capacity to forgive and arriving at genuine forgiveness is ultimately a gift of God; it is grace. Our human co-operation is obviously required, but the sort of forgiveness which Christ modelled for us and to which we are called by virtue of our baptism and so to which married couples are called in their marital commitment, is truly something of the life of God.

Returning to the issue of marital infidelity, just as an affair cannot be simply regarded as an isolated event but must be understood within the context of the couple's relationship history, so it is that forgiveness must be understood and used within that context. This perspective suggests that therapy for infidelity is best conceptualised as a "process of coming to forgiveness," (Gordon & Baucom 1999: 392) such that forgiveness cannot simply be identified with a specific statement or overt act (Fincham 2000: 9). This is why although forgiveness can rightly form part of the treatment philosophy from the first stage of therapy, it ought to only be explicitly addressed when the couple are more likely to be open to it (Gordon & Baucom 1999: 386).

Secondly, each individual within a couple will vary in his or her responses to a relationship betrayal in part because of their differing ways of regarding the self and the other as either positively or negatively. This will be mirrored in a variability in their capacities to forgive that betrayal. Combining this with the variety of 'commonsense' and culturally and religiously shaped understandings of forgiveness that influence us all (Walrond-Skinner 1998: 9), it follows that couples' beliefs about forgiveness must be explored along with what it means for them to 'move on.' Healthy forgiveness requires a realistic appraisal of the partner and the relationship, and the potential risks and benefits of 'moving on' similarly need exploration (Gordon et al. 2008: 155-156).

As the couple is helped to re-evaluate their beliefs about forgiveness and to gradually arrive at a more achievable formulation (eg. that forgiveness cannot be achieved immediately), they may discover (to their surprise) that they have already taken steps towards trying to forgive each other (Fincham 2000: 9; Gordon & Baucom 1999: 393).

Thirdly, even though forgiveness is interpersonal in that it involves partner 'A' forgiving partner 'B' some offence, it remains intrapersonal ie. something that individuals do. Consequently, although forgiveness may be facilitated by external factors, its granting does not depend on anything external to the individual. An implication of this is that forgiveness must be differentiated from reconciliation which requires the restoration of trust, and from relationship reunion which may happen for any number of reasons none of which may entail forgiveness (Fincham 2000: 7). This distinction is recognised by some models of treatment for infidelity such as by Gordon et al. (2008: 156) who accept that couples may appropriately decide to separate, though hopefully without harbouring anger and resentment towards each other. These authors encourage partners to evaluate their



Fr Mario addresses the Round Table. Also in view, Adrienne Connaghan (Left) and Bernadette Devine (Right)

relationship and explore options around whether or not to remain in it. This includes an appraisal of whether either partner has shown the needed goodwill to make the changes that can prevent a recurrence of infidelity and that can rebuild sufficient trust and safety in the relationship (Gordon & Baucom 1999: 393). Because therapists such as committed Catholics who hold specific values around the permanence of marriage may find difficulty with such exploration of options around a relationship, this does become one example of when the therapist needs to clearly communicate his or her value position to the couple, while at the same time remaining attentive to all the issues at stake for the future welfare of the couple and their family.

Finally, Worthington (2006: 15) poses a frequently asked question especially following a relationship transgression, "How do I know if I have really forgiven someone?" The difficulty in answering this question for oneself, let alone for another, helps underscore something of the challenge of using forgiveness as an intervention for marital infidelity and for therapy in general. Yet, the fundamental need which human beings have to maintain relatedness in the face of the harm which we inevitably inflict on one another (Fincham, 2000: 2) means that forgiveness has increasingly been taken beyond its traditional spheres of religion and theology into that of couple and family therapy. By way of conclusion, I would like to highlight the thoughts of Derrida (2001) namely, that although the concept of forgiveness does have a role in therapeutic intervention, its character and power lie ultimately in the realm of the spiritual and divine (Sheehan 2007: 163). For perhaps this reason, Derrida suggests that forgiveness "forgives only the unforgivable ... (and) ... there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable." (Derrida 2001 cited in Sheehan 2007: 164). When couples face the seemingly unforgivable experience of marital betrayal, it is perhaps then that the gift of '(im)possible forgiveness' can visit them (Sheehan 2007: 163-164). In my opinion, it is perhaps also only in the face of those seemingly unforgivable moments of our relational lives that we are moved to pray for and rely upon the grace offered us by Christ to forgive "not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt 18: 22).

Mario Debattista ofm

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Bernadette Devine



Couples & Family Therapist

Bernadette Devine has a masters degree in social work majoring in counselling and has ten years experience in counselling adults, children, couples and families experiencing relationship difficulties. She has been involved in the development and delivery of pre-marriage education programmes and other group work programmes designed to enhance relationships. Bernadette has lectured in the Faculty of Social Work at the Australian Catholic University on social work with families and on groupwork. She currently assists children, parents and the judiciary in situations of high conflict and/ or complex family breakdown.

The Training of Catholic Marital Therapists

There is currently not one comprehensive, degree awarding counsellor training programme in marital therapy available in Australia that is in harmony with the Catholic tradition. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity to the Australian Catholic community in general and those entrusted with the pastoral care of marriages and families in particular. I am of the view that Catholic universities across the world largely abandoned the development of thought in the area of psychology, with faculty accepting entirely secular views and methods, largely based on evolutionary theories (adaptation). Thus there has been little contribution from Catholic scholars to deepen or extend the debate about the use of psychology and counselling to assist individuals, couples and family with a range of mental health and relational problems. This is despite the fact that the "Catholic sector" is a major force in service provision to distressed individuals and families in Australia and abroad.

At present here is very little capacity for theology as discipline to dialogue with psychology. If this work is to re-commence, it would seem that it will require Catholic philosophers, theologian and psychologists/ social workers/ counsellors to work towards creating a shared language in which they can dialogue; and work to translating this in a way it can influence secular psychology in the development of counselling theory and practice that brings about not just the extinguishing of symptoms (potentially only a short term outcome) but enhanced flourishing of individuals and families.

Dr William Doherty, Professor of Marital and Family Counselling at the University of Minnesota wrote in the *Psychotherapy Networker* in December 2002 of his concerns about the standards of marital counsellor training and practice in the United States. Writing entirely from a secular point of view, Dr Doherty was able to recognise that stable marriages are a great good to individuals and society and that clients often were ambivalent about taking actions contrary to their marital commitments and were looking for therapeutic solutions that would ease their suffering while maintaining their commitments to spouses and children. His concern centred on how therapists might actually work against client wishes to bring about short term relief but offer little to encourage flourishing in the individual and their family.

Dr Doherty focused particularly on problems with the 'pseudo-neutrality' in therapists, counsellors approaching marital therapy as if it were individual therapy, consumerist notions of marriage and pathologizing of conflict in the couples that was in fact due to counsellor lack of skill. I would add that many models of counselling are inconsistent with human nature as understood from a Catholic perspective and thus are doomed to offer only superficial assistance.

Secular psychology has and will continue to offer useful insights in how to understand and assist individuals, couples and family facing psychological problems; however a Catholic therapist needs tools to critique the underlying assumption of these theories and assistance in how to develop models of therapy that integrate the best theories, methods and skills to assist our clients.

Catholics wishing to enter the profession of marital counselling need to be confident that they will obtain from counsellor training, preparation that will give them the following:

- Recognised qualifications that will allow them to be registered with their appropriate professional body, obtain employment and provide a quality service to vulnerable clients
- A through grounding in an adequate anthropology that will allow them to understand what constitutes human flourishing from a Catholic Christian perspective
- Critique secular theories and methods of counselling and psychotherapy to understand the implications of such theories for the flourishing of clients
- Capacity to determine what is useful from the range of theories and models available and the skills to develop an integrated model/s inclusive of relevant philosophy, theology, psychology and counselling theory
- The differences between counselling and spiritual direction and the relationship between the two
- How counselling models can be ethically applied to Catholic clients, persons of other faiths and persons of no particular religious belief
- The role of sacramental life and prayer in healing
- Counsellors would need to be schooled in research based best practice in harmony with ethical teaching to provide best opportunities for healing
- Would include work on ones self as a “wounded healer” and understanding of the vocation of counselling in the life of the church

Practical challenges to this undertaking will be:

- The lack of articulated published work in the area of integration of philosophy, theology and psychology. We need more theologians, philosophers and counsellors to take up an academic interest in this area.
- Lack of academic staff that have sufficient knowledge and experience of integration and therapeutic skill to teach and mentor beginning counsellors
- We may need to import staff from overseas or commence offering scholarships to overseas institutions for training that can be brought back to Australia.

Should a degree bearing institution seek to undertake the development of such a programme, it would be important to heed the warning of people such as Dr Doherty about the need for specifically trained marital and family therapists; it would be of little use that another ‘Masters of (generalist) Counselling’ enter the marketplace, even if it had “Catholic” stamped on it. A little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Good will, in my opinion, is not enough.

Bernadette Devine MSW
 Couple and Family Therapist, Sydney Australia

Gail Godfrey



JPII Centre for Life and Family

Gail Godfrey is employed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane as a Mission Development Officer with the John Paul II Centre for Family and Life. The JPII Centre was established in 2007 for the support and education of Marriage and Family. Gail and Ken have been married for 25 years and have two beautiful daughters both of whom are involved in community work and studies in Psychology and Social Work. Gail has a multi-disciplinary background and currently serves as President of the Kodály Music Education Institute of Australia. Her involvement in music education at various levels complements her work in realm of marriage and family. Gail has Bachelor degrees in Human Services and Theology.

The John Paul II Centre for Family and Life in Brisbane was established in 2007 to focus on marriage and family life. The Centre produces a directory of services and seeks to support initiatives at parish and deanery level that support marriage and family and aims to be a reference point for volunteer groups or movements working in this domain. We aim build friendly and interactive networks of people from across the parishes to bring groups together from different parts of the Brisbane Archdiocese, as representatives for consultation, formation, mutual support and communication back to their parishes regarding marriage and family events.

From this perspective then, the JPII Centre is keen to source and support the formation and education of marriage counselling in a Catholic context. In order for tertiary institutions to offer such formation to catholic marriage counselors, is a specific course or part of a course required for this formation? If so, does this mean an integration of philosophy, psychology and catholic theology for such counselors?

We know that traditional/secular counseling techniques can assist those in trouble but true healing comes from faith through the spiritual source. Healing is evidenced through the integration of solid relationship counselling theory and clinical research methods with Sacred Scripture, the holy Catholic faith, and the love and mercy of God.

We are on the cusp of a great opportunity – simply by having this discussion and working through ideas reminds me of the story of the five loaves and two fish as an example of the long-held Catholic belief that grace builds on nature and that God waits to see the choices we make and then adds to the work that we are doing.

Perhaps one choice is to consider offering education/formation to experienced counsellors while forging a path for new students entering a tertiary degree specifically designed for Marriage Counselling and Family Life in a Catholic context.

Gail Godfrey
 Mission Development Officer
 JPII Centre for Family and Life

Peter Holmes



Lecturer in Theology, University of Notre Dame Australia, Sydney.

Peter has studied at Luther Seminary for six years and engaged in pastoral work in Adelaide and Melbourne, serving as a Lutheran minister in Melbourne. He has also worked with "Centacare – Catholic Family Services" in Melbourne, in the area of Marriage education (on organising committee of Melbourne MARENC in 2001) and served as Executive Secretary of Council for Marriage and Family in Melbourne.

He has also studied at the JPPI Institute and at Notre Dame University.

He spent six years as Manager of Studies at Catholic Adult Education Centre, Sydney (including involvement in the pre-marriage program). He is now a full time Lecturer in Theology at University of Notre Dame, Sydney. Peter is also married with seven children.

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The Contribution of Catholicism to Marriage and Family

When considering the contribution of Catholicism to marriage and family, particularly to relationship counselling, it is easy to think we are on the defensive. We are gathered here today to talk about how we can provide training, networks and support for good Catholic counsellors who know, respect and professionally uphold the human person, but most of what we have observed about the 'state of play' has been negative. Most secular counsellors seem to be negative to Catholic worldview, catholic moral teaching and the ideals we believe every human being properly aspires. Government policies and legislation seem less and less concerned with the dignity of every person and seem more focussed on allowing all sorts of chaos in relationships, families and communities based on a false notion of 'freedom'. Looked at from this perspective, the picture looks bleak.

Looking at it from another perspective, however, is possible. The growing clamour about marriage and relationships reaching from parish halls to the houses of parliament has raised the issue of what constitutes human happiness in relationships, families and communities. What is it we value and look for in these age old institutions? There is a role for Catholics to help people understand the logical conclusion of various positions on marriage, but the very fact that people are talking, wondering and generally interested in what constitutes a marriage is a magnificent opportunity.

The general discussion on the sad state of modern marriages may seem bleak but, once again, it represents an opportunity to point out where true fulfilment in relationships begins. So many people are desperately unhappy in relationships that hollywood promised them would be a fairytale heaven, and they find it instead to be a kind of bland disappointment or even a kind of suburban hell. They need to know where the real spark that fires a lifelong love comes from.

The lack of training for good Catholic counsellors reveals a great hunger for health workers of all kinds who base their method squarely on a Catholic view of the human person, uniquely created with dignity, wonder, beauty and purpose. People's frustrations with various practitioners represent a genuine longing to be treated with the dignity that their created state demands.

In short, people in Australian society are desperately hungry for the truth that Christ has entrusted to the Catholic Church, even if they are not aware that we have the answers, even if they have been put off by the negative propaganda. Even if we ourselves often fail to live out the truth and fail to find true happiness in our own lives, they still hunger for fulfilment, particularly in relationships.

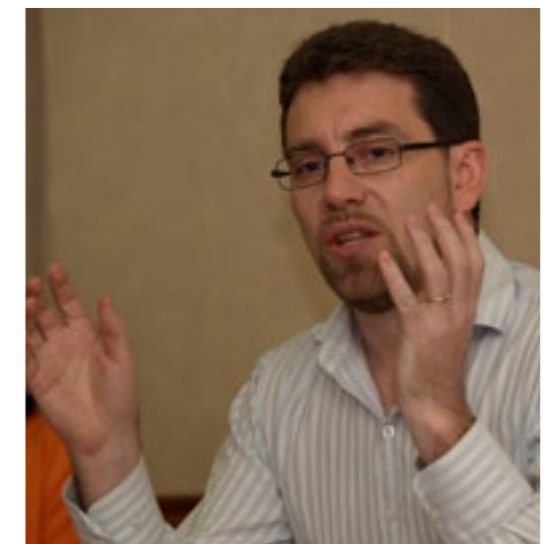
In this context there is a very grave danger that Catholics be so afraid of the possibility of being

misunderstood, that we are not brave enough to attempt to make ourselves understood. There is a danger we will be so paralysed by the fear of being called 'out-dated', 'regressive' or 'judgemental' or 'homophobic' that we hide the truth away, until nobody calls us at all. On the other hand, when we do venture out there is a grave danger of us spending so much time and energy combatively debating definitions, engaging in apologetics and responding to the latest name-calling by others in debate that we come across as the bitter reactionaries some have decided we are.

There is a great opportunity before us. Every person at this table brings the ever true, ever new teaching to the world in a way which heals, inspires, equips and enables relationships in a way that no other theory, policy or ideology can. Catholics need to stop apologising for marriage vows, NFP, tribunals and the like. These are overwhelmingly positive contributions to the present situation, resources which I wish I had available back when I was a Protestant minister, but which only the Catholics have to offer. From the pre-marriage counsellors to the tribunal, from the crisis counsellors to the marriage and family offices, the truth of the natural and supernatural gift of marriage and the family that springs from it are desperately needed. Beyond the barrier of propaganda and politics lies a body of ordinary people who are asking, begging, aching for the truth we have been given, to transform their lives into something properly reflecting their human dignity and purpose. It is crucial that we offer a unified, gentle and deliberately positive proposal of the truth which will set people free.

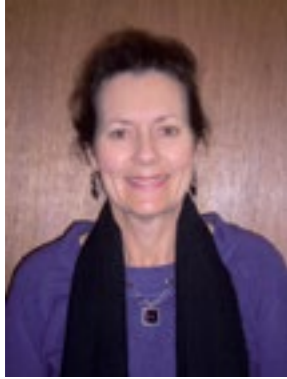
Peter Holmes

Lecturer, University of Notre Dame, Sydney



Peter Holmes addresses the Round Table

Ann O'Brien



Senior Manager, Centacare Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Parramatta

Married to Peter for 33 years, Ann has four young adult children. She is a social worker and has worked as a marriage, relationship and family counsellor for most of her working life. In addition to preparing couples for marriage, Ann provides clinical supervision and is the Manager of Counselling and Education for Centacare Catholic Social Services in the Diocese of Parramatta. Ann has worked in a variety of social welfare settings including paediatric health, mental health, adoption, out of home care services for children and in professional development and training.

As a Senior Manager in Centacare Catholic Social Services – Diocese of Parramatta I have the responsibility for many of the services our organisation provides encompassing marriage and family counselling and marriage, family and relationship education. I also carry a small caseload of counselling clients and provide clinical supervision to a small number of counsellors.

One of the major difficulties I encounter is recruiting appropriately qualified counsellors (generally social workers and psychologists) who are also active or participatory enough in the Catholic faith to provide counselling to those Catholic clients who request a Catholic counsellor. Many clients view a Catholic counsellor as having a focus that values the sanctity of marriage and one who will work with them to improve their relationship. Many Catholic couples have a trust in our organisation that we will not work towards separation if it is possible and not a safety risk for the couple to remain married.

Supervision and training is therefore also an issue for any appropriately qualified marriage and relationship counsellors who are working with couples in the context of their catholic faith and their sacramental marriage. Starting point has to be professional competency and then formation in Marriage Counselling in the Catholic Perspective. Clinical supervision with a focus on counselling in the context of Catholic Marriage also needs to be available as a resource and support for counsellors undertaking this work. In many ways this is a specialist field and needs to be looked at as “specialist training”. Currently this needs to be provided “in house”, so it would be very helpful to have specialist training available.

Marriage Counselling in the Catholic context gives us the opportunity to offer HOPE (as that is the basis of our faith). Giving the message that change, forgiveness and growth is possible.

Would welcome a “network” of Catholic Marriage counsellors as a resource.

Ann O'Brien

Anthony Steel



Institute for Advancing Community Engagement, and School of Theology

Australian Catholic University (Mount Saint Mary Campus)

Anthony Steel has been involved in Catholic education for over thirty five years. He currently works in the Institute for Advancing Community Engagement at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield where he also lectures in Theology. Prior to this, he led the Sydney Catholic Education Office's Spirituality Team.

Anthony has a particular interest in lay spirituality, Catholic Social Teaching, human rights, and linking the call of the Gospel to daily life. His academic qualifications are in education, theology, spirituality, and human rights and citizenship; he has also trained as a mediator. Anthony is a regular contributor to *Terra Spiritus*, an Australian e-journal of spirituality.

Reflecting on Marriage and Spirituality

At the beginning of the 21st century, there are many understandings of the term spirituality. For Catholics, spirituality is about the way we orient our life towards wholeness and happiness, and the ways we make meaning of what happens in our life, and our relationships. Spirituality encompasses the values by which we live and how we seek connection and communion with God through Jesus Christ.

Understood in this way, spirituality provides the context in which marriage is lived out day by day, but often it is not acknowledged, not only when dealing with marriages under stress, but even for those which are blossoming.

Spirituality can enhance marriage and family life in a wide variety of ways. Let me suggest just a few:

- Marriage is a call to a graced union with each other in Christ; it is a vocation which draws strength from the mutual relationship of the couple, the support of the wider community, and the grace of God. It is a sacred vocation we need to celebrate.
- Spirituality continually reminds us to respect and honour the human dignity of our spouse and our children.
- Hope and trust in God's providence is central to spirituality; from this flows a willingness to meet challenges we encounter. In it, we tap into grace and resilience.
- Marriage is a sacrament, and brings to the couple a special sacramental grace. Acknowledging and co-operating with this grace will assist them to flourish in their relationship and witness to the joy and goodness of marriage to an often disillusioned or skeptical world.
- Spirituality reminds us of our connectedness. It cautions against insularity and encourages us to bring together and integrate the inward and outward action of family.
- Care for the inner dynamics of the family will include conflict resolution; accountability and forgiveness (A good reflection question here could be, how can our family be transformed?) The couple and family will also be conscious of a call to people and communities beyond themselves, seeking ways for being in mission, to be good news to wider family; friends; local community; global community. (They will ask each other, how does our family make a difference and help to transform the world?)
- All of this can only be successfully undertaken through a rhythm of spiritual practices: being attentive to loving relationships; making time for prayer, ritual and reflection; and a commitment to social engagement and service.
- Spirituality calls us to identify what really matters. In our fast-moving consumerist society, a major focus here is likely to be what priority we give to relationships over possessions; who we are over what we have? In this context we could greatly profit from reflecting on Jesus' injunction, "Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also." (Luke 12:34)

Mary Ticinovic



Psychologist

Mary has been working for five years, as a clinical psychologist. Currently, she uses a more psychodynamic approach in both her public and private sector work. Her major interest is in helping people become whole and fully functioning human beings. The Christian view of the human person is integral to the way she works with her clients. Believing that marriage is a sacrament, her aim is to help her married clients work on their marriage and continue that commitment that they made to one another. As her main area of interest is clinical/abnormal psychology, her work only includes a very small percentage of marriage counselling.

There is a need for both the faith community and secular society to offer resources that will support marriages and offer hope in the midst of difficulties. One which I am happy to recommend is the Canadian Bishops Catholic Organisation for Life and Family (COLF). Among many fine resources, I particularly find useful their 2002 publication *In Love for Life! A reflection paper on the conjugal, social and religious significance of marriage*, which includes a Stages of Married Life model (1. Past history; 2. Romantic love; 3. Power struggle; 4. Stability; 5. Commitment; 6. Fruitfulness; 7. Growing old together). This model offers valuable insights into the different strengths, needs and possibilities of various stages of married life.

In the light of what has been stated above, let me suggest that a significant challenge and invitation for the Catholic community and Catholic agencies offering marriage-related services is to find ways to put spirituality and marriage in partnership. Some possible strategies might include

- Marriage preparation programs including a spirituality component.
- Parish-based 'mentoring'-type ministries in which people with some experience of married life will provide friendship, support and lived wisdom to those just starting out in marriage.
- When marriages are in trouble, the partners' motivations need to be explored (and maybe challenged?) as well as the problems addressed. Important questions need to be faced, such as "What really matters here? What really matters for you?"
- When marriages fail, partners need to be helped to honestly ask, "What does this mean for me, for us?" While always upholding the dignity of marriage and seeking hope and resilience, we need to recognize that sometimes marriages will not work. In those cases, we need to help people to move without rancor and bitterness, into a new future. This suggests the need to explore and articulate also a spirituality for rising from the ashes, which will allow people to once again recognize and co-operate with the grace offered by our compassionate and forgiving God.

Anthony Steel

Institute for Advancing Community Engagement,

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October, 2010



Difficulties faced in the Catholic Marriage Counselling milieu.

The possible issues that could be discussed are numerous. I chose to therefore focus on two broad areas. I have decided to cover, the difficulties faced by clinicians, in terms of moral and theological issues, and, secondly, the issues that give rise to stress or problems for the couples in the marriage itself.

The first area is a clinician focused area, and relates to the clinician working in an area where morality and ethics comes up. When marriage counselling is going well and the couple are responding to the therapy suggestions it does not raise such ethical issues. On the contrary, ethical issues can arise, for example, when couples are separating, divorcing, issues of eligibility for an annulment come up, and when individuals who come to marriage counselling in relation to a second marriage they are having trouble in. As a clinician, these issues have taken up my mental time and energy, trying to sort out the ins and outs of the situation. I am however, realising, that it is the couples responsibility and decision if they are to end a relationship and that my job is to try to not take on this burden of their failed marriage. Similarly, a feeling of having failed on behalf of the clinician can occur when couples decide to divorce or separate. The other thing I have realised is that the moral and theological domain is for the priests, and my job as a psychologist is not primarily to know the answers on these moral and theological issues.

The second part of this paper, focuses on the issues that give rise to problems in marriage. Some of the contemporary negative factors that affect marriage today, include, the usual stresses of modern day living (that is, mortgage stress, having too many options to choose from, two income families, time pressures, increased access to pornography, etc). These, I would say, are largely fixable, with education, motivation and perseverance to bring about lifestyle changes (provided they are not complicated by other factors, which will be discussed below). Some other factors that affect couples that are also more straightforward to treat, include communication problems and insensitivity of each to the other. Treatment for such is learning and implementing new communication strategies, and being aware of the different ways individuals both give and receive love. The latter has been outlined by Gary Chapman (1995) in his work on the "Five Love Languages". This type of work or education can be done in marriage preparation classes.

I realise this may seem like an oversimplification of the problems, and I acknowledge that such work to resolve difficulties in a marriage do not always go as straightforward as we would hope. However, the bigger problems and more serious, I would argue, are when, the couple knows, intellectually (and I stress intellectually) what and how they should change, but for some reason do not implement this knowledge by changing their behaviour and attitude. This is commonly referred to as the "head knowledge not transitioning to the heart knowledge".

The reasons for couples not changing for the better, or for the marriage not getting better with

Bishop Peter Elliott



Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Ordained a priest in 1973 by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore and Papal Legate, he commenced studies at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family at the Lateran University in Rome in 1984. He was granted the Degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology in 1986 with a Thesis on the Sacramentality of Marriage.

From 1987 he served as an official of the Pontifical Council for the Family. During ten years of Vatican service he was involved in international courses and conferences on the family and marriage in all continents, including the United Nations Conference on Population, the United Nations Social Summit and the United Nations Conference on Women.

counselling (or the other case, where improvements made during counselling sessions, are not maintained once the sessions stop), is because of, some personality or psychological issues of either one or both parties that interfere with having a better and healthier marriage. These factors get in the way of treating one another as God intended them to.

Psychological or personality issues can include (and this is not an exhaustive list), being controlling, overly defensive, critical, punitive, entitled, stubborn, perfectionistic, and self-centred. This will obviously affect a relationship. Take, say, a husband who unconsciously believes he is going to fail or be abandoned. He unconsciously, keeps a distance from his wife, because unconsciously he fears she will not be there for him. These types of issues will not be fixed by simply teaching the couple how to communicate better. Another example, may be a wife who fears intimacy with a male, because she grew up with a distant and emotionally cold father. She experiences anxiety on a daily basis, and increased anxiety when her husband tries to be close to her emotionally and physically. Punitive personality types that try to punish each other also cause great amounts of stress and turmoil in relationships.

To my knowledge, this type of problem would require that the person be seen individually for in depth psychological therapy. Further, simply telling a person what their problem is without the psychological work, will increase their self-knowledge, or insight, but it is not going to necessarily mean they will change. For example, people can go to seminars and learn a lot about themselves, but it does not mean they will receive psychological healing for these wounds. It only tells them that they have a problem. Hence, psychological intervention is needed. Also, I do not want to make it sound like, psychological intervention is the answer, because, sadly it does not help everyone, and God is beyond all. We try however, and hope for the best.

Mary Ticinovic
Clinical Psychologist

Reference:

Chapman, G. (1995) *The Five Love Languages*. Northfield Publishing. Chicago.



Mary Ticinovic addresses the Round Table



Notes

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