



Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

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January 12, 2016

Dear Brother Bishops,

Greeting and blessings in this new year. The upcoming observances of National Marriage Week (Feb. 7-14) and World Marriage Day/Valentine's Day (Sunday, Feb. 14) provide an opportunity to celebrate the gift and blessing of marriage and to affirm and support engaged and married couples.

Promoting and strengthening marriage remains a pastoral priority of our Conference, and I am grateful that it will be included in our 2017-2020 strategic plan. Marriage, both as a natural institution and as a Christian sacrament, is an irreplaceable good for society and all people. Our Committee remains ever grateful for the ongoing efforts in dioceses and parishes to promote, strengthen and defend marriage, and to accompany married couples in their joys and trials.

We have faced many challenges this past year, most especially with the misguided Supreme Court decision in June that claimed to redefine marriage throughout the country. We will undoubtedly continue to see the effects of that decision on our pastoral work and institutions, and I thank each of you for your steadfast witness to the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family.

At the same time, as you know well, 2015 also brought unique opportunities to highlight the joy and promise of marriage and the family. During his visit to our country in September, Pope Francis called our attention to the beauty of marriage and family life. The World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia gave families from around the world a renewed appreciation of their identity and mission. In October, the Ordinary Synod on the Family met in Rome to assist the Holy Father in reflecting on ways the Church can further support families in their vocation and mission. In November, our body approved the formal statement "Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography," which we pray reaches many men and women, including married couples and parents, with the healing truth of authentic love and chastity. Lastly, the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy began in December, and the Jubilee of Families on the Feast of the Holy Family remains an encouragement to families to live out this Jubilee of Mercy with greater trust in the Lord's mercy and with greater love for family members and neighbors.

Brother bishops, on behalf of the Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, I am grateful to highlight various resources that may be of assistance as your dioceses and parishes continue to build a culture that honors and promotes marriage and the family.

Preaching Resource – We are pleased to offer a preaching resource based on the readings for World Marriage Day, Sunday, Feb. 14 (enclosed). We hope this will encourage and assist your priests and deacons in preaching about marriage and the family, with a suggested emphasis this year on marriage and mercy, given the special Jubilee of Mercy.

Bulletin Insert – We are making available again a bulletin insert that can be used during National Marriage Week or at any time (enclosed). This insert utilizes social science data to highlight marriage as a great good in itself and as a gift to the married couple, their children, and society.

Call to Prayer for Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty – During National Marriage Week, dioceses and parishes might consider promoting Friday February 12 as a day of prayer and sacrifice for this intention: “May all husbands and wives renew their commitment to love in good times and in bad.” More about the Call to Prayer is available at www.usccb.org/pray.

For Your Marriage and Por Tu Matrimonio – A large and varied collection of resources for couples who are married or preparing for marriage can be found in English and Spanish at www.ForYourMarriage.org and www.PorTuMatrimonio.org. Both sites also run Facebook pages, which will provide daily content during National Marriage Week: www.facebook.com/foryourmarriage and www.facebook.com/PorTuMatrimonio.

Marriage: Unique for a Reason – Video and print materials and other educational and catechetical resources that present the beauty and explain the uniqueness of marriage as the union of one man and one woman can be found at www.MarriageUniqueforaReason.org. Coming soon: a new video on marriage and religious liberty.

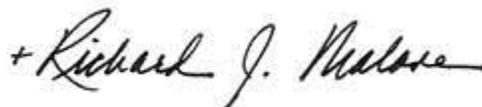
World Marriage Day – Resources for celebrating World Marriage Day (Sunday, Feb. 14), sponsored by Worldwide Marriage Encounter, are available at <http://wmd.wwme.org>. World Marriage Day, now in its 34th consecutive year, received the Apostolic Blessing of Pope St. John Paul II in 1993.

National Marriage Week USA – Lastly, National Marriage Week, now in its seventh year, is a collaborative effort to influence the culture by faith communities, business, media, education, and non-profit groups. It promotes marriage as a benefit to husbands and wives and to the nation, as well as the best environment in which to raise children. Information and resources are at <http://www.nationalmarriageweekusa.org>. Dioceses might consider adding marriage programs, including conferences and retreats, to the national calendar facilitated by National Marriage Week USA.

Thank you again for this opportunity to highlight these resources in anticipation of the celebrations for marriage next month. I would be grateful if you could share this information with the clergy and lay leaders of your diocese. May these upcoming observances be occasions to affirm ever more deeply the gift of marriage and family life, and may the Lord continue to bless all that you do in witness to the beauty and gift of marriage and the family.

With gratitude and prayerful best wishes, I am

Fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard J. Malone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Richard J. Malone
Bishop of Buffalo
Chairman
Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

Encl.