

VII International Family Summit – Milan 2012

PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL CONGRESS

Separation, divorce and new unions between work and holiday

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Power Point text presentation

1. (Initial image)
2. The causes of family crisis are multiple and complex, of historical, cultural, social and economic nature. It starts way back, because some of the weakening and eroding factors of family values have begun to manifest themselves well before the phenomenon assumes its current dimension and severity. This dimension and severity don't have any record in the history of our civilisation. Those who have experienced the drama of family separation, whether directly or indirectly, know what kind of suffering lies behind what is not only a sociological phenomenon, but is also a spear that pierces the soul. According to Father Paolo Gentili, Director of Ufficio Nazionale for the pastoral care of the family, who opened the Italian Episcopal Congress, this also represents "The light of hope for the suffering family - Separated and divorced people remarried within the christian community" (Salsomaggiore, 22-26 Giugno 2011) *"the peak of the incapacity to love which can be experienced by any man or any woman"*. Already in 1993, the Executive Board of the Pastoral Family, in chapter VII of "Pastoral care of the family in unusual or difficult situations", spoke of "Welcome and mercy", highlighting that *"the reference to the pastoral behaviour of Jesus and its re- proposal today demand, on behalf of the Church, that a welcoming and merciful pastoral care is developed towards everyone"*.

«Dealing with many broken families, the Church feels compelled not to express severe and detached judgement, but rather to instil the light of God's word into the folds of the drama, together with the testimony of his mercy»; according to Giovanni Paolo II, in his Speech at the Third International Family Summit on the occasion of their Jubilee (14th October 2000).

And even before (1994), Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith's Doctrine said in the *"Letter to the bishops of the catholic church regarding the Reception of the eucharistical communion by the divorced and re-married believers"* that *"It will be necessary that the pastors and the community of believers suffer and love together with the people in question, so that they can feel the burden of the delicate yoke and the light burden of Jesus. Their burden is not delicate or light because it is little or insignificant, but it becomes light because the Lord – together with the Church – shares it"*.

3. The conference: "The light of hope for the suffering family - Separated and divorced people remarried within the christian community" was the first National Congress of pastoral care for the family that explicitly brought to attention the support for people and families going through separation in varying situations. This presentation will report a couple of passages from the speech of Father Paolo Gentili, Director of Ufficio Nazionale for the pastoral care of the family: "In parishes, in movements and associations, throughout the whole Italian Church, paths of faith should be laid down for families going through separation or divorce in different and specific situations (...). It is only in this way that the christian community will be able to welcome those who are dealing with separation with the same affection of Jesus; to discern with care the varying and specific situations; to accompany the suffering family with the balm of God's word and to educate by enlightening the possible horizons of the good life of the Gospel".
4. The conference of Salsomaggiore was also a good occasion to take stock of the situation of the pastoral initiatives that have been born in recent years (meaning the stable initiatives, characterised by continuity, and not by individual congresses, days of study, formation and thematic meetings). Let us see in detail what has come up. Please be aware that this data is being developed and constantly updated. It does not intend to be exhaustive and

therefore cannot fully represent the richness of all the experiences that have been achieved (sometimes carried out with difficulty by the local parishes or associations, in other and recent times developed as structured diocesan and inter-diocesan paths). For this Family Day, the focus has been extended, as far as possible, to a European and outer-European level. To better reason, the gathered experiences at this level are by way of example illustrated, but however - we believe - useful to throw a glance at what was born or is being born in the international Catholic church for the welcome and accompaniment of the suffering family. On an international level - considering what aforementioned - a clear geographical differentiation can be observed in the distribution of the accounted initiatives: the majority of them are concentrated in the south-central area. But if we look at the official data (ISTAT - Central Statistics Institute) regarding the number of separations and divorces in relation to marriages, the distribution is almost similar, meaning that the initiatives have tried to respond to local situations as well as their evolution. Moreover, let us observe how the ISTAT data concerning the period of time between 1998 and 2005 show an implacable progression from north to south and a tendential homogenisation of the phenomenon on the national territory.

5. (Just image)
6. On representing some of the significant characteristics in graph form the following situation can be observed: as already said the territory distribution is 61% in the North, 30% in the Centre and 9% in the South. The origin of the initiatives is now predominantly diocesan (55%); followed by the specific associations (34%) and, finally, by the parishes (9%) and by the national church movements (2%). The development of the initiatives appears to be steadily increasing since 2005.
7. By examining the presented documents of the various initiatives, websites, articles in which the activities and paths are described, and through a frequency analysis of word use (using a visual representation of what is called "tag cloud" or "word cloud"), it has been noticed that the 50 most recurring words are the following (...). After just the first analysis, simple but significant, the result is that, apart from the obviously recurring words concerning the topic (specifically separation and divorce), the most frequent terms are: Church, God, meetings, life, path, brothers, Faith, community, family, Jesus, love, pray, course, journey...
8. Which are the principal common characteristics? On a principle and structural level, the attention to conjugate Truth and Mercy. "Love of truth and truth of love... The measure of each church pastoral is always the heart of Christ" (CEI Congress "The light of hope for the suffering family - Separated and divorced people remarried within the christian community", Salsomaggiore 2011).
9. As far as the typology is concerned, it is group meetings, based on sharing, listening to the Word and prayer. In this particular way, sharing makes it possible for everyone to become for the other the "cireneo", willing to carry the burden of the brother's suffering...
10. The working groups are made up of married couples, clergymen, together with, now even more often, separated people. The latter, therefore, are not "objects" anymore, but "subjects" of the Pastoral, according to the image coined by Henri Nouwen, in *"The Wounded Healer"*, mentioned by Ina Siviglia who, in her speech at the Salsomaggiore congress, pointed out "how the most efficient operators are often those who, in their married life, have been through the painful tunnel of crisis, separation, divorce and have managed to overcome it, even with different life results, growing in their experience of faith".
11. The activities consist of periodic sharing and prayer meetings, training and catechesis meetings and convivial moments.

12. Let us have a look at some of the pastoral welcome and accompaniment experiences for separated and divorced people both in Europe and in the world.
13. In France, for over 25 years (next year it will celebrate the 30th year of work) separated believers have been catered for at the sacrament of the Communion Notre Dame de l'Alliance. Here are some of the important steps of its history: Christmas 1983, Anne-Marie Le Marquer and Paul Salaün, along with Father Guillaume, a monk of Timadeue abbey, founded the Communion Notre Dame de l'Alliance; January 1997, participation at the work of the XIII plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family; April 2001, final approval of the canonical statutes and acknowledgement by the French Episcopal Congress; Summer 2008: the Communion celebrates in Lourdes its 25th anniversary; 30th June 2010: papal hearing with the Pope himself together with the Italian friends of "Separati fedeli" ("Separated believers") association and the book "*Séparés, divorcés à coeur ouvert*" was given to the Holy Father.
14. The "Amour et Vérité" association offers two solutions: one for the "single parents" and one for the "re-married divorcees". The initiative of the summer retreats to Paray-le-Monial is very popular because it is right where the subject of holiday and spare time can be seen from the point of view of "allowing everyone to meet God and being renewed in hope".
15. Association Renaissance, a catholic movement of just separated or divorced women, is probably one of the first known experiences. Founded in 1953 by a young mother, abandoned by her husband, the association has been welcoming those who need to be listened to and encouraged to re-live. The unconditional welcome, listening, care and friendship Association Renaissance offers, help to overcome the inevitable test of the loss of trust or the internal withdrawal. Renaissance offers individual contacts, convivial meetings, sharing retreats meetings and a link bulletin («Partage»).
16. (Just image)
17. In Belgium, apart from a group of the Communion Notre Dame de l'Alliance already active since 1984, a similar initiative for separated believers, whose name is "Groupe Nazareth", was started in 1998.
18. (Just image)
19. In Spain, in 2003, the Spanish Episcopal Congress approved the Executive Board of the Pastoral Family. In the last chapter, the final lines for the activation of different pastoral services for marriage and family were drawn up. Among these, the Centros de Orientación Familiar (COFS – Centres of Familiar Orientation). It is especially within these centres that the specific cases of marital and family distress are dealt with.
20. (Just image)
21. In Switzerland, the strong historical-cultural difference among the different linguistic areas also reflects on the reality of separation and divorce. However, this is barely perceived in many areas of the country and is actually dealt with on a strictly individual level also with the help of many significant initiatives. Since 1997, the Diocese of Lugano has been organising meetings in Bellinzona meetings for separated and divorced people as well as Mendrisiotto Curacy which has been offering a faith path since 2011. There are also many initiatives by RNS (Rinnovamento nello Spirito Santo – Renewal in the Holy Spirit) and Focolare Movement, always in Lugano and in Baar, in the Zugo canton.

22. (Just image)
23. S.E. Mons Biro, President of Family Commission of the Hungarian Episcopal Congress frequently organises meetings and seminars for clergymen working in the Pastoral Family. The catchphrase of the last meeting, which just took place in April, was «*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*» (Luke 5, 31-32). The goal is to give a theoretical and practical survey according to the «Pastoral Mercy» of the pastoral care for divorcees and people who married with a civil ceremony, rebuilt families, and the spouse who educates the children by himself or herself. Some dioceses are carrying out specific initiatives, but it is not safe to talk about homogenous and strong experiences yet. Great prevention work is done by the movements, like the Focolare Movement, Équipes Notre Dame, Schönstatt, ICCFM (International Confederation of Christian Family Movements), Marriage Encounter.
24. (Just image)
25. Since 2004, at the parish of Saint Jadwiga in Chorzow, near Katowice, another group for the separated and divorced believers has been in action. The activity offers monthly meetings, which people coming from other cities and villages in Slesia can attend.
26. (Just image)
27. In Germany the AGIA association, a catholic organisation founded in 1986 thanks to the Union of catholic women (Sozialdienst katholischer Frauen), operates with the aim of making society and the Church aware of the single-parent family.
28. (Just image)
29. In the United States, the American Episcopal Congress has created the service “For your Marriage”, and many dioceses offer support groups and programmes for separated and divorced people. For your Marriage reports: non-profit organisation Catholic Divorce Ministry has been offering support and recovery for those who have experienced separation and divorce. It also welcomes people who are going through different situations of pain, like widowhood, or single parents for whatever reason. Project Beginning Experience born in 1973 thanks to Sister Josephine Stewart and Ann Maria Lamia, a separated woman, with the aim of easing the process of pain resolution for adults and children who have suffered the death of a relative, divorce or separation and allowing them to love themselves again, the others and God. The path “Journey of Hope” to help people who have come across separation or divorce understand that faith in Jesus Christ is the way to hope, healing and renewal...
30. For the separated people who intend to remain faithful to the sacrament of marriage, there is a journey available to the United States which took its name («Nostra Signora di Cana» - Our Lady of Cana) and its reference text («Il dono di sé» - The gift of yourself) from the experience born in Sicily, in the Palermo diocese, thanks to the work of Maria Pia Campanella.
31. (Just image)
32. In Brazil, the contextualised reading of the situation has led the Brazilian Church to enact a special attention to evangelisation, welcome and accompaniment of the second union families (“Stepfamilies”). The work is widespread throughout all the local churches in which the pastoral family is active, more than 140 dioceses and prelates on the national territory. The work method is similar to that used by ordinary pastoral family with the first

union families, with the appropriate contents for the members of second union families.

33. At the end of this brief survey of some of the most significant experiences of pastoral accompaniment to the “suffering families”, we can say that the common denominator is to make it possible for those who have been through the pain of separation, to recognise in their burden, in their own family burden, «the final triumph of God over all the ills of the world» (Benedetto XVI)

34. Thank you for the attention.