



ACCOMPANYING AND HEALING THE WOUNDS OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

By Daniel Meola, Ph.D.

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TALK OUTLINE

- I. Statistics for Perspective
- II. Six Wounds of Adult Children of Divorce
and Suggestions for Spiritual Healing
- III. Suggestions for Pastoral
Accompaniment



STATISTICS FOR PERSPECTIVE



STATISTICS FOR PERSPECTIVE

1 million children a year suffer through and experience their parents' divorce since 1974.*

This means that there are *at least* an estimated **47,000,000 children of divorce** since 1974, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of children of divorce in the 1960s.

25% of all young adults are children of divorce.**

*See W. Bradford Wilcox "The Evolution of Divorce" in *National Affairs*, Fall 2009. ** See Elizabeth Marquardt et al., "Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?" in *Torn Asunder* (2017).

WHAT ABOUT OTHER SITUATIONS?

From 2011 onwards, roughly **21 percent of children** are born into **cohabiting households** and the **majority** of these children will see their parents break-up by the time they turn fifteen.* These children of cohabitation and separation experience **similar pain** to adult children of divorce.

*W. Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriages Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 3rd edition (2011), pg. 1.



What about the effect on faith?

2/3 of young adults who were regularly attending a church or synagogue at the time of their parents' divorce say that **no-one** – neither from the clergy nor the congregation – reached out to them at that time.*

25% of Americans claim no formal religious identity now, a crisis research shows that in part is caused by children of divorce leaving their faith because they believed that the Church wasn't listening or ministering to their wounds.**

*Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, pg. 155.

** "How Decades of Divorce Helped Erode Religion" in the *Washington Post* citing the study "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion" by the Public Religion Research Institute.

What about the effect on marriage?

Parental divorce *increases* the chances that their children will divorce by at least **40%**.*

47% more likely to be currently cohabitating, compared to those who were raised in intact, married families.**

*Nicholas H. Wolfinger, *Understanding the Divorce Cycle: The Children of Divorce in Their Own Marriages* (2005), 74, and "More Evidence for Trends in the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce" in the journal *Demography* vol. 48, no.2 (May 2011): 581 - 92.

**W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Evolution of Divorce," *National Affairs* I (2009).

**" THE PAST AFFECTS US, BUT IT DOES NOT
DESTINE US TO REPEAT OUR PARENTS'
MISTAKES. REAL SPIRITUAL HEALING AND
GROWTH IS POSSIBLE, BUT WE HAVE TO "
CONFRONT HOW THE PAST IS FILTERING
OUR PRESENT.**



//

EVERY **LAYER** OF THE WOUND
IS A **LESSON** FOR **LOVE**.

//



//
**BY HIS WOUNDS YOU
HAVE BEEN HEALED.**
//

-1 PETER 2:24





SIX WOUNDS OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALING



WHAT IS ACCOMPANIMENT?

- The goal is not to **point fingers** or **pity**, but to offer a **path** to Christ.
- Understanding wounds from the **"inside."**
- Having key **spiritual conversations** that connect to **wounds** and encourage **the development** of **faith, hope, love, and joy**.
- Allowing **time** to grow and to heal.
- Allowing the **negative emotions** (sorrow, anger, fear, etc.) alongside love.
- Offering your own **witness** to Christ's love, **on-going conversion**, and **path of healing**.
- **Friendship** (truth, conversion, and virtue; not just hand-holding).
- **Integrating** them into **parish life** and the **Sacraments**.
- Helping to discover the unique **"mission within the wound."**
- Offering helpful **resources**.



SIX CORE WOUNDS OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

1. The Wound of Silence

2. The Wound of a Broken Identity

3. The Wound of a Fractured Relationship with God


4. The Wound of Unhealthy Self-Protecting "Love"

5. The Wounds of Anger and Anxiety

6. The Wound of Unforgiveness

1) THE WOUND OF SILENCE





Despite the overwhelmingly large number of adult children of divorce and separation, I often receive these types of comments after running *Recovering Origins* healing retreats...

// I AM SO GLAD I CAME BECAUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME
I WAS ABLE TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING THAT HAS
BEEN BOTHERING ME FOR YEARS WITHOUT
HEARING FROM OTHERS 'OH, I'D JUST LET THAT
ROLL OFF MY SHOULDERS.' **BEING WITH OTHERS** //


WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE SAME WOUND AND
THE SAME AFTERMATH MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WASN'T
CRAZY ANYMORE.



**// WHILE THE RETREAT WAS VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE
OF THE TOPIC AND THE MEMORIES, IT WAS ALSO
VERY HEALING TO SEE THE COMMUNITY – TO SEE
THAT THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO
HAVE BEEN SIMILARLY WOUNDED, AND IT'S NOT
JUST ME. IT WAS INCREDIBLY BEAUTIFUL.**

//





They have a
**wound of
silence**
because of...

Trauma

Survival Mode

Loss of Childhood

Resiliency Myths

False Guilt and
Shame

"Happy Divorce
Talk"

Protective Parent
Talk / Fear of
Losing Love or
Hurting Parents

Ubiquity

Professionalization
of Healing

No Dedicated
Church Ministry /
Very Little Said By
Church Leaders

Denial

Various Other
Fears

CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

The THREE “G’s” as An Entry Point

- **GIVE VOICE TO OUR PAIN** – help us to begin to articulate our stories – the good and the bad – and name the core wound (cf. John 11:35).
- **GRIEVE TOGETHER**– “Blessed are those who mourn” (Mt. 5:4) – consider praying the Psalms (cf. Psalm 42).
- **GOD SUFFERS *WITH US* AND COMFORTS US** – with an unfailing, faithful love – read scriptures that attest to this truth and help us see our story within salvation history (cf. 2 Cor. 1: 3-7).

2) THE WOUND OF BROKEN IDENTITY





CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **WHAT SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT OUR IDENTITY** – we are created, finite, God's beloved, and capable of great love but only as dependent upon Him (1 Cor. 4:7).
- **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR BAPTISM** – we are all adopted sons and daughters of Christ's perfect marriage with the Church; we belong to God (Lk 9:35).
- **ASSIST US IN ACCEPTING THIS GOD-GIVEN IDENTITY** – by teaching us how to pray and the importance of developing our spiritual lives.

3) THE WOUND OF A FRACTURED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD





CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **DISCUSS WITH US WHAT SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT GOD AND CHRIST** – especially how God is different than the broken image of our parents' love and yet uses familial language to describe our relationship with Him (Eph. 3:14-15).
- **SHARE WITH US ABOUT GOD'S CLOSENESS AND PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES** – especially about the unique presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the tabernacle, within each of us, in suffering, etc.
- **ASSIST THEM IN ACCEPTING THESE TRUTHS** – by encouraging active participation in parish life, peer-to-peer friendship, and the sacraments.

4) THE WOUND OF UNHEALTHY SELF-PROTECTING "LOVE"





CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **WHAT SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY–** especially how love is indissoluble, faithful, fruitful, and total self-giving in Christ – and how this is the antidote to “unhealthy self-protecting”.
- **IDENTIFYING WAYS OF UNHEALTHY SELF-PROTECTING–** especially articulate some of the common ways, the opposite virtues, and help them understand how this is an effect of our wounds.
- **ENCOURAGE THEM TO MAKE A LIFE-LONG GIFT OF LOVE IN MARRIAGE** – by sharing with them the joyful success stories of marriage, including your own or others, and the importance of scriptural meditation on God’s divine plan of love.

5) THE WOUNDS OF ANGER AND ANXIETY





CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **WHAT SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT ANGER AND ANXIETY**— especially the difference between sinful anger and healthy anger (Eph. 4:26) and how anxiety is a summons to prayer (Phil. 4: 6-7).
- **THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVING OUR PARENTS, ESPECIALLY THE ONE MOST AT FAULT** – this is especially important for letting go of anger.
- **VIRTUE AND INTERIOR FREEDOM** – build up their supernatural outlook on life through prayerful gratitude, daily Ignatian examen, Eucharistic adoration, etc.

6) THE WOUND OF UNFORGIVENESS



CONVERSATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- **SHARE WITH THEM WHAT SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT FORGIVENESS**– especially the right interpretation of forgiving one's enemies and the commandment to honor your mother and father, which do not entitle parents to harm their children or negate healthy boundaries.
- **HELP THEM SEE THAT FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS FOR THE LIFE-LONG GRIEF OF THEIR PARENTS' DIVORCE** – this is indicated by Christ instructing his disciples to forgive 77 x 7 times, sometimes for the same fault (cf. Mt. 18: 21-35).
- **LET THEM KNOW ABOUT THE BEAUTY OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AND DIVINE MERCY** – mercy is a gratuitous gift we don't deserve; also consider introducing the devotion of the Divine Mercy Chaplet.



SUGGESTIONS FOR PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT



Dedicated, Specific Ministry to ACODs

- **Host a specific, annual retreat on this topic**, such as Recovering Origins. RO is a three day, healing retreat focused on the topics we covered in part II of this presentation; it is a great starting point for ongoing diocesan or parish ministry to ACODs.
- Could be the **follow-up to a marriage prep retreat** or offered as marriage enrichment.
- Could be **offered to every engaged couple** where one fiancée is an ACOD.
- Could be expanded into **small groups** at parishes, which we call "Life-Giving Wounds Small Groups."

Marriage Preparation

- **Avoid a “one-size fits all” marriage preparation program.** Have *specific* and *detailed* content about healing the wounds of ACODs. Consider having a break-out talk for them and their fiancé/e.
- If you are assisting a cohabitating couple, then explore with them whether they chose to cohabitate, in part, out of an underlying fear of divorce. If so, then encourage them to work on healing that underlying wound.
- Connect ACODs with **mentor couples** to see authentic, married love up close and to have a friendship to rely upon after marriage.



Marriage Enrichment

- Have **talks geared toward healing wounds from family of origin**; consider a series just for ACODs and their spouses.
- Consider **having a list of mentor couples** where one spouse is an ACODS that could be shared with them as a resource if married ACODS are going through a hard time or exploring healing for the first time.

Offer Other Resources

- Online Catholic Facebook community.
- Books, articles, websites, podcasts, etc.
- Develop a Catholic counselor referral list.



// REMEMBER THAT ACODS ARE NOT JUST IN NEED OF PASTORAL MINISTRY, BUT ALSO ARE **AUTHENTIC WITNESSES TO LOVE AND HEALING** THAT THEY CAN SEE, AT TIMES, MORE CLEARLY ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR WOUNDS. **THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO TEACH US ON ACCOUNT OF THEIR BROKENNESS.** //





“The Church cannot fail to speak out on behalf of those who are most vulnerable: the children who often suffer in silence” (Amoris Laetitia, no. 246).

For **more information** about ACOD resources, Recovering Origins retreats, or how to start a permanent ministry for adult children of divorce or separation in your diocese see:

www.lifegivingwounds.org