

NATIONAL PASTORAL INITIATIVE FOR MARRIAGE FOURTH YEAR REPORT (2008)

In the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage (NPIM) the U.S. Catholic bishops call attention to the meaning and value of married life for the Church and for society. Bringing Catholic belief into dialogue with contemporary needs, the bishops urge the Catholic Church to become a community of hope and help for marriages and to join others in building a culture of marriage. The Initiative weaves together the Catholic faith tradition and its pastoral practice, the data of social science, and the experience of married couples to offer guidance and resources, including a pastoral letter, in order to promote, strengthen, sustain and restore marriages. More information about the Initiative is available at www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/npim.

In 2008 the Pastoral Initiative concerned itself entirely with its second phase, namely, the public communication and education phase. This year's work focused on the continuing roll-out of the *For Your Marriage* campaign (radio and TV Public Service Announcements on marriage, billboard advertising, and the special website www.foryourmarriage.org), and the drafting of a pastoral letter on marriage.

Below is a summary of activities during the fourth year of the Initiative.

“FOR YOUR MARRIAGE” CAMPAIGN

Radio and Television:

The campaign, particularly through the PSAs, has three related, public awareness goals: (1) offer an attractive, hopeful image of marriage and married couples/families; (2) connect the Catholic Church with a positive, helpful message about marriage; and (3) motivate people to personal action, including going to our website for more help. The campaign is also intended to create readiness for the pastoral letter and to support marriage-strengthening efforts at a local level.

The PSAs ask people on the street the question “What have you done for your marriage today?” They convey a simple, upbeat message about the necessity of couples participating in their marriage—often in small, daily acts of love and care—in order to build commitment. The website, which continues to grow, offers information, help, inspiration and encouragement to couples who want to learn about marriage and deepen their commitment.

The spots were released in three waves, with the final wave coming at the end of 2008. According to tracking reports received in early 2009 the cumulative figures (since July 2007) for broadcasts of the PSAs on radio = 155, 397, for broadcast television = 38, 285, and for cable television = 7,700.

Nielsen's Sigma™ service (a content tracking system that tracks video air play in all 210 U.S. television markets) recognized the *For Your Marriage* campaign with an award for being in the top 20% of PSAs receiving air time in the year 2007.

By the end of 2008 it was calculated that the equivalent market value of the air time given free to the *For Your Marriage* PSA campaign from its inception would have been more than \$15 million.

Billboard Advertising:

Three billboard ads using the “what have you done for your marriage today” theme were created in 2008 and offered to outdoor advertising companies that would agree to feature them for free on unused billboard space. This aspect of the campaign grew slowly but steadily. By the end of the year the ads had appeared on over 1700 billboards in nearly forty different locales covering most regions of the country. The equivalent market value of this advertising space was calculated at over \$10 million.

Website:

In the second half of 2008 the “for your marriage” website celebrated its first anniversary with a redesigned homepage and the addition of several new features that would be interactive and updated regularly. These include a “blog” done by a young adult preparing for her Catholic marriage in 2009, and a “Marriage Rx” that presents a common perplexing problem and offers a prescription to keep the marriage healthy. In addition, the “About Catholic Marriage” portion of the website was enhanced and enlarged with new resources about the Catholic wedding celebration, including the approved Scriptural readings with commentaries and the current guidelines on music.

Prayer Cards:

As a simple, easy-to-use resource as well as a promotion for the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage the USCCB developed a prayer card containing a special Prayer for Married Couples. The prayer focuses on the covenant of husband and wife that reflects Christ's union with the Church. The card includes the “For Your Marriage” logo and website address, where couples can find practical information and help to strengthen their marriage. The prayer card is available in English and Spanish. It can be used as a worship aid and a giveaway in various educational and liturgical settings.

Diocesan participation:

It is essential that dioceses, to the extent they are willing and able, participate in the Pastoral Initiative by (1) promoting the Initiative and its resources within each diocese and (2) developing local “For Your Marriage” campaigns.

For example, dioceses can link to the For Your Marriage website, promote it at diocesan and parish events, order “For Your Marriage” bookmarks from USCCB Publications, and discuss the Initiative at Province meetings. A list of suggestions for diocesan involvement is available on the For Your Marriage website (see “Pastoral Initiative” under About Catholic Marriage).

PASTORAL LETTER ON MARRIAGE

The Bishops' Subcommittee on Marriage and Family began work on a pastoral letter in January 2008 when it reviewed a first draft. Throughout the rest of the year the Subcommittee received successive new drafts – each of them developed after extensive discussion and critique. The principal consultative group in this phase of drafting was the USCCB Committee on Doctrine.

The complexity of the consultation and development process caused the Subcommittee to extend its timeline for completion of the pastoral letter to November 2009. At that time it expects to bring a text to the General Meeting of the Bishops for a debate and a vote to approve its publication.

2009 ACTIVITIES

Beginning in the first quarter of 2009 the Subcommittee expects to engage in a wider consultation on the pastoral letter. This process will solicit input from other USCCB committees, national and diocesan leaders, and the body of bishops.

Plans were made in 2008 for the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers (NACFLM) to organize its national conference in 2009 on the theme of “Becoming a Marriage Building Church.” NACFLM undertook this project as its main contribution to the National Pastoral Initiative for Marriage. The conference, which will feature a large number of sessions on all aspects of marriage as well as presentations by the bishops who have been leaders in the Pastoral Initiative, will be held in June 2009.

In 2009 the Pastoral Initiative will continue to develop and expand the “for your marriage” website with new content and with the introduction of a Spanish-language site. Eventually the Spanish-language website will be promoted in a PSA radio campaign similar to the English-language “What Have You Done for Your Marriage Today?” campaign.