**“Marriage, a Life Journey of Authentic Love”**

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My husband and I have asked ourselves this question: “How did our parents live their lives as a married couple that has led us to where we are today as faith-filled married Catholics?”

  In our reflection we realized that the witness of our parents, revealed in their daily actions God’s plan for marriage and family life. I have fond memories of participating in neighborhood Corpus Christi processions and my father leaving early for work to attend daily Mass. During the month of May, I remember our family praying the rosary. I remember the frequent tender kisses my parents readily gave each other. We knelt beside our beds each night in prayer to ask for protection and blessings on our family. Every Sunday, we attended Mass as a family, then went from Church to visit our relatives. To all this we can add our mothers who reminded us to always love our siblings, to use our best manners with others, and to save our pennies to help those less fortunate. Our homes were schools of love and virtue and our parents were the primary educators.

Our parents bore faithful witness to the joy and beauty of God’s plan for love and life. Unfortunately, not only in our evaluation of current culture, but also due to our pastoral experience, we know that many young people do not see the witness of married love that we experienced. So many youth grow up in homes broken by divorce or with no experience of married parents due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies. We have entered, as some social scientists have described, the age of the diminished family structure. This is more than a crisis. To quote Saint John Paul II, “[T]he role of parents as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it.” Sociological research testifies to this problem and information in the *Instrumentum Laboris* confirms it. Children raised without the blessing of married parents, who have created a home animated by love and faith, will likely struggle to trust in God and their neighbors. How can they create life-long marriages?

Our diocese in the United States is not unlike those around the world. We have seen the number of marriages decline each year and the rate of cohabitation increase. We have seen a steady drop in the number of baptisms. We have watched our youth fall prey to the confusion of a hedonistic culture. We know countless divorced adults who have joined other faith communities because they do not feel welcomed in the Catholic Church. And, our hearts ache for single parents who struggle to care for their children. Like you, we strive to find simpler, more effective ways, to better share the blessings of God’s plan for marriage and family.

The *Instrumentum* documents pastoral programs that attempt to address the negative issues impacting marriage and family life. Sadly, these efforts are not meeting the magnitude of the cultural challenges facing us today. We must develop more robust and creative methods to share the fundamental truth that marriage is a divine gift from God, rather than merely a man-made institution. This will require us to examine the methods by which we teach our children about the nature of human sexuality and the vocation of marriage. When speaking of the call by God to serve, marriage should be included in all programs designed to explore vocations. And, it should compel us to ask how we provide for the aftercare of marriage that can help couples deepen their relationship. We therefore see the issue before us not as a crisis of truth, but rather as a crisis of methodology. How do we as a Church, effectively share what we know to be true in practical, simple and convincing ways, so that all men and women are challenged and supported to live life-long marriages and build homes that reflect the domestic Church?

In all of our pastoral planning, we must remember that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Solutions to the identified crisis can be found. This Synod has the ability to provide aid to husbands, wives and families. Let us open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit so that God’s will may be accomplished.