

The Pastoral Care of the Separated, Divorced and Divorced & Remarried

The Bishops' Conference agrees to be guided by the pastoral recommendations regarding pastoral care of marriage and family life presented by the Marriage and Family Life Committee, and encourages dioceses to use these to develop or review policy and practice in this area.

The recommendations are as follows:

- I. We ask that the dioceses promote the establishment of support groups such as ASDC [Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics] or Rainbows (along lines similar to those in Liverpool Archdiocese), in as many centres as possible. Closely associated with these support groups, we urge that the counselling resources of Marriage Care and the therapy available in BE [Beginning Experience] be utilized as widely as possible.
- II. We recommend that a diocesan coordinator be appointed to ensure that information is disseminated to the deaneries and parishes, and that a network of support groups and counselling services is available for all those in need. We believe that the ideal is a coordinator [or contact person] in each deanery and parish.
- III. We ask that each diocese makes provision for clergy to study and reflect on these issues and to offer and receive pastoral support related to coping with these issues. Key pastoral people like priests and deacons require opportunities to study and reflect on the needs of the significant number of people in most of our parishes who have suffered marital breakdown. Clergy are expected to be able to understand them and their various situations, and to know when they can help and when they would be better advised to refer people to other agencies. The clergy can support one another by sharing pastoral approaches with their ordained colleagues and discussing the inevitable tensions which arise from the many difficulties of the present system for attending to marital breakdown in the Catholic Church.
- IV. The diocesan bishop can give a strong lead in the way he handles his preaching and teaching the truths of the faith about marriage and family. Sensitivity in the use of language and images about those who have experienced marital and family breakdown is often crucial for their welcome in the community. We ask the bishops to give this lead and to encourage their clergy to be as fully informed as possible.
- V. Given the importance of preparation for marriage and the realism that needs to be achieved for couples setting out on their married life, we suggest that the bishops and consequently their pastoral teams should examine the possibility of involving some of our divorced people in the preparation of others for marriage.
- VI. Sensitivity in the way we treat and talk about those whose marriages have failed or who, for a variety of reasons, have entered second irregular marriages is a skill that needs to be learnt. We ask that training in such skills should be on the

agenda of all our educational establishments - schools, colleges of higher education and seminaries.

VII. Given the crucial part played by the tribunal system in resolving people's marital problems, we ask the bishops to affirm the work currently done in our tribunals and assure adequate resources for this work. In particular we recommend that:

A Given the rights of the faithful to just and speedy procedures, Diocesan bishops should ensure adequate resources for the efficient working of their tribunals.

B Provision of resources should include the training and appointment of sufficient numbers of lay auditors and other qualified personnel, so as to assist tribunals to realise the requirements of Canon 1453 (both instances should be completed within 18 months) without compromising the need for just and adequate investigation of cases, which may on occasion exceed these time limits.

C As far as possible, women should have the opportunity of being interviewed by women auditors.

D A conscious effort should be made to ensure that everyone called to take part in the tribunal process [petitioners, respondents, witnesses] be clear from the beginning about its purpose and limitations.

E Bishops of dioceses should have complaints about the efficient working of their tribunals investigated.

Agreed November 1996