



REMAIN

IN MY

Love

John 15:9

Remain in My Love:
**Archdiocese of Philadelphia Initiative
for the Renewal of Marriage and Family Life**

**RESPONSES FROM MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SURVEY
CONDUCTED SUMMER 2017**

“I want to thank the Archbishop and the pastors of the Archdiocese for being willing to read the surveys. I want to commend them for being brave and recognizing the need to protect and promote marriage and family life.”

-Survey Response, Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

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-Survey Response, Chester County, Married 26+ years

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About This Survey

This survey is not a public opinion survey on marriage and family. It does not seek the general opinion of local Catholics on marriage. The survey was conducted with the intention of obtaining qualitative results, not quantitative. Its value does not come from numerical statistics, but from the voices of faithful Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia seeking to live their vocations and looking to the Church to support them.

Seeking the *Sensus Fidelium*

Whenever the Church seeks discernment about her path forward, she looks to the treasures of the Holy Spirit that are at her disposal. One of these treasures is the *sense of faith (sensus fidei)* of baptized believers. The Church believes that “the faithful have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice and to reject what is false. That supernatural instinct...is called the *sensus fidei*...”¹ In other words, it is possible to find among faithful Catholics, in their insights and reflections, a rich source of truth about the movement of the Holy Spirit among His people.

The *sensus fidei* must be distinguished from public opinion.² Any attempt to consult the authentic sense of faith of the People of God must recognize that this gift is intimately tied to baptism and therefore dependent upon a person’s adherence by manner of life to his or her baptismal vows. A person does not participate in the *sensus fidei* simply because of formal membership in the Church. Instead, certain dispositions are necessary for the faithful to participate in this supernatural instinct of faith. These are:

- Full participation in the life of the Church
- Listening to the Word of God
- Openness to reason and its relation to faith
- Adherence to the Magisterium
- Holiness
- Seeking the edification of the Church³

The body of truths that emerges collectively from those who possess the *sensus fidei* is called the *sense of the faithful (sensus fidelium)* and it is this that was sought in the conducting of this survey. In gathering thoughtful responses from faithful Catholics of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, our hope is to glean from their reflections and testimonies a glimpse into the supernatural instinct of faith. These valuable contributions will serve as an important source of discernment for our local Church as we seek to reform our pastoral care of married couples and the family.

Given the qualitative nature of this survey, it requires time and prayerful reading to process its results. The next page contains a summary of the six themes that emerged most regularly from the respondents. Following the summary is a compilation of many of the verbatim responses of the faithful. Please consider reading them prayerfully and attentively.

¹ International Theological Commission, *The Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014) n. 2

² *Ibid.* n. 113-119

³ *Ibid.* n. 88-105

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SURVEY CONDUCTED SUMMER 2017



The following were the six most repeated themes that emerged from the 200 survey responses from our families. Examples of each of these themes can be found in the following pages, which contain actual, verbatim responses from the married couples and families of the Archdiocese.

1. **Bold, clear, unequivocal teaching, especially in homilies:** Almost every survey response included a plea to the leaders of the Church to teach them the fullness of the Church's teachings on marriage and family, especially in the Sunday homily. Many indicated their disappointment with the silence of their parish leaders on these subjects, which they perceive as stemming from cowardice or lack of confidence in the truth of the teachings. Almost across the board, families expressed that they and their children are incessantly being bombarded by false messages from the culture and crave to hear from their shepherds instruction in the teachings of the Church about marriage and family with boldness and confidence.
 - a. Related to this often-repeated point was the testimony of a number of couples who had received advice from Church leaders in the confessional and in conversation that was contrary to the teachings of the Church. This advice has resulted, in a number of cases, to suffering in the marriage for those who followed the poor counsel.
2. **Opportunities to form community:** The second most repeated petition from the surveys was the desire for more opportunities for married couples to build relationships with other married couples in order to find support in their vocation and life of faith. The lack of community among married couples who want to live their faith was lamented by many. Suggestions to address this included: parish-based socializing opportunities for married couples, mentoring programs in which older, more experienced couples offer guidance to younger couples, and more opportunities for couples to share their testimonies with each other by way of encouragement in the faith.
3. **Childcare is a *must* for parish activities:** A high majority of the surveys indicated that for couples to participate in parish-based ministries, childcare must be provided. Couples pointed to the high cost of babysitting and the precious hours they would spend away from

their children as the reason why it is so difficult for them to participate in parish events. Many couples requested that parishes offer them “date nights” and indicated that childcare must be provided in order for this to serve them well.

4. **The Sacraments are the greatest gift to a marriage:** Across the board, almost every survey indicated that the highest contribution of the Church to their marriage and/or family life was the gift of the Eucharist and Confession. A number of surveys remarked that increased opportunities for Confession, rather than just the Saturday evening option, would be a very welcome gift in support of their married and family life.
5. **Availability of priests:** A strong portion of the surveys expressed deep gratitude for priests who have been available to them, ready and willing to offer accompaniment in their marriage and family life. Many have experienced priests who have been a great help in their vocation. An equally strong portion of the surveys expressed disappointment in the lack of availability of their priests, their distance from their people, their indifference, or even a negative or dismissive attitude. The consistent theme among them all was that the closeness and availability of their priests, or lack thereof, has a very strong impact on married couples and families, for better or for worse.
6. **Destigmatization of marital problems and marriage counseling:** Many respondents shared that while they had marital problems to greater or lesser degree, it is very difficult for them to disclose their marital problems or ask for help because of the perceived stigma surrounding marital difficulties. Many expressed that parishes could do a great service to their marriage by helping to de-stigmatize marital difficulties and pave the way for more open discussion and paths of healing for couples who are struggling. Many pointed to the very high cost of marriage counseling and asked the Church to find a way to help them access faithful Catholic therapists who could assist them with their difficulties.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SURVEY CONDUCTED SUMMER 2017

Part I – Your Vocation to Marriage

Introduction: This section of the survey asks specifically about your marriage. We wish to know how well our local Church has supported your vocation to love each other as husband and wife, expressed through:

- *Unity - the total giving of yourselves to one another such you that you are "no longer two, but one flesh"*
- *Indissolubility - exclusive fidelity to one another and to your marriage vows until death*
- *Fruitfulness - openness to the children God wishes to bring through your union*

If you are not married, please feel free to adjust these questions to make them relevant to your situation. The main goal is to identify (1) where our local Church is serving marriage well and (2) where our local Church needs reform in her mission to married couples.

This section is about marriage. Questions about family life and raising children will be asked on the next page.

QUESTION 1

In what ways has the Church supported you in living your vocation to marriage? How has your parish, school or local Catholic institution helped you grow and mature in love for each other, in understanding the meaning of your marriage, and in living your marriage vows faithfully? If possible, please give examples.

QUESTION 2

In what ways have you experienced the Church as absent, unsupportive, neutral or even a negative influence in your life as a married couple? Have there been times when you have needed help in living your marriage vows and not received the help you needed? Please give examples if possible.

QUESTION 3

In what ways does the local Church of Philadelphia need to be reformed to better serve married couples in living faithfully to their vows? Please be specific, even offering suggestions of what a parish, school or Catholic organization might do.

Part II – The Mission of Your Family

Introduction: Your family exists to be the place where God's love is revealed, encountered, and shared. The way you love each other in your family becomes a "school of love" that instructs all the members of your family in the way of God's love. Your mission is to become saints, to help one another get to Heaven, and to make your family a place where those who do not know God may come to know him by the way your family lives its life.

With that in mind, please tell us about how the Church has supported you in embracing and living this mission in fullness.

QUESTION 4

How has the Church supported you in lovingly accepting and raising the children that God has given you? Please be specific, using examples from your parish, school, or other Catholic organization. (Names of people or institutions will not be included in the published document.)

QUESTION 5

In what ways have you experienced the Church as absent, unsupportive, neutral or even a negative influence in your family life?

QUESTION 6

From your own experience, what do families need most from the Church, especially in these times when the family is under attack and, in many places, in crisis?

QUESTION 7

Please offer any suggestions of ways that your local parish, school, or institution might better and more directly serve your family's mission to love each other with God's love and become a light to the world about the way God loves us.

Part III – Final Comments

QUESTION 8

If you could share one thing with your Archbishop and the pastors of the Archdiocese about what you need from them to live your vocation to marriage and family life more fully, what would be it be?

Remain in My Love

INITIATIVE TO REINVIGORATE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE THROUGHOUT THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

archphila.org/remain

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-Survey Response, Chester County, Married 26+ years

Responses were received from 200 families from all 5 counties of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Survey responses were received in English and in Spanish. The following text contains actual verbatim responses from the surveys received.

Question 1

In what ways has the Church supported you in living your vocation to marriage? How has your parish, school or local Catholic institution helped you grow and mature in love for each other, in understanding the meaning of your marriage, and in living your marriage vows faithfully? If possible, please give examples.

I was married for 30 years to a non Catholic man who did not practice any form of religion. Our three children were raised Catholic and attended Catholic school through 12th grade. My parish community was a strong base for us with support through good and bad times. Because I am an active member of my parish both other parishioners and priests were most helpful during the difficult times of the divorce and beyond. I strongly believe in the Catholic view of marriage and the beauty of married life. Unfortunately, it was not something that was part of my ex-husband's beliefs.

Philadelphia, Divorced

The truth is that the John XXIII Movement is where we have received an unconditional support about marriage in general and my own marriage. For example, when we receive the new retreatants in the closing Masses, the great majority leave with the desire to complete their sacraments and the great majority only lack the sacrament of matrimony.

Philadelphia, Married, 11-25 years (translated from Spanish)

When I listen to Father Ianelli's, Monsignor Gentili's, Deacon Brady's homilies during Sunday mass, I feel an overpowering sense of responsibility to honor my husband by being a kind, patient, caring, and faithful wife. Maintaining a strong marriage, especially with the addition of a newborn, is difficult. Father Ianelli and Monsignor Gentili give me hope during hard times.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

Going to mass together and sharing that beautiful experience has made our love grow. My husband and I both work in a social outreach ministry at our church and that experience has drawn us closer together. The teachings of the church emphasize the meaning of marriage and living our marriage vows. We sit at Mass and hold hands and just feel so very, very close to each other and to God.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

When I was married, each week at mass, one of the General Intercessions always asked that we pray to keep our marriages strong and live in the way that reflected our teachings of Christ. I took great comfort in knowing that we were all praying for each other. Also, every Sunday mass near Valentine's Day they had all the married couples stand and renew their vows.

Bucks County, Divorced 26+ years

Fr. ----- often gives homilies that touch on his family life. He uses these stories to inspire us as he relates them to teachings of the gospel and I come home every Sunday from mass, feeling that I've learned valuable lessons to remember or apply in my everyday family life. However, just last year at this time, I was speaking with a friend who is involved in a "Cana date night" program through their church and I thought is sounded like a phenomenal program. I had another friend who had pass along their "Beloved" cds, another program to support and deepen the bond of marriage through the church. I was disappointed in the lack of programs available through our church, so I approached the director of pastoral ministries and spoke about these programs and my interest, desire and offered to help support these types of programs at SSPP with volunteer time. I was told that the programs did not fit with the vision of the Church for advancement at that time and was directed to a bible study group, which isn't quite support for married couples in the same manner.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Our parish, St. Ann's in Phoenixville, has supported us in our marriage through the monthly Cana Date Nights for couples. This is an evening where couples share dinner, fellowship, and have a presentation/ discussion about faith and marriage. There is also child care provided, which is crucial.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

I believe that through various Church programs, such as a Dynamic Catholic speaker coming to our parish to speak about marriage, have helped and strengthened our marriage. We do a renewal of vows at Valentines Day during Mass, which is very nice. Our pastor is very traditional Catholic, which has also helped our marriage with staying true to the Catholic faith in his message, especially about the sacrament of marriage.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The Church's teaching and writing has been helpful. However, I do not feel that any of the parishes that I have lived in have done anything practical to help besides the obvious assistance of the sacraments. There is far more practical help for couples looking for an annulment.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The Church has some wonderful documents to support couples in living out a healthy marriage vocation. Some include, Humanae Vitae and the Theology of the Body teachings. While hearing about these examples from the pulpit, we have sought to educate ourselves on these teachings as there are little to no concrete opportunities for couples to explore these in the parishes in which we have lived. We have offered to create marriage support group activity in our parish, but our time is limited due to caring for children and parishioners do not show to advertised events. Having grown up in NE Philly, we did not know many people living their Catholic faith fully. When we moved to Delaware County, we were blessed to meet many faithful families through channels such as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (Barbara Bonella at St. Philomena's in Lansdowne, then St. Andrew in Drexel Hill), Noah's Ark (Moms rosary group at St. Madeline's in Ridley Park), Regina Angelorum Academy in Ardmore, and Man Up Philly. It was by connecting with these married couples and their families that we have been able to support each other in our walk as Catholics.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

The Church helped me before marriage with Pre-Cana classes. Also, the Pastoral Familiar has helped, but I believe it's possible to do more at the parish level.

Philadelphia, Married, 0-10 years (translated from Spanish)

We are married 45 years and the Church is supportive of our vocation. We feel at home and share the values that comprise Sacramental Marriage. The Church has provided a shelter in the storm of modern life, that doesn't see the importance of real love and commitment. In a society that prizes relativism and morals d'our, the Church is an enduring tradition of Faith and Morals that are bedrock strong.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

The Retrouvaille ministry saved our marriage, and those parishes that support the ministry's ongoing efforts are showing their clear support for marriage.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

The Church has supported us in living our vocation to marriage by giving us good marriage prep, by its wise teachings on marriage and on human sexuality, and by providing us with the Sacrament of Matrimony. Our parish has supported us by making us aware of opportunities like Marriage Encounter and Retrovaille. Our pastor, when speaking of the occasion of sin and sin's consequences, frequently uses the example of being unfaithful to one's spouse even in little ways.

Our parish and our independent Catholic school, especially, provide us with the opportunity to be in communities with other men and women who are trying to live faithful Catholic marriages.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

After a Redemptorist 40-hour Mission, in our Parish, I felt called to confess our marriage had not been blessed by the Church. Our Parish Priest compassionately blessed our marriage, and I felt as if a weight of a million pounds was lifted off of my shoulders. We were not in right relationship with God and I only pray that everyone know the love and mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Parish has a new Marriage ministry to support couples. There are occasional homilies on marriage. Marriage is often in Intercessions at Sunday Mass

Philadelphia, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

The Catholic Church holds a life giving view of marriage and the family. In my middle adult years I learned of the beauty of marriage through St John Paul II Theology of the body.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

There is a ministry to married people at the parish, so I suppose it's trying. We get much better support where we regularly visit (St. Katharine Drexel) than at our home parish.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Documents like those of St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have stressed the importance of the vocation of marriage. Sadly, these are not widely available. My parish offers a family retreat at Malvern every year, which has been wonderful in strengthening our marital and family relationships. We also have a Valentine's Mass for the renewal of vows and a dinner every year. We also have Lenten and Advent faith sharing, where couples come together to learn and share. These all have been good experiences for us.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

*The Church has supported my husband & me in living our vocation to marriage by:
- (1) sending us to Pre-Cana weekend before marriage which was very good & could have been*

offered again after marriage as a refresher

- (2) Retrouvaille is offered in the bulletin occasionally, but never promoted from the pulpit or mentioned by priests. If it was encouraged, I think more people would attend.

- (3) in 2015, prior to World Meeting of Families, Meghan Cokeley visited our parish and did a talk on: "An Introduction to the Catholic Church's Teachings on the Human Person, the Body and Sexuality." This was the VERY first time we heard the Church present these teachings. She did an outstanding job defending the Truth, presenting these teachings with courage, boldness, and deep meaning & insight. Unfortunately, we've never heard priests teach this message in this manner

- (4) Also in 2015, our parish did a 6-week book study on "Love Is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive" which was the catechism provided to us by the Church through the Office for the New Evangelization on difficult topics such as:

-sexual relations outside of marriage,

-chastity & celibacy,

-contraception,

-porn

-same sex "marriage"

This book and study guide explained how God created us for joy and how we are called to love as God loves. It explained how all of Catholic teaching about family life flows from our beliefs about Jesus and it is by loving God and one another that we are fully alive. What was most appreciated again is that the book presented the "why's" (and not just the what's) of the Church's teachings which people found so very enlightening & refreshing.

It would be a wise idea to offer this book study on a more regular basis and have it promoted by priests and pastors so that more people would attend.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Our pastor is personally very supportive of our family and families in general. He makes it a point to be directly involved in our family's walk and has a personal relationship with each of us. He also emphasizes communal events to encourage families to get to know each other to strengthen the Body of Christ.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

We have received little institutional support from our parishes since we were married five years ago. The extent of the support has come from friendships (that we have sought out) with younger priests and the occasional homily about the Church's teaching on marriage. In truth, the majority of the support we receive comes from networking with other serious Catholic couples. The parishes that we have been part of have not offered much.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

We've been in the same parish for 44 years. I don't ever remember an event that focused on improving our marriage. We sought that elsewhere through retreats, strong Catholic friends and Marriage Encounter. I'm sure that there are priests and parishes sensitive to this but they

are rare in my experience. usually, this is a lay person apostolate. The church needs to encourage it and promote it and seek the right people to lead it.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

We feel very supported in living our marriage as a vocation within the Church. We are surrounded by other couples who also believe in marriage as a Sacrament which strengthens our faith. We have been given the opportunity at our parish to help guide couples who are preparing for marriage with our involvement in PreCana. There are often speakers and opportunities for us to continue to grow our marriage in our immediate area.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

At our church the primary opportunities have been chances for us to attend and participate in various ministries together as a couple and also for our entire family. Activities like AbbeyFest, Marriage Alpha, and our annual church picnic have been times for us to be together as a married couple or as a family experiencing worship, joy, and community as a family. We also have felt very loved by our Deacon at various points of financial and health crisis in our life.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

By being a consistent public voice in support for marriage, family and the sanctity of life amid the changing and challenging cultural views. This has strengthened us in our beliefs. Also, various educational opportunities the Church/parish have offered (Theology of the Body and others) have provided us with moral guidance and teaching to help us make decisions about how we approached infertility, cared for our aging parents and decisions about how we spend our time/resources as a couple that have helped us deepen and better understand our relationship.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Our Pastor has been extremely supportive. We were uneducated about the faith. My husband was an atheist and we were married in City Hall. Monsignor guided us through counseling and we had our marriage blessed. He was very clear and patient in instructing us about the Church's teachings on the vocation of marriage as a convenient. He explained the Church's teaching on openness to life thoroughly. His love and kindness was instrumental in my husband's conversion. He taught an excellent RCIA and my husband was baptized and became a devout Catholic. We struggle financially and after giving birth to our second child, Monsignor thought to offer us money that another parishioner donated for a family in need. Our Parish is very welcoming and there are many faithful, dedicated married couples devoted to serving the church. We always feel supported by the Church in our vocation as a married couple.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The greatest help to our marriage (preparation, formation, realistic expectations, deep understanding of the nature of marriage, etc.) has come from our parents.

Secondly, the most helpful support has been in the form of three Archdiocesan priests: Fr. Chris Walsh, Fr. Matt Guckin, and Fr. Kevin McCabe. Each spent time (lots of time!) working with us (individually and as a couple), praying with and for Dan and me, answering our questions, and helping us navigate difficult moments leading up to our marriage and since we've been married.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

The sacramental life of the Church has been beneficial to my marriage. Unfortunately, the local and national church did not clarify the church's position on sterility 25 years ago which meant that I did a reverse vasectomy 10 years later when I better understood the church's teaching. This was before St JP2nd's encyclical on Humanae Vitae.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

In general the Church is the only institution that encourages Forgiveness with the Sacrament of Reconciliation without which our marriage would not have survived coming on 52 years. The Church welcomed all of our children with joy. All of our pastors give us encouragement

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Our Pastor, and our Vicar speak frequently of the sanctity of married life. They encourage couples who are not married in the Church to pray for the grace to be married in the Church. For couples married in the Church, they also encourage frequent reception of the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation and The Holy Eucharist, both as food for a happy married life. Each year we have asked our Pastors to give us their blessing when we celebrate our Anniversary. They have always complied with great joy.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

The main way the Church supports our marriage is by providing plenty of opportunity for mass, confession, and eucharistic adoration. Homilies are generally doctrinally sound. False teachings about marriage and sexuality are not endorsed or insinuated.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

In what ways has the Church supported our living our vocation to marriage?

Years ago the Archdiocese sponsored NFP classes. My husband and I attended. We were so inspired about what we learned - I am a health care professional and in 1988 I was only offered birth control pills from my ob/gyn for family planning. My parents never discussed anything with me but my mother did admit to me the night before our wedding that she and my father used condoms. Our pre cana did not address this. One woman did ask the question about what should we do about family planning and the priest running the pre cana actually said to follow your conscience. There was no discussion of the fact that it had to be well informed.

How has your parish, school or local Catholic institution helped you grow and mature in love for each other, in understanding the meaning of your marriage, and in living your marriage vows faithfully?

Initially, it did very little. When I called the Archdiocese to get marital counseling after the birth of our first child (I discovered that my husband was viewing pornography, and I was devastated). We attended sessions at the Catholic Social Service center that was in ----. I remember the intake coordinator on the phone telling me "you think you are the first woman to ever discover their husband doing this?" - actually dismissive of my hurt and fears. They gave us a woman counselor who was not Catholic and she told us that viewing pornography was not a sin - only if he acted out on his fantasies. I told her that Jesus said even lusting after a woman was wrong - but I was more upset about the fact that she didn't seem to know the Catholic faith and was working under the Archdiocese social service. At the end of the sessions she recommended that my husband get additional counseling to resolve issues in his family of origin and that was it.

When we moved to a very faith filled community that had a pro life ministry, we were introduced to the Theology of the Body - Christopher West gave a talk at the parish. Later, we volunteered to be a witness couple for the parish Joy Filled marriage program based on the Theology of the Body

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

The wider archdiocesan community is big enough that if you look, you can find the support you need for help with marriage. For example, thank God for Barbara Rose and her dedicated NFP apostolate, which has helped my wife and me many times. I am also grateful for the shrines around town that make confession available at many times during the week other than Saturday, so that confession/spiritual counsel is available. I am grateful for other things: the Archbishop's lecture series, the "Love Is Our Mission" book, the Theology of the Body apostolate, Generation Life, the Culture Project, etc. I would just note that all of this is outside normal parish culture. Normal parish people aren't getting any of this. To get this stuff, you have to be unusually motivated and know to dig for it. The parish, where most people are most of the time, is mostly silent and absent on these issues. See next question.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

One-on-one, many of the priests/lay ministers/volunteers of the Archdiocese are doing heroic work to be present to, and encourage, married couples. I know priests who are chaplains to Teams of Our Lady, host dinners in their own rectories, and etc. Many individuals are doing heroic, solitary work to try and support couples. But they need so much help!!! They are often operating solo!

Chester County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

Good books are always available in the narthex of our parish (Annunciation BVM, Havertown), the priests regularly bring married life into their homilies, the priests are good confessors and offer good spiritual advice. Our daughter's school (an independent Catholic school--Regina Angelorum Academy) has a Valentine's dinner with a talk each year--kind of a date night. I get the majority of my formation through Opus Dei since I'm a cooperator. They offer monthly circles on virtues with lots of practical advice about married life and parenting, and sometimes they host couples evenings (e.g., this spring they hosted a dinner with Damon Owens as a speaker--really great).

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

Starting with the Bishop I really appreciate his homilies each week on podcast. Then the emails from the Office of the New Evangelization are filled with useful opportunities to grow in our individual and married faith. I have found both very helpful and are easy to access for anyone who is pro-active in seeking support and information. I was also recently able to find a Spiritual Director, Fr Eduardo de la Torre, LC. So I am thankful the diocese supports having the Legionares in the community. At our parish, St Denis in Havertown, they held a virtual marriage retreat during Lent that was a huge success. I would recommend more parishes offering the same opportunity. The material was found through the USCCB.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

We were blessed to be prepared for marriage first by our own parents and the example they gave us and then through the generosity of a priest in my parish who met with us several times to guide our journey.

A little over 5 years into our marriage we were faced with a medical crisis that left me unable to bear more children. It was a tough time for both of us. I was undergoing a torrent of emotional stuff as well as physical issues requiring rehab and other support. My husband was working and doing all he could to be the best parent he could be to our girls, and manage the household.

A priest, who has since become a dear friend, sat with us a few times and helped us sort through all the pain as he reminded us of our vows and our relationship with the Lord. He also put us in touch with others in our parish community who could help us with some of the basic needs so we could once again focus on us and our family.

With the help of God and many others, we got back on track and have remained strong these many years. God willing we'll celebrate 40years of marriage in December.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Honestly, much as I Love our church and pastor, they really do not offer classes, discussion or groups focused on marriage. There is no literature available .

I just recently discovered the Archdiocesan groups through my own research and it has been a great resource for me and my husband.

As well, the ability to access such documents as Theology of the Body and reading Archbishop Chaput's book: Strangers in a Strange Land, have been helpful in understanding our vocation more fully.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I am sorry, our local parish has not been directly helpful in supporting our marriage and family life. There are school activities and fund raisers that could be considered "date nights" but, other than that...

Rarely, if ever do we hear anything about marriage from the pulpit nor, how the sacraments may help us in our vocation.

There is little opportunity to come and share together with other families in a way that specifically supports marriage and family.

I am grateful, however, that we have found friends through our parish community.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Unfortunately, I cannot think of any way in which our local church has helped us in our vocation to marriage.

We do belong to a Catholic couples group - Teams of our Lady ("TOOL"). We believe that this group - which does include a religious member (currently a priest for our team) - has helped us tremendously with our vocation. We periodically reach out to help publicize TOOL within various parishes to start new teams. I highly suggest that the Diocese learn more about TOOL - I am certain that current members of the various Teams throughout our Diocese would be willing to come and share our experiences with those in the Diocese interested in listening.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

St. Ann's Cana Ministry (in Phoenixville), which includes childcare, has encouraged us to prioritize our marriage with a monthly date night. It also helps us to focus on our Faith in ways we might not otherwise often find time to discuss.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The homilies often focus on the importance of marriage and family...this helps reset what the world influences.

Our personal engagement in the church and helping the community to be a bigger part of what the family does. It allows us to set example for our children and hopefully bring them forward to act the same way.

The priest always ask about the family and sees us as one unit...this keeps us thinking and feeling like a Unit, Pod, Single entity, one.... no matter what you call it to be together.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years



QUESTION 2

In what ways have you experienced the Church as absent, unsupportive, neutral or even a negative influence in your life as a married couple? Have there been times when you have needed help in living your marriage vows and not received the help you needed? Please give examples if possible.

My husband and I often joke about how condescending the pastor is to women. He often portrays women as nagging in his sermons. It appears he does not have a very good concept of spouses as equal, loving partners.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

When we were experiencing infertility, we had to look for outside sources to help us, like couples group therapy for people experiencing and the medical community. There were no groups for individuals or couples in the parish.

Delaware County, Widowed

I am actually a counselor myself, and I am aware that misunderstandings and miscommunication play a big part in marital stress. Most Catholics like us (people in their 30s) who are married and have kids are not going to local parish groups because they take too much time; most Catholics like us aren't going to pay for counseling because money is too tight. I sincerely think the best thing the Archdiocese could do to benefit my marriage, and the marriage of others like us, would be to somehow instate a pilot program in which married couples could receive free Catholic marital counseling over the phone. This could save countless marriages, or at least make marriages stronger.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Pretty much on your own

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

...We would never seek guidance from this pastor. We would be more inclined to seek advice from the young priest at our Parish. We have occasionally attended mass at a near by church in NJ and would most definitely seek help from the priest there should the need arise.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

We think it would be helpful to hear more frequent, forceful and clear preaching on the indissolubility of marriage. Further, explicit teaching on the conditions necessary for the licit reception of the Holy Eucharist is desperately needed. This has been neglected for far too long.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

I do remember one time going with my husband to speak with our parish priest about issues within our marriage. The priest kept speaking to us as if he had been married (which he definitely had not been). We didn't want to know what he would have done, we wanted to know how to better understand God's role for us as husband and wife.

Bucks County, Divorced 26+ years

Pretty much crickets when it comes to addressing the "fruitful" part of "faithful, fruitful, forever" part of marriage. Nothing about openness to life, contraception being a mortal sin, NFP, etc. from the pulpit.

We have 8 kids. Where are the other big families? Mainly homeschoolers as far as I can see. Everyone loves our family - we stand out, they think we are great. They say, "Oh I have 4 (or 5 or 6 or 10) brothers and sisters and it is great" and "Oh I could never have that many kids" or most commonly, "God bless you!" to which we reply, "We are blessed!"

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

When our church declined the proposed ideas of marriage support group formation in our parish, I tried to look in surrounding parishes, St. Agnes, SS Simon and Jude, SS Philip in James. I even emailed Ascension Press to see if anyone had any local marriage building, supporting community programs and I really couldn't find anything besides some fliers for Marriage encounter retreats and pre-cana education, that is discouraging.

We have women's groups and men's groups at our church, which are both wonderful, but to my knowledge there are no community support or marriage guidance programs offered through the church, so when we do struggle, which of course happens with every marriage, we seek support and guidance from our friends. But instead of waiting until we need help, I'd rather be proactive in growing our marriage through our faith with God's guidance and the Church's support.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

There doesn't seem to be a natural place for couples to encounter other couples and seek help or support.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Maybe lacking classes for married people once they are married for a few years. When you start to add kids and stress of money into the mix, not sure if there is anything that can help in those areas to help prevent divorce.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

When we have encountered rough patches in our marriage there was no one in our parish or church community that we felt we could/would want to turn to.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

We have only lived in this Arch Diocese for three years. In that time I do not think we have experienced anything like this. Before that we lived in Baltimore and unfortunately belonged to a small, ailing parish. I do think some of the more "open and accepting" tendencies of that parish were hurtful to our marriage in that they did not truly support marriage as the Church defines it.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

My only regret in the parish support of marriage is as previously stated, our parish does not have any programs specifically for married couples. To my understanding there are many programs that other churches offers for married couples however, we do not have any programs.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

I have often worried about how little information and conversation about marriage is available in parishes.

Given the absence of medical support for non-contracepting couples, the Church needs to help families to fill in the gap!! So many good and wise people already do this, but the lack of information and support at the parish level is quite perplexing to me, so many decades after "Humanae vitae."

I sometimes worry that the beautiful teachings of the Church, especially of St. John Paul, have not been as widely disseminated as possible because of these rather practical, bureaucratic lapses and omissions.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

*...a priest (not from the parish) giving permission for my husband to have a vasectomy...
...not emphasizing and teaching that the GRACE of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony in ongoing...that the GRACE is their everyday through thick and thin...*

Montgomery County, Widowed

We completed a marriage preparation course in accordance with the archdiocesan requirements. There was a lack of instruction on sexual issues, such as chastity, pornography, contraception and natural family planning. The facilitators were not able to answer our questions about these topics. One could extrapolate that these couples were not living according to the Catholic faith when it comes to these issues. We are aware that there are other still marriage preparation program facilitators who are also not willing or capable to discuss such matters to this day. This sends a very negative and confusing message about these and other beautiful teachings of the Church to an audience who, many of which, is already addicted to pornography, cohabitating and contracepting. Our opinion is that unchastity and subsequent contraception use are the root of marital problems. Further, it is very difficult to squeeze a quality discussion on these and other important topics into a two-day (~9 hour) marriage preparation course.

Additionally, one priest told us that, regarding fidelity, pornography addiction was not infidelity nor was it sinful.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

I have the impression that we often worry about people as they get married, and then again when they divorce and remarry, but in between....we are less attentive. Marriages are by nature private in many respects and it can be hard to know what is going on with a given couple. Nevertheless, even a very good marriage is a challenging one, and couples need to be sustained through friendship, prayer, the sacraments, etc. For myself, I am living in an abusive situation. It is very delicate to be married to a practicing Catholic who is also abusive and know how to address situations discreetly but effectively. I don't know.

*While I am doing everything I can for my marriage and do not intend to divorce, I do not know if While the archdiocese has useful links to supports of various kind, my parish has nothing (despite *many* ministries) that would be useful to me, and neither my husband has never had a confessor who seemed to pick up on any issues enough to say anything/ suggest. I have had more direct conversation, and do NOT expect confessors to provide psychological advice but it would be great if they had some direction to point people in when they sense the marriage issues are more serious than normal.*

(I will note, since I'm not sure if there will be a space later, that I know several marriages with issues similar to mine, some where the abusive spouse has an (sometimes) advanced degree in theology from a very solid institution; there are certainly places and cases where people have been badly formed theologically. But I think we often underestimate how broken many people are--especially in recent generations. And how fragile they are, and unwilling to admit their broken-ness so they can be healed).

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I have never experienced our Church as not supportive of our marriage, and it means so much to me to be able to say that!

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I don't think there has been a time where I felt any of those responses in regards to my marriage

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

I love the Church, but I had a worry that I could not bring my problems to the Church, because I would not be accepted if I confided all of my challenges. I had not been well formed and was ignorant of many things. This is not an excuse, I wanted to be in right relationship but I had no one to confide in.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Overall I find the church to be neutral to our vocation

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

Sadly, I was not taught the realities of living a faithful, fruitful Catholic marriage until much later in life.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

My husband and I have certainly struggled at times in our marriage, but I fully admit that our local church would not be where we would turn for help. The church is small (1 resident priest, 1 visiting priest) and although I love the Pastor, at no point would we have reason to reach out to him for marital advice. Moreover, we are involved in our church ministries, so to bring such personal and intimate issues to him would be awkward and uncomfortable. We would seek out professional counseling in a private setting.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I know there are programs for marriages that are struggling, but again the day to day little struggles, what is the church doing to help with that? I think a lot of married couples feel a lack of guidance from the church once marriage prep is over. Why is that? To return to focus too much on children and ministries for them and forget about their parents?

Montgomery County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

My parish has been neutral. We have not approached our parish related to issues in our married life. I would feel more comfortable seeking help outside of our parish

Years ago we were involved in Worldwide marriage encounter and this was helpful but had no parish connection.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

For the most part, the Church has been neutral other than helpful advice in the Confessional.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

While the teaching is clear, very little is discussed from the pulpit in terms of encouragement against the new norms that American society portray. While I understand wanting to be inclusive (love the sinner, hate the sin) I'm tempted to think pulpit speak is not bold or often enough in defense of marriage against behaviors I know are wrong. It's not enough for parents and grandparents to teach children, support on this on Sunday would be an advantage. It need not be 'hell and brimstone type of speak but rather touch on points of "why" something is wrong. Most in my parish just don't know or so it seems.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Our local parish has never preached or taught the faith in the 8 years since I converted, and so is a significant negative influence in trying to raise our family in the faith. There is NEVER any teaching on chastity or purity or holiness or anything beyond being nice and accepting to everyone no matter what they believe or how they live. The only place our children hear any moral teaching at all is from their mother and me, so we always come off sounding out-of-touch and judgmental. They avoid blessing fathers and mothers for fear of offending anyone. We volunteered to help with Pre Cana and it was horrifying how un Catholic it was and we never went back. I think we might have left the church completely out of frustration if we hadn't found a solid priest and parish down the street in Chester.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Over 25 years ago I was in a difficult place in my marriage. My Pastor was unsupportive and judgmental and caused me much pain. He had listened to rumors and I felt lost. I tried to talk - but he couldn't look at me. I didn't see the church as unsupportive - but I did see this pastor as a negative in my life. He asked me to resign from the respect life committee which I led in those days. The message was strong that it was better for the parish if I just disappeared - and so I did. I was broken with 2 small children. And alone. I ended up going outside my parish for help. That marriage ended in divorce. I ended up leaving that parish but not the Church. I went to another church and became a parishioner there. I filed and was granted an annulment. And subsequently I remarried.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

As Evangelization Coordinator of my parish, I will respond to this question not only from my personal perspective as a married person, but also from feedback from parishioners:

-The Church & pastors have been absent in helping married couples live their marriage vows from the time we were married until the World Meeting of Families in 2015. And after 2015, absence occurred again until this present time whereby the Archbishop has initiated "Remain in my love."

-We HAVE heard Sunday sermons once in a while about how married couples should love as Christ loves His Church, but our pastors have not initiated any sort of programs or support groups to help married couples live their marriage vows or share Church teachings on married life. Many parishes have eager lay volunteers to help with this, but things have not come to fruition.

-While I am aware of wonderful programs like Retrouvaille & Worldwide Marriage Encounter, pastors are not promoting these programs from the pulpit or in any way, other than putting a small blurb in the bulletin every once in a while. If pastors & priests only realized what a difference it makes when people hear THEM promote a program, they would do so. They have such a strong influence in people's lives, yet they seldom, if ever promote important programs being offered in their parishes that help families & individuals grow in discipleship.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

We are very active Catholics and our faith with God's grace and frequent sacraments sustains us.

We did leave one parish to join another. Reason for leaving was that our former pastor and visiting priests from DeSales on three occasions told the congregation that gay marriage would soon be accepted in the church as a way to save souls.

I communicated directly with my former pastor and admitted the conversation on same sex marriage is difficult, but it is an opportunity to share the church's true and beautiful teaching on marriage - rather than lead the flock to believe the church will soon given in to societal pressure. ...That is when we exited stage right and found another parish home.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

We have encountered priests and clerical figures who do not forthrightly declare the teaching of the Church as true. The most common issue that we see is that priests are unwilling to preach about the Church's teaching on marriage out of fear of alienating others.

The majority of the priests that we encounter rarely, if ever, speak about marriage during homilies. Although I have not personally experienced it, we have had other couples tell us that priests have advised them, in the confessional, that activities that are contrary to the Church's teaching are "not that bad." This is the exact opposite of what is needed. It is quite deflating when you are trying to live out the Church's teaching to find out that priests do not take it seriously.

Additionally, there is little to no support for young married couples (immediately after marriage), young parents, and young families. After marriage, newlyweds have an incredible opportunity: to begin building a domestic church to welcome children and others. Yet our parishes neglect this time of formation. We have tons of programming for children (school-

based), some for teens (but not much), and then between the ages of 30-50 (the most critical time for forming the next generation!) we leave people to their own devices.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

We have never felt supported in the raising of our large family from the point of view of contraception. We were the obvious odd and rare couple who obviously practiced Church teaching in this regard. That makes you the butt of jokes from fellow Catholics. Living this kind of non-contraceptive lifestyle is difficult. A couple seeks support from like minded family members and friends when you can find it. There are great lay leaders, books and spiritual reading as resources but one does not find them at the local parish. If you can find a priest who openly supports Catholic teaching on contraception, all the better but he will usually do that only privately.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

More than anything, I believe that my parish has been neutral in the life of my marriage. Despite this fact, we are happily married for 46 years.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

We have not had a sense that the Church, through its clergy or ministries, offer much or are present to help us by providing practical guidance for ways our faith and its teachings can help us navigate common challenges of married life - communicating effectively, forgiving one another, dealing with financial issues or stresses of busy lives.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

My husband planned to talk to the parish with the pastor about the Love is Our Mission catechism but the pastor backed out saying, "The Church should stay out of the bedroom." As mentioned below, homilies do not address the topics of marriage etc.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

It's difficult to be critical here or say the Church hasn't done enough for us or our marriage when we are so incredibly blessed with the Sacraments that are made possible only through the ordained men who've made tremendous sacrifices for the sake of their priesthoods. A response like, "It's difficult to make it to Confession at our parish, since it is only offered for 30 minutes on a Saturday and the lines are usually very long" would, therefore, seem rather petty. Nevertheless, what is deeply concerning is the rate at which the number of priests is dwindling. The Church, for whatever reason, does not present Holy Orders as an attractive vocation.

Indeed, there seems to be no real emphasis on the Sacraments in general. Priests and Deacons, generally speaking, are too timid from the pulpit, often delivering a stale homily that doesn't challenge congregants to live holy lives (much less inspire a young man to contemplate the priesthood).

Again, there's no time for hurt feelings or resentment. We are truly grateful for our priests. It's just confounding, with all that is going on in our world today, why the leaders in the Church seem more concerned with preserving the status quo rather than challenge whatever Catholics are still attending Mass on Sundays to live more heroic and holy lives at the risk of "losing" parishioners.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

The help is there if we need it. We have been in the same parish for 45 years. In that time, many pastors have touched our lives. I don't ever remember a time when help was not available if we asked.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

There have been times that I have been refused Confession during "off-hours", Saturday's, after Mass, etc. Some pastors try to push inclusive language which hurts family life by trying to whitewash gender roles. In this Archdiocese I have seen very little done to focus on the family specially besides a few conferences here and there. .

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

I don't feel my parish at the present time is deeply concerned about the marriages in our community. There is a lack of fellowship and support.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

As first generation immigrants in this country we truly seek closeness, friendship, and intimacy with our priests as that is how we were both raised. We understand that there are fewer vocations to the priesthood and therefore our priests are strapped for time, but we would love less distance between us and our priests. As a young couple with a baby living amidst a culture supportive of the twisting and perverting of the family image, we need support through friendship in our journey.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

The laity are constantly patronized. This is profoundly alienating, frustrating, and depressing. Priests are too busy and set in their ways to get to know parishioners as persons. There is practically no sense of the kind of vibrant community life that marriages and families need to

flourish. There is little scope for or encouragement of lay initiatives. On the contrary.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

There is an implicit communication that the the Church's teachings are not necessarily good and true, as evidenced by the lack of teaching on marriage and particularly sexuality. I am shocked that Theology of the Body teaching is not being shouted from the roof tops. Teenagers (like my children, but I am helping them) need help, need guidance, and just leaving it to the parents is not good enough. Because the parents (and yes, I know they love and care for their kids) are not formed well in the faith.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

The parish and our school are totally AWOL on these issues. We did nothing for the World Meeting of Families about marriage or sexuality. In over a decade of never missing a Sunday Mass, I have yet to hear my pastor or any of our parochial vicars explain anything about the Church's teaching on marriage, family, or sex. My guess is that they either don't believe it or they are deeply afraid. Maybe two or three times I've heard our pastor say we should be cautious about what we look at on the internet, and maybe two or three times I've heard a retired priest in residence mention contraception in a litany of other issues that merit concern. But nobody has explained why the Church teaches what it teaches. And except for the time a friend and me volunteered to teach a "Theology of the Body for Middle Schoolers" after hours at our PREP program (which got no official support from the pulpit), nothing has happened in over a decade at my parish to form young people on these issues. Meanwhile we blithely marry cohabiting couples and lose our post-confirmation teens who are convinced the Church has nothing to say to them. At the parish level, they are more or less correct.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

We rarely hear a homily on the realities of marriage.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

I haven't experienced the church as absent necessarily, but in times of stress in my marriage, I don't really think of them as a resource for us. Part of this is knowing that I am from a big parish and there are surely many needs greater than mine (I don't want to bother my pastor with these kinds of things), and the other part is that my pastor often speaks in very abstract terms that can be difficult to relate to, and I'm not sure how helpful he would really be.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I always felt I belonged in my Parish, but now I feel more often than not, I do not have a place. I am going to copy and paste from the section below that I have already written -

Having struggled with infertility and not having living children yet, sometimes we feel we do not have a place in the parish. For example there are youth and young adult groups and family fun days, but we often feel like we don't fit into either. Sometimes we even have gotten remarks that we are not a family because we do not have children. These comments are very challenging to handle, and sometimes I begin to believe them. I am not exactly sure what can be done. I have been praying and thinking about it, and will continue to do so.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

We have been to counseling several times. It's difficult to find Catholic counselors, and the only marriage retreats offered seem to be either really cheesy or Retrouvaille, which advertises itself as though it's only for couples going through infidelity or something else catastrophic. We could really use help for everyday problems and the stress of living together while raising young children.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

I am a divorced Catholic and initially felt as if I was an "outsider". I was embraced by the order of nuns " Sisters of Jesus Our Hope" in New Jersey and was personally welcomed back into the church which set me on my way back to living my Catholic faith more fully.

As a remarried Catholic - (my husband as well) - the annulment process was for both of us a time of great healing. We did have to face many families issues surrounding the special needs of blended families and through prayer and God's grace have been able to navigate these family struggles which directly impact married life. An active sacramental life as instructed by many clergy is what got us through.

The local parish through all this has been "absent". I would like to see more support for blended families, life after divorce, and individual people who can mentor and journey with married couples, so we do not feel alone.

Married couples need small groups which share all their struggles and can listen and learn from one another. I do not see the church or our parish moving in this direction yet.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

I have experienced a mostly neutral influence from the Church for many years, with little personal involvement at the parish level. We kept our marriage vows quite well, but without much help from the Church.

Montgomery County, Widowed

One area that is absent or unsupportive is the opportunities for Reconciliation. I have not found

one parish in my community that has more than a Saturday afternoon time and that is not very convenient for most of the community. I think the church is depriving its members of this opportunity for Grace by limiting the availability of an open confessional. I know most parishes say you can make an appointment, but that is a hard step for someone to take especially if they haven't been to confession in a long time. Offering confession before or after work on a weekday or on weekends 15-20 minutes before/after mass would have an immeasurable impact on the life of the church.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

In my opinion, I would consider the Church and my parish in particular as a neutral influence on my married life.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

We have suffered the loss of 3 children due to miscarriages and I feel there is a void a lack of support. Lack of visibility of the priest at my parish.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

There was a time when our marriage was struggling. At one point when in the confessional, the priest actually suggested that maybe Jesus was leading me to separation of my marriage. When I asked our pastor to speak with me privately, I told him I was having trouble discerning what I was told in Confession, he hesitated to speak to me. He did not want to intervene in what another priest had said to me. This was one of the most difficult times of our marriage. I actually thought Jesus was leading me to separation, and the lack of empathy and understanding from our pastor was so discouraging. Was this an example of clericalism? Buddies sticking together? I don't know but it sure felt like it. Thankfully our Lord is good and I am not one to give up hope. And I got much inspiration form Fulton Sheen and his book Three to Get Married

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I believe that if I ever sought help through my pastor, it would be given. He is very generous with his time and would certainly make time to counsel us if we made the request.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

When we were engaged 39 years ago, we were required to attend a Pre-Cana class, but it didn't adequately prepare us for married life. I wish we had been taught the teachings of the Church in Humana Vitae and I wish that we could have had Theology of the Body back then. When I miscarried my 6th pregnancy, we had been very open to life, the doctor recommended my husband have a vasectomy because I had 2 precarious prior deliveries with hemorrhaging and

had gotten pregnant even though we were practicing the rhythm method of family planning. My husband went to our parish priest who said it would be all right to do so since we had four children and this pregnancy could risk my life. However, after the procedure my husband looked upon me totally different. Gone was my husband's respect for our fruitfulness and I became merely an object for his pleasure and use. My eyes were opened and I realized this after hearing Christopher West speak at Mary Mother of the Redeemer Parish on JPPI's TOB. The unity in our marriage has been gone for the past 10 years. A nun, a counselor I went to for help, recommended I leave the marriage. I have remained married but I don't know how to heal the hurt or fix things.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years



QUESTION 3

In what ways does the local Church of Philadelphia need to be reformed to better serve married couples in living faithfully to their vows? Please be specific, even offering suggestions of what a parish, school or Catholic organization might do.

The church could have more recognition of marriages. Non married couples have become such a new thing that married couples sometimes go unrecognized.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

I think that we need to be mindful of who we choose to put in positions of leadership. For example, the pastor at ---- in ---- seems very disgruntled and annoyed that he has to handle business needs of the parish. Over the 15 years that we have been active members I have seen a great shift in him and the parish on a whole. Most recently when my husband and I voiced our opinion on the way that communications to the parishioners were being handled, we were told to "find a new parish". This was shocking to say the least, especially in today's day and age.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

The Parish could sponsor social events for couples - wine and cheese, dances, etc. where faithful couples could get to know each other and find supported friends.

We have found the Marriage course (AlphaUSA.org) to be an extremely useful tool to support marriages - it consists of a meal for 2 served in a semi romantic setting - home or parish - viewing a video which raises important topics , shows interviews with couples who have experienced growth through the course and gives the participating couples time to talk with each other, as well as providing books for them to review and do "home work".

Social time after mass could be offered with encouragement from the pastor - name tag Sundays could be held periodically so mass goers could become more familiar with each other.

We have found that we need to initiate many of these programs but the support and regular encouragement by the clergy is extremely helpful.

Socials for young Adults and for Families could be held - maybe monthly - rotating Young adults, Couples - families. Currently our facilities are used almost exclusively for sports.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Perhaps the church could offer a yearly retreat (held on-site) for married couples to reflect upon

their marriage and their vows. Couples who have been married for 20+ years could be invited to speak about their lives together, specifically the obstacles they've endured and the reasons why they remain so steadfast to one other.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

They should create intercessory groups for married couples and pastors should bring this theme into homilies more.

Philadelphia, Married, 11-25 years (translated from Spanish)

We need to learn how to work with our weaknesses in order to become one body. We need education about the stages of marriage. Offer occasional spiritual retreats to strengthen what has been learned. For children: have a study program with the goal of personal growth in virtue and morality.

Philadelphia, Married, 26+ years (translated from Spanish)

Possibly to help (if possible) families that don't have money to pay for parochial school.

Bucks County, Married, 26+ years (translated from Spanish)

It would be wonderful to have a ministry in our parish dedicated to supporting the ongoing formation of married couples. Not just support in times of crisis, but for every day life. Childcare would be essential though for my husband and I to attend any events

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Offer marriage retreats every so many months so everyone can get to it. It's very important for couples to have a deeper life with their spouse and God.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

*More opportunities for family events (that include young children).
More opportunities for husbands to be involved and be more exposed to church teachings
Opportunities for mini precana (post cana?) experiences. these could cover a range of topics such as NFp, parenting, etc.*

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

I don't know how to deal with this, but babysitting to attend parish events is a regular issue for

younger families open to life without babysitting-aged or driving children. Perhaps Parish sponsored babysitting training (Red Cross I think) and then somehow setting up a network through the parish. My kids get more babysitting requests than we can handle, and often people are willing to drive quite far to pick them up.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

A Saturday night date night marriage retreat for a few hours, 7-9. Who among us who have children can go to a weekend retreat? Not someone who is taking care of their children's needs before themselves, and that is what most good parents do.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

I'd love to see more available, affordable (for the average couple) teaching on the Theology of the Body. It's THE ANSWER, THE SOLUTION, to most of what ails marriages, families.. the WORLD! If more could learn it and live it, I can only IMAGINE!

A beautiful young couple in our parish, very knowledge in our faith, is holding a seminar/ pot-luck dinner to discuss Strangers in a Strange Land by Chaput and The Benedict Option by Dreher later this month. What a WONDERFUL , simple, joyful evening we'll spend together! AND we'll be discussing something SO relevant to "modern" Catholic marriages and families

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I think every Church should have not just pre-cana education, but also ongoing marriage development opportunities and if these programs aren't available at a Church, then that Church should be able to provide information of a nearby affiliate Church that does have that type of regular offering.

My parents often referenced their "marriage encounter" group that they were actively engaged in throughout the early stages of their marriage. My sister and her husband attend a monthly "cana date night" at their church. These are programs to develop strong faith based marriages and I without them, too often marriages are failing.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

I think many in the church are confused about the church's teaching on contraception. There desperately needs to be more catechesis on this topic, preferably from the pulpit where the masses can hear it. I understand that many priests shy away from this topic for fear of turning people away, but I think the benefits outweigh the risks.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

1. *Talk about the availability of NFP workshops from the altar or in the bulletin, but also the joy of having a large family with the theology and scripture that supports it!*
2. *Offer evening Masses daily (rather than have two Masses in the morning.) With both parents working this would be an opportunity for all the family to come to a daily Mass. Perhaps have a reception or pizza party every three or four months after Mass to build community.*
3. *Put a print copy of the Archbishop's weekly column in the Sunday bulletin and read it when appropriate and always refer to it from the altar.*
4. *Teach and explain the Church's Teaching from the pulpit on receiving the Eucharist worthily.*
5. *Promote and teach from the pulpit the necessity and the benefits and joy of going to Confession spiritually and psychologically.*
6. *Be sure that all the Teachers in the Catholic schools are not only Catholic but witness the Faith in their lives. We all know that the armament of Truth that God puts in little children helps them to pick up hypocrisy.*

Montgomery County, Widowed

Making older, long-married couples or individual spouses available for conversations to younger, shorter-married couples or individual spouses.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

There needs to be more programs like the Cana Date Nights.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Parish priests need to stay true to the Catholic faith and not feel like they are going to offend parishioners. They need to encourage couples to pray more together.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

We think opportunities for successful married couples to share their lived experiences with other younger or newly married couples could be impactful. I think having Ministry focused on mentoring couples in parishes might be helpful. These ministers should be married persons, not clergy or professed people who actually are living married lives. Consider providing the formation/studies needed to serve in this ministry - it should be funded as a job just like a Pastoral Minister, Parish Administrator or Manager position.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I think this survey is a great start. There are so many challenges in the culture these days that it's hard to listen. Honestly, I am not so sure about the challenges facing "normal" couples, I only know my own. I think it's good to de-stigmatize challenges in marriage so that people don't feel the need to appear better than they are. And I think priests should be prepared to expect that some people's marriages have serious problems resulting from mental illness, personal history, etc. There should be some preparation and awareness that marriages with abusive or other difficulties cannot be handled in the same way as other problems, even though priests cannot and should not be expected to handle such problems themselves, if they could be attuned to them, it would be a great help.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I happen to be a recovering alcoholic. God gave me the gift of sobriety back in 1979 and has kept me sober since. In the last 38 years I have seen alcoholism come out of the closet and become recognized as the disease that it is and shed much the stigma that it once held. Today's closet condition in the Catholic Church is the marriage in trouble. It is hard to admit when one needs help, and even harder when society considers the troubled marriage as a failure. Truly ironic (and pretty sad if true) that it is probably more acceptable in our society to be divorced than to admit to struggling and needing help. How do we remove THAT stigma? TALK ABOUT IT! Ask "recovering" couples to share their experience, strength and hope. Ensure that every priest in the Archdiocese has a clear understanding of programs like Marriage Encounter and Retrouvaille. And that they know the "symptoms" to listen for, and where to direct their parishioners.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I would love to see a program that is offered in a regional way, maybe once a month as an example in the evening for an hour or two, for married couples to know the faith in a deeper way. Whether it is lectures specifically for married couples or speakers that can help such as Catholic based psychology for raising a family or inspirational talks to remind us that we are not alone - that we are all one in the Church.

It would be a nice thing if babysitting could be offered since a we have children and finding a babysitter is tough!

Even though my children attend Catholic school, it is still hard to find families that put faith first. In my parish I know of maybe a few families out of the hundreds that attend. It is nice to make connections with people that hold dear the Church and It's teachings. It would be wonderful to meet more that feel the same way!

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Be approachable and available to help out when needed. Compassion is a HUGE factor in dealing with couples having marital problems.

The once-per-week homily is the biggest dose of Catholicism we receive, so when scripture readings have a marriage focus, the homily should be marriage focused. This is quite rare.

In addition, we would welcome the occasional opportunity to attend a single-day session at our local church with a focus on marriage. I realize the Archdiocese offers the occasional marriage retreat, but we are not inclined to be away for several days, or to go to an offsite location. The sessions need to be both targeted (newly married, new parents, parents of teens, new empty nesters, senior couple with ailing spouses, etc.) and very, very practical. A session that puts too much focus on the emotional aspects of marriage is not what my husband and I need. We often need practical, professional advice from trained councilors.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Programs need to be available at the Parish level. For example we have Lenten and Advent sharing groups. Why not groups related to married life. Appropriate readings and material for reflection would be needed.

We also need clear guidance at the parish level about what constitutes a licit Catholic marriage. The divorced who have not remarried and in a state of grace need to be encouraged to partake of the sacraments. Some think they cannot.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Easier knowledges of faithful Catholic therapists (via catholictherapists.com)

Use the Beloved Series to have marriage enrichment programs around the archdiocese

Have programs for mixed marriages (Catholic married to non-Catholic)

Have more programs (even social ones) for parents of young children (esp for parents who don't send their kids to Catholic School)

Have more scholarships to bring down the cost of Catholic School (esp for practicing Catholics)

Help more parishes to purchase programs like FORMED.org so families can provide Catholic content at home for their kids and also learn themselves

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Read Strangers in a Strange Land by the Archbishop and DO IT. For goodness sake, get back to faith in the crucified and risen Lord and believe and preach the good news. Stop watering down the already unrecognizable remnants of the faith. Get the priests back to Jesus and embrace/model the crucifixion that results when you're conformed to Christ. Make the faith sacrificial and inspiring, not a constant whine just to be nice and tolerant of everything and

affirm everyone in their okayness. We need to stop acting as if the road to life is broad and easy and most everyone finds it. I don't recall the Lord saying that. We can't force anyone to follow Christ, but we can do it ourselves and let God do the rest. TEACH THE FAITH.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

As I mentioned above, my parish offers a family retreat, faith sharing and a Valentine's Mass/dinner that have been an enormous encouragement to us. Perhaps other parishes could do the same.

Society mocks Sacramental marriage and everything it stands for, so any program that would encourage and support married couples would be welcomed and so needed.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I think just a more friendly demeanor would be helpful.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I believe that all parishes should offer a program whether in their own parish or neighboring parish, to help people develop and deepen their relationship with Jesus as THIS is foundational to everything else. The Church exists to make disciples of Jesus. I am referring to programs such as "Discovering Christ", "Christ Renews His Parish-Welcome", "Catholics Reaching Out", or the like. A vast majority of practicing Catholics do not have a relationship with Jesus or know Him. If they don't know Him, they will not be passionate about sharing Jesus with their families and children or embracing, following and sharing the teachings of the Catholic faith. Pastors should strongly urge all members of their parish families to attend a program like this as it can revive a parish as well as restore family life centered in Jesus. These programs should be offered at convenient times for parents as they have so many obligations with work and family.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

1) Making pre-Cana longer than a weekend or day-long event. Couples who wish to be married in the Church should have to meet with a priest several times.

2) During pre-Cana, do not sugarcoat the Church's teaching on marriage, NFP, and other difficult topics. Make the meaning of the vows apparent.

3) Priests need to become more aware of the Church's teaching regarding NFP and they need to preach about it frequently at Mass.

4) Catechesis of the current generation of young parents (ages 25-40) who are the children of parents and students of teachers who mostly neglected catechesis.

5) *Parishes need to prioritize fellowship amongst young Catholic couples and families. Currently, support networks for this generation are non-existent from a parish perspective. Almost all networks amongst serious Catholics in this generation DO NOT use the parish as the primary means of connecting. That is a shame as there is great value in a) belonging to a parish and b) helping to build community there. Every parish in the Archdiocese should be required to spend \$100/week on a basic coffee/donuts fellowship activity after Mass, specifically designed to connect young Catholic families.*

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

I think mentorship by an older, Godly couple could really help young couples.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

It may be helpful for parishes to bring in speakers on the Sacrament. Also, Days or Evenings of Reflection need to be put into place. Any events, including the Mass, that would celebrate our example of fidelity, especially through times of trouble, would be appreciated.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

I think every parish should know about AbbeyFest because it is such a beautiful and unique opportunity for families to come together in a fantastic, joy-filled Catholic atmosphere to enjoy worship, music, and plenty of fun. It is such a wonderful day and a true blessing to all those who attend. As a family we look forward to it every single year.

This isn't about reform but as a Catholic in the diocese who strives to live and bring up my family within the context of the Church and according to her doctrines I have been very encouraged by the Archbishop's willingness to speak out frequently on hard topics, affirming and explaining the Church's teachings often on contentious issues. We know we are living a life that is entirely countercultural and it is such a boost to us knowing that our Bishop is "in our corner."

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

We believe that the Church of Philadelphia needs to offer some specific support vehicles for married couples who are struggling to live out the Sacrament of Marriage, maybe counseling and support groups for those married couple who are struggling financially and in their relationships.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I feel because I was pro active in marriage prep that I received an awesome preparation and transformation. If a couple does not advocate for themselves or is lukewarm in regards to the

faith they are not required to do the Formed survey or even attend a Pre-Cana. They jump in without even knowing what they do not know. Also there is no follow up. After marriage there is not an attempt by individual churches or the Archdiocese to touch base with the couples, get them involved offer anything to them. There are no personal invitations or even groups within the church that minister to married couples.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

I think that the Church's teaching on openness to life should be preached more boldly in the parishes. We receive strong and honest homilies about the Church's pro-life mission but never about the dangers of birth control. My personal reversion was brought about after I enrolled my daughter in a conservative Catholic school. The families there were plainly open to life and not contracepting. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit so strongly being around these families and fell in love with the truth. I wonder why our parochial schools don't all offer a course in Theology of the Body as their sex education program. I don't think it is realistic to assume that girls and boys are being taught the fundamental principles behind NFP at home. I think that the sad majority of Catholic couples are using contraception.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The Church should be pro-active in offering marriage fulfillment workshops that target married couples of all ages and stages.

Mentor programs - Pairing of newly married with long term couples.

Couples faith sharing programs.

Resources for troubled marriages.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Could local parish churches remain open more often for adoration and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament?

When priests are preaching about mercy, could they make themselves more available for confession? Our parish, Our Lady of Lourdes, is an excellent example of very frequent opportunities for confession.

Also, within parishes, some form of a regular (monthly?) marriage building ministry, run by the laity for the laity, where couples gather in small-ish groups to share, pray for one another's intentions, and receive formation in the vocation to marriage according to a diocese-wide curriculum (for quality control). Having volunteers to provide childcare could be a huge help in enabling couples to attend, and wine/dessert or some special food/drink could help to set it apart and make it feel significant and special.

Have obligatory continued education for priests on this subject, with specific examples of how the Church's teaching on marriage can be tied in to specific lectionary readings. Homilies are the only time when you can speak to a decent amount of parishioners.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

There are some homilies which do touch on family life, many in fact but after a while they can blur together due to a lack of conviction for our Church's teachings.

Having theology of the body workshops might be a big help . People need to know what it means to be a man and a woman and to be married as Christ married to church .

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

The pulpit needs to speak on this more regularly. They could try to tie sacred scripture with the current reality of life. Not downplay the ease of marriage; but rather it takes hard work, full commitment, and sacrifice of oneself constantly.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

I think couples are increasingly feeling disconnected from the Church. Maybe what's needed first are opportunities for fellowship -- for individualistic people who are living separately from their neighbors and so who have little support just to come together and get to know other Catholics and make friends with them. Initially, no agendas -- no catechesis, no readings; just friendship. And see where things go from there. That means that there has to be something to draw people together -- good coffee, a movie, etc. Above all, families are feeling disconnected from each other. After building a trusting community of faithful people, there will be opportunities to learn and help people where they need it.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Because we live in a culture which tries to tear apart our marriages we need more activities such as retreats, talks for married couples, and gatherings where married couples young and old can meet. Our friends are not getting married or having babies, therefore we need our church pastors to bring married couples together. It was incredible to witness seeing the hundreds of married couples renewing their vows several weeks ago, it would have been even more wonderful to have a place to enjoy each other in community through a potluck. So we ask our dear priests to simply bring couples their married or whose children they christened together.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

First, start with evangelizing our own clergy as to why these issues matter. Too many pastors are nice go along guys. Ongoing theological formation for ordained clergy, teachers and bureaucrats would be a start.

Second, stop giving young kids coloring sheets, or telling youth to watch FORMED, and calling it catechesis. Sell some real estate and invest some serious money in hiring orthodox catechists and adult faith formation leaders.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Mentoring is an effective way to assist couples. In these transient days, they may not have their families of origin close, so connecting a newly married couple with another couple in the parish who are married 20 years or more could be helpful.

More education about the Sacrament of Marriage- days of renewal, opportunities to learn effective communication skills... Support for couples in crisis.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

In a society that otherwise does not seem to place much value on marriage as a vocation and life-long commitment, I need my Church to be my "safety net": a community that supports and strengthens marriage. I feel that the current mentality is that marriage is the "given", and a lot of time and energy is spent on wagging fingers at divorce, same-sex marriage, and cohabitation. But what about those of us who have already committed to marriage, and are trying very hard to not only keep it in tact but to have it flourish and grow? I don't think the Church does much to really celebrate, reaffirm, or renew that commitment. Homilies need to better address the reality of marriage and the struggles we live every day. Time should be spent celebrating and honoring the vocation of marriage. Renewing baptismal vows are important, but I'd love to see regular, ongoing opportunities to renew marital vows too. Social outlets with other married couples, family events, childcare assistance (have the parish youth group serve as babysitters so that parents can gather in fellowship!), service opportunities, and Marriage Encounters can all help strengthen marriages. I'd love to even see mini-Marriage Encounters, for those who cannot arrange childcare or a weekend away for other reasons.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Advertise! Pamphlets, blogs, website, posters in churches. Our local parish is wonderful...but if there are any services offered in any way the church does not get the word out. It seems that is all hidden not easily accessible. I was in another church in another county and they had information everywhere. Bulletin, pamphlets, and from the pulpit tell what was going on before and after mass. Again if you don't know what is offered you are not going to seek the help that is offered.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I'm not certain as to what can be done to help married couples. The high rate of divorce is evidence of a problem. Most people I know rarely mention asking for help from the parish or the clergy. We need more parish level programs for couples and definitely better preparation prior to marriage. From my own personal experience, I'm concerned that hardly anyone is listening or wants to listen. If I had a problem I wouldn't be interested in a diocese wide program and that seems to be the direction that has been taken. We spend too much time hearing about annulments and not enough prior to reaching that stage.

Montgomery County, Widowed

One area I see lacking is with marriage support after the wedding day.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

The Church of Philadelphia could do more to follow newly married couples through the early years of their marriages. Pre-Cana has great value but, much like what happens with those welcomed into the Church through RCIA, there is little follow-through or little continued support. Stuff happens and couples need to know that the support they received in preparing for marriage exists on some level beyond the wedding day.

Parishes or other organizations could schedule a few social gatherings a year for those married up through 5 years with table fellowship, maybe a guest speaker, and perhaps the Pre-Cana team being present.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

My parish does provide an Engaged Encounter for couples preparing for marriage. In my opinion, our parish does nothing to remain connected with these couples, maybe 1, 2, 5, 10 years beyond the wedding. Couples may find this helpful.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

So many ways - as I noted above - periodic daily seminars on topics that could be helpful to married couples - (finances, conflict resolution strategies, spirituality as a couple/with children - basically similar topics to what we do in Pre-Cana (we do serve on a Pre-Cana team) but giving it to married couples as a "refresher"!).

Another suggestion could be to have "mentors" for newly weds - a more "seasoned" couple that would walk with a newly wed couple for a specific period (TBD) of time post wedding. Maybe periodically to meet with a larger group (annually, each 6 months, etc) where specific topics could be addressed.

Again - I highly suggest the Diocese get more active in our Teams of our Lady groups to

understand what we do/ how they help. Maybe have parishes more actively promote/recruit new members.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Take some lessons from our Protestant brothers -- I have two sisters who have gone over! --

They have simple monthly (sometimes weekly) family dinners -- mostly spaghetti & pizza -- where families can meet / share / connect... And these connections turn into support groups of sort, for times of need, streets, trouble.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I think that parish priests could preach more homilies specifically on living the marriage vocation. Probably most of the people attending Mass will be, are, or were married, so it would be very relevant but I don't remember the last homily I heard on this.

At the colleges and Newman centers in the Archdiocese preaching on marriage could be an important means to prepare young people for marriage. This was done at the college I attended elsewhere in the country but I have not seen it at either of the campus ministries I have been to in Philadelphia yet.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

First of all, the teaching of the meaning of the sacrament of Matrimony could be taught much more right in the Sunday homily whenever it's appropriate. We need to understand this sacrament better and how Our Lord works through this in order to appreciate it and desire it.

I think it should be referenced to constantly throughout the year, because the media and culture are bombarding us with the opposite.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

*Opportunities for *wholesome* interaction would be wonderful! We have attended parish picnics with excessively loud music (more often than not offensive lyrics) and have felt very out of place because these are influences which we avoid for our children. I would love to see supportive groups for dads, moms, and children to encourage faith-filled relationships with other serious Catholics. Perhaps, Bible study, or book clubs with break out groups for parents, teens, and children, with baby sitting services for little ones. Bowling nights, ice/roller skating nights for Catholic families would be great, too.*

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

QUESTION 4

How has the Church supported you in lovingly accepting and raising the children that God has given you? Please be specific, using examples from your parish, school, or other Catholic organization. (Names of people or institutions will not be included in the published document.)

Spiritual direction with Fr. Bruce Lewandowski and the Pastoral Familiar with Fr. Rafael Vargas has been a help. I believe we can invite couples with 5, 10, 15 and 20 years or more of experience to help us. Create a kind of network of support to help couples in different stages of marriage.

-Philadelphia, Married, 0-10 years (translated from Spanish)

Our former pastor, now deceased, steadfastly supported us through raising five children, now adults. They attended the local parochial school from pre-school through 8th grade and all went on to graduate catholic high schools and various colleges, one with a graduate degree and one working on one. Three of them went to catholic colleges.

Our former pastor never charged us for more than 2.5 children even though we had five in the school at once for several years. The current pastor also was generous in his support. Sadly the school closed in 2012 after our children were out.

Our former pastor even helped us find baby sitters when the children were little. I did not fully express my gratitude to him although I visited him before he passed away.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

We have an adult child with multiple disabilities. Our Monsignor often inquires about his well being. This year has been a particularly challenging one regarding our son's health and Monsignor Gentili and our associate vicar, Father Ianelli have kept him in their prayers. We do have a welcoming parish at OLG and I place my concerns in God's hands.

This being said, I have wondered if a local ministry might be established to gather other families who may struggle with their faith during frequent tests of strength, challenges to their faith and emotional upheaval when raising these children, who are indeed special blessings to us all.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

The Church has been very helpful with this. I am fully aware that Catholics are supposed to be open to life, should not use contraception, etc. However, one thing that I think needs to be improved is that there needs to be more Catholic doctors who help with natural family planning techniques. We meet with a woman at the Shrine of Czestochowa, and she is wonderful.

However, she's the only person we're aware of in the area, and it's about a 45 minute drive for us to meet with her. It's also a bit expensive, so sometimes we'd like a refresher class, but we decide to save the money. It'd be great if there were numerous doctors and if this information was more readily available to the public.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

I have had to switch from my too liberal parish to more traditional parishes to get the support needed in understanding my faith life better. It depends on the priests, some who like to be "liked" as opposed to telling the truths of the faith.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Very good. We homeschool and the DREs over the years have been very reasonable in their requirements.

CYO is great - Cross country and track are especially great because it is the same practice for all age levels at once. Prayers are always a part of it.

Although our local parish has offered TOB for teens, we unfortunately have not been able to get the schedule to work, but it is great, and if possible at some point in the future want to take advantage of it.

Some priests make a point of singling out our family as positive example for getting everyone up and to Mass every Sunday.

Fr. Onunwe at OLMC is very good in his homilies in making a point of addressing how to live as a Christian family.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I felt that the church embraced my pregnancies with joy and support. Way back when priests actually were able to do home visitation, our parish priest blessed our new home. I then informed him that a child was expected, and he offered another blessing to me and my unborn baby. Once born each of our daughters (3) had beautiful and solemn baptisms.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

We have enjoyed our children participating in CYO Sports and Speech at ----- Church in -----.

St. Charles hosts Borromeo Days and QuoVadis which have been wonderful!

Every year, we participate in a weeklong vacation at the Apostolate for Family Consecration - Catholic Familyland.

We have been blessed by monthly Festival of Praise at St. Norbert Church as well as their Youth Group.

Our family looks forward to 'Abbey Fest' at Daylesford Abbey.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The mandatory pre-Jordan class was a great way for the Church to teach us of the blessing of a child and how to raise our child as a child of God.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Our children attend our parish school, where the exemplary principal encourages and schools the children in prayer and reverence. Moments of silent prayer and meditation are the daily norm in our children's lives because of her example. Although the families in the parish have differing degrees of commitment to the school's Catholic mission, we have felt supported, loved, and encouraged, by pastors, our principal, and teachers who want the gift of faith to be nurtured above all in the children's formation.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Our kids' school, Regina Angelorum Academy, is the single greatest influence in our lives. The lessons of faith learned and practiced there help support our family.

Also, an annual retreat I attend at the Malvern House as well as ManUP Philly are great for replenishing my spirit.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Catholic education is the biggest support to parents. Unfortunately many can't afford it. More should be done to help families provide a Catholic education.

Bulletin could have tip section for marriage and parenting. The Archdiocese could create the tips and have them included in every parishes bulletin, website, etc.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Our priests have always been supportive of our choice to have a larger family (5 children). Programs such as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Regina Angelorum Academy have been pivotal in helping us raise our children in the faith. We're sorry to read that these examples will not be included in the report. Our feeling is that this type of political correctness

is exactly the reason why our beloved archdiocese is struggling to effectively support persons and institutions that are changing lives for the better while allowing subpar or poor situations to flourish.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

I also attend a moms group at another parish close by. There are about 20 -30 moms that go (during the day) and babysitting is offered! It has been a tremendous blessing to meet moms that put God first in their family life. To hear that we all have the same struggles. We also have had guest speakers that were inspirational. I can not tell you how much I appreciate this ministry.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

We are truly blessed. Our Directors of Religious Education have been amazing. Our Catholic Youth Organization has had periods of tremendous spiritual influence.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I feel that our children are welcomed and cherished at our parish. What is a bit unfortunate is the lack of focus on faith from parents at our kid's Catholic school. It is more of a country club atmosphere vs a Catholic environment. Events for parents are social drinking outings - wouldn't it be great for a social event to be focused on service, prayer or otherwise?

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Society tells us that children are a burden, whereas the Lord sees them as a blessing.

Our parish has parish picnics, a family retreat at Malvern, VBS and other programs that encourage parents/families in raising children.

What i would like to see, in addition to these wonderful, but once a year programs is something more frequent- fellowship with coffee and donuts after Mass, or family-related speakers and resources brought in- that would show support to families in a religious context so they don't need to turn to secular sources.

Also, something as simple load words of praise and affirmation in the weekly bulletin with phone numbers of Catholic resources for families would be welcomed and an encouragement to parents.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Both the Parish Church and the local Catholic school have fostered an environment supportive

of bearing and raising children. The Parish is, perhaps, the last bastion of communal family life.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Sports has been great thru our parish for my kids to excel athletically, form relationships and have an identity with our parish.

For years I home schooled and for many of them I was allowed to home school for religion which I was very grateful for. Was disappointed when I had to send them to Prep. Religious education was one of the reasons why we home schooled. Now our youngest is at our parish school and I'm grateful for the religious education he receives thru school.

I'm doing Walking With Purpose in my parish and it has been a wonderful support in my faith life as a wife and mother. I think it has helped me in my family life. I also love the community it has built in our parish. Best thing I've done in a long time.

I also loved the Mother's of Young Children group we had years ago. I still have friendships from that group. I did one at my parish and a neighboring parish and that was unbelievably helpful and supportive as a stay at home mom.

The principal at our school writes a weekly letter that is beautiful, inspiring and is always seeking to lovingly turn us to the Lord. So grateful for her!

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Our church has given us the opportunity to keep our children extremely involved. They have been sacristan, alter services, lectors, and choir members. They have served funerals, weddings, daily and Sunday Masses. They have had the blessings of being able to attend camps and retreats.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

We have always lived in a parish that offered the sacraments and religious education for all members of our family. The Priests were always available and present in all activities we chose to be active in.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

We do not have children, but through the challenging time learning of and understanding our infertility, friends in our parish community were a strong source of love and support through their prayers, enrolling us in league of St. Gerard Majella, and being present when we needed someone to talk to.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Our parish is very supportive in helping us raise the children that God blessed us with. Our priests go out of their way to make our children feel loved and welcomed. One priest in particular, Father Arechabala invested a tremendous amount of his personal time in catechizing my nephews and bringing them into the the Catholic Church.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

We sent our children to the parish school which was helpful to instill Catholic values. As our older two children reached high school, there was not much of a youth group scene. A new Parochial Vicar (Fr. Szparagowski) came when my middle child was in 7th or 8th grade. Fr. S had (has) a true love and concern for all and related so well to everyone of all ages, especially the youth. He would joke back and forth and encourage each child. My youngest two got to know him well also. Between altar serving, seeing Fr at Mass and having him in the classroom, these younger three formed a strong bond with Fr. His encouragement was (is) priceless in guiding our children in the faith. About a year or two after Fr. came, we also had a new Youth Minister. Kurt Z. does a wonderful job with the youth (and all of us for that matter). The Steubenville trips have also helped my children grow closer to God.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Do not have children but as I reflect on when I was a child myself that my parents could not afford to keep us in Catholic School. Even with assistance Catholic School has become an institution for the rich kids that can afford it and the poor poor kids that can receive scholarships. Middle class in between kids can't go.

Also the teachers in Catholic schools are borderline Catholic. I know people who have pulled their kids out of school because the teachers themselves were not practicing, were living in immoral relationships etc. The passing on of the faith has been reduced to what is in the textbook.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

The Church has made a Catholic education affordable to us. We are a low income family. Our extended family is not Catholic. Giving our children a Catholic education and surrounded them with fellowship is vital to our mission to raise our children to become saints. Our Parish gave us money when our second child was born. Our school community was extremely supportive by throwing us a "Shower of Roses" baby shower. Everyone offered to watch our oldest daughter during labor as we had no family members to help with that. Our school community creates clubs, play dates, mother's prayer meetings and homeschool co-ops for preschoolers.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Again, the Church provides the sacraments and sound teaching, for which we're eternally grateful.

The biggest helps for our family life over the last 3 decades have been lay initiatives like Couple-to-Couple league, the charismatic renewal, theology of the body, the pro-life movement, the home-schooling movement, Catholics United for the Faith, Communion and Liberation, etc. Those have given us ways of meeting and forming friendships with like-minded, faithful Catholic couples and families.

We're also indebted to the good priests and laymen at Devon Prep, and to the lay organist at our parish, who gives us beautiful music for our liturgies.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Church has supported us in having a Catholic school that we could have our children attend that was not too expensive.

It also supported with Catholic youth programs - specifically the Challenge girls (not girl scouts) and the sponsoring of mother daughter fertility education programs run by the Friends of FertilityCare.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

My Church's Director of Religious Education is so visibly committed to supporting parents in lovingly accepting and raising the children God has given us-- she is inspiring and encouraging in so many real-life ways. She is in tune with the challenges inherent to parenting in this day and age. She develops programs and opportunities for families to connect on a deeper level. And she is doing wonderful things with our children in our parish PREP program. She is truly a blessing to us! I feel that the Church has also been supportive of my children's involvement in Mass and in service to the parish, which is helping them feel connected and "at home" in our parish. Helping to weave the Church into the fabric of their being and their experiences as children will make attending Mass part and parcel of who they are, rather than just something they do.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The Cape May Marianist Retreat Center family summer retreats were the #1 blessing in our family growing up. Their model absolutely bears investigation and emulation. Families live together in CATHOLIC COMMUNITY for a week, and are supported with child care and other "respite" elements for tired parents as kids are engaged by teen and young adult leaders, who in turn are learning how to be leaders in the Church. Families take the time to talk about things like their family mission, name and affirm the gifts of each family member (in public!), and parents renew their wedding vows in front of their children and the community. This was our "second spiritual home" as a family. I cannot say enough about it. (And credit it for the strength of my own and my siblings' faith today, as many of our peers fell away.)

I have seen the Teams of Our Lady model be very helpful to married couples. Any model that

combines fellowship with ongoing faith formation is a win. Young married couples need mentors, too. The Churches TEACHINGS are beautiful. They are not often shared or taught, but they are beautiful once discovered.

St. Norbert's (Paoli) and St. Anastasia's (Newtown Square) have a thriving couple-to-couple mentorship Pre-Cana option. I know people who have participated and loved it. Young people want role models! They crave guidance (often their own families are unhelpful, or anti-Catholic!)

Chester County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

Formation given by strong Catholic Leaders in Opus Dei and Regnum Christi - not afraid to provide the "truths" of the Catholic Faith.

Most parishes and Catholic Schools we have belonged to are "afraid" to speak the truth for fear of loosing enrollment and parishioners.

I wish I had found Opus Dei or Regnum Christi Lay Leaders earlier in my life.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Parents Prayer at our school has been a place where I've learned to lovingly accept and raise my children in the faith because of the other moms who attend.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been very helpful in forming my children in the faith and helping me see the faith through new eyes, not just textbook religion.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Our priests often address parenting issues in their homilies as they relate to the Gospel reading. Specific topics that have been covered include homosexuality and addiction. I know that my children are always welcome at my church no matter what. We also send care packages to students away at college and may even have a special Mass to bless them as they leave at the end of the summer. We also bless new drivers once a year.

Bucks County, Divorced

We discovered and joined a movement called Teams of Our Lady (TeamsofOurLady.org) that has been of great assistance to us... To keep us focused on God's plan for marriage & self-fulfillment through that sacrament.

We also discovered a fabulous retreat center in Cape May Point, NJ (capemaymarianists.org) whom I credit with keeping us... And our children... On the path of God's plan for marriage & family.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Other than the influence of our family priest, I cannot say that any direct intervention came our way, through 6 children and putting all of them through both Catholic grammar school and high school. Pre-Cana did talk about natural family planning, and our priest gave us a book on the topic. I could have used more help. On a positive note, the school chaplain at Archbishop Wood did see us at graduation and recount something about our son. That was the first feedback that we have ever gotten from the high school level. Monsignor Gentile often comments to us that we have a beautiful family and that he is thankful for my sons ushering along beside my husband. This means a lot.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I have really been encouraged through attending the Mom Cafe at a Parish. When I was starting out as a stay at home

Mom, nearly four years ago, I called the diocese to find programs that support mothers. This was the only program of its kind that you could recommend. Thankfully, meeting monthly with other Catholic moms to discuss issues of faith and mothering has been really beneficial to me and my family.

The meal ministry, meals for moms, has also been a real blessing for my family. After the birth of both of our children, fellow parishioners brought meals for our entire family for a week. Especially with my first daughter, not having much other support locally from family or friends, while finding my way as a new mother, this was just invaluable.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The Church eventually convinced us to begin practicing NFP and to stop using the birth control pills my wife had been using for regulating her menstrual cycle.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years



QUESTION 5

In what ways have you experienced the Church as absent, unsupportive, neutral or even a negative influence in your family life?

Sometimes I feel that something is missing on the part of clergy about the real struggles of family life. Families today are very different than in the past. Those with two parents in the home usually are both working full time to support the family. Many are single parents struggling on their own. Sometimes there seems to be judgments on the time constraints of families without an understanding of the limited time that families have due to their responsibilities.

Philadelphia, Divorced

Not supported, having men dressed like a female at church and in groups. While children around. Being accepted is not right corrupting a child's mind and innocent view.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

I think the church needs to truly recognize the struggles that parents and families have today. It might not appear outwardly that there are struggles but they are present in every family. Whether it is financial, time, scheduling etc. With the demands on mothers and fathers these days to do it all and with children being overscheduled the church needs to find a better way to work with that. It is the reality that those 30-50 are dealing with.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

Most of the richness of our family life has not come from the parish church - it is just there to provide the sacraments - as important and magnificent as that is.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Certain Ministries in our church can be very unwelcoming and judgmental of non Catholics that use our church services ie burial - this can be a hard thing to explain to our young children as well as a very bad example.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

I don't find much support for NFP practice. I haven't heard any discussion from the priest

regarding NFP, heard of any educational opportunities after the initial class offered by the diocese (Which doesn't include teaching on special circumstances breast feeding, post partum, etc)

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

The constant requests for money are a fact of life - but they are also a source of some irritation. We are sufficiently blessed that we can make financial contributions on a routine basis. But I am struck at times by the number of expenditures that seem a little excessive. It makes me wonder whether the relative affluence of the parish is taken for granted, and indeed, whether these expenditures will result in a diminished sense of community because we are focusing too many efforts on material trimmings.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I think they are an absent influence.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

We can promote the vocation of marriage more. We aren't going to have more priests and consecrated if there aren't more holy marriages that have children at the service of the Church.

Philadelphia, Married, 0-10 years (translated from Spanish)

It has been passive

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

Can't say much that it has other than just the fact that as a large family, we stand out like a sore thumb (in a good way) in the pews. In general though, we are more likely to be asked if we are Mormons than Catholics.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

The hierarchy and their constant scandals is a negative influence to my Catholic and family life. Obviously, the house was not cleaned out.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

We have not had much support in our homeschooling efforts. Homeschooling and private classical schools have a difficult time renting space in closed parish schools. The cost of rent

can be extremely high.

I teach PREP and I find the curriculum to be watered down and sometimes borderline heretical.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

1) Poor Communication - As a head of a ministry in my parish, I am usually notified at the last minute for assistance (lining up people for Sacramental services for example). As a result, my family and everything else in my life is put on the back burner while I contact many parishioners for their assistance for the ceremony.

2) In getting to know the clergy over the last 10 years, I and my family have been turned off to the Catholic faith. Their rudeness, cruelty, focusing on money over the Christian thing to do, ignoring the parish's mission statement when it would not support what the pastor wants to do, lying, bad mouthing other clergy and/or the Archdiocese, disbanding the church council so that the parishioners' views are ignored, not making time to discuss a personal issue I was struggling with (I was actually met with annoyance), no concern for welcoming current parishioners and/or visitors, closing off the rectory meeting room we use for Scripture Study from mid July to mid September (Scripture Study is a very important part of my life - it impacts my week extremely positively) and poor/uninspiring homilies.

Delaware County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

Our children attend Regina Luminis Academy. We decided to send them to this school because of it's classical, non-Common Core curriculum. I feel that in using the Common Core curriculum in the parochial schools the Arch Diocese has let down all of it's children and families. I believe we can do much better than this. We have chosen not to put our children in our parish school for this reason alone.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

I think that the church has been supportive of family life as a general rule. However there are not enough programs for personal growth or supportive issues that may develop in a family or marriage.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

A more creative focus on how our faith can shape the archdiocesan curriculum--especially in the teaching of literature, history, etc.--would be a real step forward for our children.

The archdiocesan summer reading list, for example, is often a list of very recent, generic children's fiction that does little to enrich our summers!!:)

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

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1. A lack of good catechetical instruction in the catholic schools.
 2. Poor homilies

Montgomery County, Widowed

I think the only time that the Church has been unsupportive or somewhat absent in our family life is the religion program in the grade school. I did notice that there was some improvement with the lower grade this year with a new teacher, but the upper school programs need to be less "fluff".

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Our experience is that our local Catholic schools demonstrate little difference in curriculum, philosophy and community culture from that which is offered through the public schools.

Our parish does not teach children a proper reverence regarding Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Children are not taught by priests, sisters or catechists about genuflecting in front of the tabernacle. Our children in particular were told they did not need to fold their hands prayerfully after reception of the Eucharist and receiving on the tongue was discouraged. We need to reclaim our Church Traditions if we are to rebuild.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

It's been difficult to get some initiatives started in my parish even with pastoral approval given the lack of space. Some of the ministries to children are lacking in substance and seriousness (children's liturgy materials seem totally divorced from mass etc.). Religious materials and instruction at the school could also be more focused.

The school is wonderful in many ways, but real parental feedback is clearly unwelcome.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

During our years of raising our children we have had our share of crises involving our children. During one, in particular, in which a son had behaved badly in a parochial school class, we found great support from most our fellow parishioners, but from some, and especially from the parish and diocesan professionals, we received no constructive help and, in fact, scorn. That was years ago, but the lesson to us is that those representing the Church should go out of their way to be Christ like and not limit themselves with secular attitudes.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I feel the church is incredibly unsupportive and insensitive to the issue of the Girl Scouts. It is

painful to see the cookie drives, especially when you know how much of the money goes to Planned Parenthood. It has caused a negative influence, because the celebration of this group and the exclusion of groups like AHG, Little Flowers, or the Camp Fire Girls says to children, parents, and all parishioners that it is okay for us to be in partnerships with organizations that promote birth control and abortion, and yet I wonder why my husband and I weren't properly catechized in NFP. This celebration undermines who we are. It undermines our identity, and it negates the idea that love is our mission.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I do recall that when my husband was ill, dying in the local hospital, other churches even as far away as Bucks County were praying for him. Our Church did nothing and I was a PREP (CCD) teacher and had to practically beg the pastor at the time to please give my husband his last rites which at that point he was in a coma. ...As you can see, I'm still having a major issue with that.

Delaware County, Widowed

The Church has always been supportive. I just wish they did not shy away from hot button issues at the ambo. People need to hear exactly what they must and must not do or they will not be saved.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

A priest told me once that "we are not supposed to ask about a couples' sex life". But this was in the context of Reconciliation. While spiritual direction is not the direct aim of Reconciliation, it does play a small role. I understand how the long hours in a confessional are emotionally and physically exhausting but knowing that you've allowed the Spirit to help guide on marriage issues might go a long way toward helping priests feel much closer to their family - the parish.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

I see the Church as neutral or unsupportive many times in the culture war...

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The Church has been absent, unsupportive, neutral or even a negative influence in family life in the following ways:

(1) Because there has been little to no action by the Archdiocese until recently in effectively addressing issues with priests whether it be sexual misconduct, behavioral misconduct, or pastoral ineffectiveness, family life has been effected in negative ways.

There appears to be no accountability with priests and pastors, other than the annual spiritual

report that is submitted to the Archdiocese with key parish performance parameters & statistics. Parishes and parish families are dying a slow death as a result of poor performing priests.

These priests have not just caused families to move to another parish, but have caused families to leave the Catholic Church or stop practicing any kind of faith.

The Church often wounds us deeply. People with religious authority often wound us by their words, attitudes, and demands. Precisely because our religion brings us in touch with the questions of life and death, our religious sensibilities can get hurt most easily. Ministers and priests seldom fully realize how a critical remark, a gesture of rejection, or an act of impatience can be remembered for life by those to whom it is directed. There is such an enormous hunger for meaning in life, for comfort and consolation, for forgiveness and reconciliation, for restoration and healing, that anyone who has any authority in the Church should constantly be reminded that the best word to characterize religious authority is compassion. Let's keep looking at Jesus whose authority was expressed in compassion.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

The Sacrament of Confession could be more available.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

1) Negative influence: Priests who are lukewarm or passively hostile to the Church's teaching on marriage, sex, and other difficult issues.

2) Absent: lack of support for young, Catholic couples and families. Parishes tend to act like school activities are sufficient for evangelizing and catechizing individuals between the ages of 30-45. The majority of programming and parish support should be for young parents.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

The Church is at best absent, unsupportive or neutral. Marriage is never even addressed from the pulpit. Uplifting and instructional homilies on topics relative to marriage might be helpful.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

I feel a lack of follow through. My husband and I have worked hard to keep our family involved in our Faith, parish, church, and community. However everything that we have tried to participate in that would include the entire family has not gone any farther then a sign up sheet. No follow emails, phone calls, mailing, texts, nothing. And it never goes anywhere. Our children are sacristan, alter servers, lectors, and choir members. My husband is on the parish council, a member of the Knights of Columbus, and a prayer group leader. I am the vocations director for our parish. All great things, but each separate from one another and dividing us from worshiping as a family unite.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

When the Archdiocese closed our parish school, this was a very negative influence in our family life. Although we realized the financial reasons for the closures, it did not diminish the hurt and anger we felt going through the closing. Our children were in 6th, 4th and 2nd grade and they were devastated to lose the school that they felt was a second home. We think the Archdiocese failed our family in how they handled the closures. There was a lot of ill will by not letting parents make their own decisions regarding which Catholic school their children could attend after the closures.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The recent church "scandals" have been difficult to discuss with our young adult children. It is hard to defend church with these type of issues. Don't think the church handled it well.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

My children have abandoned the Catholic church - not their belief in God or the importance of prayer and leading a good life. They have not had much support or explanation (other than what we have discussed) about issues that upset them.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Minimal interaction with clergy. They don't really know our family or feel like part of our extended family. This is a big change from when we grew up and the priest's we knew felt like part of our family and there was a stronger sense we were all part of God's family. Our adult experience has been that clergy are more distant and a sense they lack interest in getting to know us/others personally, just in general or the roles we undertake in ministry.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Growing up I went to public school. I attended Church alone on Sundays as my parents were sick most of the time and completed a very weak CCD program in middle school. In high school I was converted by an evangelical youth group. However, I never received the Church's teaching on sexuality in terms of openness to life. I assumed that all modern Catholic couples used the birth control pill and that it was an acceptable, responsible, safe practice. I was completely ignorant and therefore without actually knowing it, I had a very weak foundation from which to mature in my faith. I college I quickly fell away from God. The Church's teaching on sexuality are so needed right now. People are largely ignorant about the truth of chastity and the beauty of NFP. For my husband and me, this ignorance in the earliest years of our marriage lead us to some deeply regrettable decisions. I am so happy now when I see a lot of free books and audio recording being offered in the vestibules which are a wonderful way to evangelize.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The critique that comes to mind is only that a lot of time and energy and money seems to be wasted on certain things (i.e. Fresh flowers in church) and certain ministries (I.e. CRHP retreats) when that time, energy, and money could be better spent on supporting marriages and families.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

When asked about a youth group, the pastor responded "We have the best youth group ... the Catholic School". This was not very supportive of those parent who, for whatever reason, choose to enroll their children in public school. The current pastor is not very child friendly in general ... only with specific children.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

In the past, when we have attended our geographic parishes, we have found that guitar Masses and goofy/kid-relatable homilies have made it difficult for our children to take the liturgy seriously, and have sometimes left sensing that our church is a joke.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Sunday School materials are totally blah. You can never raise a Catholic on the materials used. School curriculum also tends to be dull. Parish and school leaders seem totally unaware of the treasure chest that is the Church's heritage/teaching, which could be used to build Catholics of all ages.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Again, it's hard to be critical in light of our answer to the previous question. However, the concerns raised above regarding the dwindling number of priests is more troubling when homilies about marriage suggest that same-sex couples raising children are somehow just as much of a family as ours. And again, it's not that our feelings are hurt because we want to feel special for having a traditional family. Rather, it's frustrating because it's just trivializing the Sacrament of marriage, watering it down and stripping it of any spiritual or moral significance. Moreover, there was not a word spoken the Sunday after the Obergefell decision came down.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

When our church closed a lot of people in our family turned away from the church. They never felt the same closeness again.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

I cannot say the church was ever unsupportive to us or absent. Thanks be to God.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

Homilies not based on practical ways to live out the catholic Christian faith.

Lack of friendly atmosphere--

Need talks or sermons on REAL issues facing the world: immigration, the environment, peer pressure, addiction etc.

The church needs to better relate to its people-- build community-- starting with the priests. We don't even announce the names of the Mass intentions any more--all subtle ways of connecting people to one another.

People need to feel like they BELONG to their parish, not just a place to go to Mass on Sunday--

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Contact with parish staff is frequently frustrating and demoralizing. I've never felt like the priests of our parish (where we've been members for 10 years), with one important exception (namely, Fr. -----) had any interest in getting to know us as individuals.

We pulled our son out of the parish school and put him in public school, because of frustration with the clericalism and non-responsiveness and non-availability of the nun principal to parents.

When we met with our pastor to discuss ways our parish might collaborate with us in our efforts to spread the Christian personalism of JP II and JH Newman, we got zero interest, zero help. Nothing but condescension. (This pastor is now a bishop.)

I could go on and on.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Church is absent or unsupportive in pro life health care for women. Too many women are going to IVF clinics and not too many even know about NaProTechnology. When they get involved in assistive reproductive technology (and it fails most time) they are so burnt out they don't even want to consider adoption and many will have their marriage fail.

Also, I hear all sorts of horror stories about hospice - I'm not at that age yet but I hope that we don't have culture of death physicians encouraging my children to euthanize me or my husband. We need authentic Catholic health care from womb to tomb!

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

The parish's silence on these issues means that families trying to embrace and live orthodox teaching feel lonely and unsupported. You make a handful of friends, and you want to remain open to the rest of the parish. But you can't rely on parish clergy, DRE's, school teachers to be enthusiastically and creatively orthodox, so we all settle into a "don't ask, don't tell" modus operandi on family/marriage issues. We're left to cobble together whatever we can as individuals, drawing on ad hoc friendships and/or whatever para-parish apostolates we can find on the internet.

I remember once telling my pastor that my middle schooler was struggling with questions of faith. Another time I told him my wife was struggling with depression. Both times he made a referral to somebody else on the parish staff, who gave me a glib answer. The pastor never followed up. He's a busy guy and probably has his reasons, but don't call him my shepherd or spiritual father. He's an excellent property administrator though.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

When I was going through my divorce, I didn't feel like I had anyone to talk to except in the confessional. There is no support for those struggling with separation and divorce and it is unfortunate as there are way to many of us going through this painful experience.

Chester County, Divorced

If you want families to show up, you need it to be (a) community-based (b) connected to free babysitting and/or children's activities (c) led by personable, caring mentor figures and (d) oriented to radical discipleship. Intertwining support for marriage with repeated invitations to discipleship is key. They go hand in hand. When couples can see God's plan and role in their marriage, they are inspired to heroism.

Chester County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

The priest sex abusive scandal had a profound effect on how my children view the church.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I wish there were more opportunities for family fellowship time outside of mass.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Being neutral actually has a negative effect on family life. During my years as a single mother, I had only family to support me, the Church was absent. I was attending Mass during my divorce, was away from my family, and had no idea how the Church could possibly support me. I rather felt unsupported as a divorced young mother and did not know how to re-enter the church until I moved to the parish where Our Sisters of Jesus Our Hope we active. They embraced me with

Mercy and Forgiveness which then led to more formation, annulment etc. They embraced my young children with compassion. This is what led me back to the Church.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

I grew up in the Diocese and loved the annual parish festival as a kid. I moved away from the diocese for about 15 years after college and recently brought my family to my first parish festival in years only to see there was almost nothing Catholic about the festival. I was disheartened to be there and struggled to even enjoy the rides with my kids because of the emptiness I felt at the festival. I understand many parishes do it as a way to bring the community together or is it an attempt at a fundraiser to make up for the lack of tithing from parishioners. I have seen and been a part of several thriving parishes with no major fundraisers during the year, because the pastor and parish staff focused on the mission of the church.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

Only when priests and lay leaders try to water it down.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

I think with the exception of my last pastor, our families were valued. All of them. Then we were assigned him and many people felt excluded and unwanted, unheard and not valued, so they moved on to other local parishes. I think it's sad that the diocese doesn't recognize this change and come to witness, unannounced, what is happening within a once vibrant parish. Thank God for our new pastor!!

Philadelphia, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

I think until I began actively seeking out resources on my own, driven by my own desire to make my marriage and family life more authentically Catholic, that the Church has largely been absent in influencing my family life as an adult except in the general sense of knowing Catholic teaching that marriage is a sacrament, it is for life, and the Church's stance on contraceptives and fertility treatments. I did find myself very alone when experiencing infertility. My husband and I tried to join a Pre Canaa group at a church since we had been married at that point for 14 years, had gone through many trials with family members, and had a pretty strong faith and marriage. We were absolutely made to feel 'less than' by the group because we were childless at the time. Rather than embrace us and the very real fact of infertility that many couples face and allow us to share our own faith journey to adoption, we were made to feel unqualified for the group and we eventually left. The priest who ran it saw what was going on, was quietly apologetic but never stood up and addressed the issue head-on.

As a child at a small Catholic parish in Manayunk, there was a strong sense of community and families tended to be emphasized more. This may have been more of a cultural influence-tightly bonded Italian families-than church influenced.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

When I look at my other Christian friends, I think that their churches do more to support young families. Specifically, I joined an international Christian group called Mothers of Preschoolers. This group has been pivotal to support my motherhood journey in Christ and benefit my family. We meet monthly, while childcare is provided, to pray, learn from applicable speakers, do service projects and fellowship. We also get together outside of these meetings for playgroups and moms' nights.

I wish that our Catholic Church was more hands on in this arena. While we're encouraged to have large families, there haven't been many programs that I've been able to seek out to support parents in this incredibly important work.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

ABSENT in homilies and school education relevant issues to couples lives and try to instill in them the understanding that:

" Unity - the total giving of yourselves to one another such you that you are 'no longer two, but one flesh'

'Indissolubility - exclusive fidelity to one another and to your marriage vows until death' and

'Fruitfulness - openness to the children God wishes to bring through your union' "

are necessary for a truly Sacramental Marriage as well as the understanding that a relationship with Christ will greatly benefit a marriage.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I wish that our local parish could have somehow offered us more counseling or pastoral care with our two daughters who have suffered with mental illness over the past twenty years. Getting professional help for them greatly burdened us financially. Trying to find a Catholic counselor who would keep God in the treatment was most difficult. Maybe more sharing of resources available at the local parish level would greatly help families like ours suffering with mental illness.

Our previous pastor was such a support to us in our struggles with our girls and graciously would bestow blessings and prayers over them. However our present pastor once brought me to tears when after asking him for prayers for my daughter's ill health, he told me never to bother him before Mass. On numerous occasions he has told people not to bother him with their problems. Sadly, he is certainly not someone I would ever approach again to ask for help.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

The priest scandal hit hard. Although we were not directly victims, we have several priests involved with our spiritual and family life. This was truly devastating. When the story broke we felt alone and unsupported. In those difficult days we felt the need for sacrifice, penance, and prayer, particularly in union with other Catholics in the form of Masses, holy hours, Rosaries, etc. in atonement for the sins in our archdiocese.

We chose to homeschool our children due to several reasons, including financial, but more importantly spiritual concerns. Before our oldest was about to enter 1st grade a scandal broke at the local school involving the principal, a father and former classmate of my husband, and kindergarten teacher. Unfortunately, in our experience the lack of morality is common in Catholic schools. We felt it would be impossible to entrust our children to adult Catholics who would allow this to happen. In our experience many teachers do not live out their Catholic faith.

As a homeschooling family we often feel like orphans in the archdiocese as there are no resources for school Masses, graduations, or even academic support available from the Church.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years



QUESTION 6

From your own experience, what do families need most from the Church, especially in these times when the family is under attack and, in many places, in crisis?

I am buoyed by the many new resources, speakers, "Formed" site, and Catholic channel programs on Sirius XM.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Making catholic schools more affordable for everyday, working blue collar families would be very helpful. It appears the only financial aid offered is for low income and in many cases non catholic families.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

I think that more than anything, families need help from the Church with keeping teenagers close to the faith. My kids are all under 4, but I already know that the greatest challenge will be to make sure our kids have a strong faith before they reach their teenage years.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

We need religious to be more present in the communities. I know that it is a little bit difficult because of the shortage of vocations, but it is always beautiful that the community at least see them around the Church and that they feel confident in approaching their priests and speaking with them.

Philadelphia, Married, 11-25 years (translated from Spanish)

Tell the truths of the faith from the pulpit. Do not water it down. Challenge couple to raise their children in the faith and to teach them the faith.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

I think maybe more education. Honestly I have learned a lot from catholic bloggers. Maybe directing families to resources (digital or otherwise) will make them feel more connected to the church's teachings.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

Now more than ever, families need to hear the explicit and faithful teaching of the Church. This will both strengthen the committed and convert the tepid.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

They need to know that the Church will always be there for them in ALL times---not just in good times. I am lucky to live within a parish now that is very supportive of the families that belong to it but also extremely aware that there are many families that live around us that need help. We are always helping those in need and that I believe, sets a good example for our children as well.

I will say that at times it gets a little repetitive hearing about making donations/tithing but when there is a push to increase the giving, our Pastor knows how to get us all to reach a little deeper.

Bucks County, Divorced 26+ years

Catechesis on the fact that marriage is forever, in the good times and the bad times. Realistically, this is the only thing that kept our marriage together at one point. Sticking it through because it was a promise not just to each other, but to God was totally worth it. We have an incredible marriage now. Wouldn't have to asked to get here the way we did, but in some ways feel like our marriage would be rather mediocre without it.

FORMED material is great - presenting openness to life, the church's teaching on marriage not as a bunch of "no, no, no" but of how valuable and wonderful God's plan really is. The "no, no, no," is just there to keep people from being broken and hurt.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

A continual affirmation for our children as to what God truly intends for a family. We have to battle the influences of the world which is bombarding them with lies. We need priests and catechist teaching about: same sex marriage, transgenderism, abortion, contraception, premarital sex.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Teaching families how to make their home Domestic churches. Families just don't know how to do it.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Clear messages from the pulpit helping the congegration to understand the "why" behind our

stance as a church.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

Catechesis and adherence the the universal truth of Catholic Doctrine. Not watered down, sentimental liturgy.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Right now clarity on all the difficult issues around "marriage equality" is really important. Our children will all have to navigate this issue as young adults, and they need the formation and example to do so with fidelity.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

WE NEED TO BE CHALLENGED. We know God loves us ... tell us how to love him back!

Montgomery County, Widowed

A greater sense of community. Many Catholics leave the church for protestant denominations because those churches provide a better sense of community.

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Strong priests to explain why God created man and woman to be married. Really encourage more family time at the Church with various activities; prayer services.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

The Church needs to actively invite couples, parents and families to use the Church's resources, advice, teaching. There needs to be a sense of community and invitation. I hate chit chat and talking inside the Church before mass, but having someone smile and say good morning or good evening as they enter the Church makes people feel welcoming. It need not- in fact should not be overbearing. That could be a first connection, a display or caring which makes it easier for people to seek out more connection and if/when necessary help.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Families need consistent support groups that we can fallback on during very tough times. A place to share experiences and gather helpful insights would be great.

Philadelphia, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

Families are in dire need of support on many levels. The Church needs to provide a welcoming experience to all families and find ways to retain younger couples and people who are starting their lives and need to have a positive connection with the Church. Many of our people lack a solid foundation in understanding and believing in the teachings and dogmas of faith and our easily lead astray by relativism. Sexual Identity, Marriage and family life in general, all are under siege. Sometimes we feel like the Church puts to mention emphasis on what people shouldn't do as opposed to want we need to do to strengthen our spirituality. Perhaps there is not enough focus on how to live in close communion with God and each other.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Sacraments! Make it easier to get to them, even during the week (scheduling, etc.). More confession. Better daily mass times.

Also, parents of young children face particular challenges. We could try to do more for parents of kids younger than 5.

Ask families/ parents what they need--and make them be part of it, too. It's not the "Church's" job without our help!

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

As I have stated before, I think we need to know that we are not alone. There are so many programs that are offered to adults that are home during the day (retired) such as bible studies. I do not know of a single program that supports the family through marriage. (other than Marriage Encounter or Retrouvaile which I believe is aimed at marriages that are struggling) Married couples that aren't struggling need the support too!! With the grind of daily life it is SO easy to forget what your true vocation is about. It would be nice to have something offered that isn't an entire weekend long, like maybe an evening a month for an hour or two, that supports us in this sacrament!

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

From our own familial experience, families most need from the Church what a good mother provides for her children: true love that works for the good of the child, or, in this case, the family. Each family needs to be accepted for who they are, have their particular needs ministered to, and also be challenged to become the healthiest and holiest they can be. We need clear and consistent teaching about the truths of marriage, family, and human sexuality for all of our family members as well as support and resources for our individual situations.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

Authentic and consistent presentation of the Gospel - not so much as informative, but as FORMATIVE.

Montgomery County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

Families need clear teaching from the pulpit. There should be opportunities for families to interact at the parish. Mother's groups could also foster a place for young mothers to learn from more experienced women. Men's groups which focus on being better husbands and fathers.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

First they need to know they are under attack. Our homilies do not make this explicit but tend to focus more on good interaction in our personal lives. The average person in church does not follow the Catholic press or blogs and all the information they are receiving is from biased secular sources. Clergy need to articulate this struggle clearly and offers means spiritual and otherwise how to counter this.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

As I mentioned above, families need to hear a loud and clear voice from the Church on Her teachings in the areas of abortion, gay "marriage" and the attacks on our religious freedom.

We need to know that we are on the right path and to be encouraged on that journey through prayer and fellowship-based programs. Our generation is probably one of the worst catechized and needs to gently be taught the teachings of the Church.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

We need strong homilies reminding Catholics of precise doctrine on marriage and how to "love the sinner but not the sin" when it comes to homosexuality.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Less business-like attitude.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Families need the TRUTH shouted from the rooftops by the Church. We no longer live in a nominally Christian society where everyone agrees on social morality. The Church must be a beacon to a post-Christian society, walking in darkness. The Church is currently silent in the public square on most issues, with the exception of Bishop Chaput and a few other Bishops, who speak truth as often as possible.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

More examples / testimonies / witness of individuals, couples of who faced the hot topics head on and came out on the other side victorious. Let's God's grace be heard through the real lives of parishoners. This will require someone at the parish level to manage a witness program - but it can go SO FAR.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

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- 1) Clarity on teaching, especially on difficult social issues.*
 - 2) Messaging examples of joy from Catholic couples and families who strive to live the teaching of the Church.*
 - 3) Parishes need to serve as intersections for serious Catholics to meet one another and support one another outside of Sunday Mass.*
 - 4) Clear catechesis of children on difficult social issues and zero tolerance for teachers and/or other figures in schools who actively contradict Church teaching on these issues.*

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

Lastly, families need to educate themselves to fend off the attacks from the media and secular humanism and the debasing culture that comes every day. Most parishes don't provide those resources. Mostly the tough issues are ignored. Major faith affecting things happen during the week but at Mass in the homily, its the same. Burning issues go unaddressed and opportunities to make ones faith connect to the world is missed. Once on a retreat at Malvern, one of the first time men said "wow, this is the big leagues, the parish is like 'pop warner' compared to this." What he meant is that he was not fed at the parish level. Going to weekly mass was just a chore, no engagement, no challenge, no noteworthy dialogue that got his attention.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

We need teaching on the ills of gender theory, a clear Catholic perspective on same sex attraction and outreach to those who are marginalized. These are topics never covered in our parish homilies.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Compassion, but clear message. Relationship. Godly wisdom.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Parish priests, as Christ's representatives here on earth must become even more visible in local parish life (scripture study programs, ecumenical connections with other local religions). The reverse has happened...priests seem less visible, less accessible. There are fewer priests to go around...but then all the more reason for priests to engage with interested laity.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

We feel that the Church needs to send a clear message on their stance on marriage and family. As parents, it is very hard to feel like we are in the minority and that we are close minded because we believe in the traditional view of marriage. Our children are constantly bombarded with the secular view of gay marriage and those who believe marriage is outdated. A clear stance and response from the Church would help us.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

- Clear, outspoken leadership. The traditional family is important, no matter what the culture says. This is particularly important in an era when even Catholic leaders are being led astray by the culture

- Support for families trying to raise their children in orthodox Catholic homes. This includes more financial support for those attending Catholic Schools, as well as support for those trying to homeschool their children.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I think families now, meaning the adult parents and their growing children, both within their own age appropriate settings and as family units need help learning and understanding the Church's teachings. Why does the Church say what she does? How are these doctrines life giving instead of life-deflating rules for the sake of regulation?

And more importantly, how can we implement these teachings in our family in a practical way? How do we do family devotionals? Give us helpful language for conversations with our children about the sacrament of married life, sex, and the perils of the world's empty promises. And continue to provide opportunities for our children to see the entire church in action. The world meeting of families was one large and phenomenal example of this, but we also enjoy taking our children semi-regularly to the cathedral to hear mass with the Archbishop so that he is a "real person" in their lives of faith.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

I would really like to see more family programs, more family events and reasons for us to come together as a Church community and family.

Bucks County, Married 11-25 years

Understanding of the current brokenness and pain that is within families and go out to meet them. Do not wait for them to come to the Church. There is a need for the Church to be missionaries and go to them.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

I think that different families need different things and that these needs can be identified in terms of socioeconomic statues. Low income families need the Church to be less politicized. There is a feeling that the Republican party is hostile to the poor and to minorities and yet the Democratic party is decidedly pro-abortion. Understandably, many Catholics are therefore Republicans. These political leanings are quite palpable and many low-income families, while pro-life and Catholic, can feel hurt by right-leaning political rhetoric, that so often degrades the poor, then bleeding into the Church. The Church needs to have a conversation about racism. I have heard a priests who I greatly admire and love, joking about running over Black Lives Matters protestors who were blocking traffic to a football game. A much more non-partisan message is vital to gathering lower income families into the Church.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Support and validation. The Church has to continue to be the voice that provides reason against this culture of political correctness. Catholics are constantly bombarded to accept alternate gender and family roles. Our media and entertainment treats people of faith as old-fashioned and misinformed.

We need to teach people to first believe in God's word and the risen Christ, to be confident in their faith and then to fearlessly stand up for their beliefs.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Simple gatherings of married couples and of families would be beneficial. Having a regular parish rosary night where families are welcome to come and pray and then share a potluck meal afterwards would provide much needed fellowship for our increasingly isolating/individual-focused/let's-interact-through-social-media world.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

Fellowship and formation grounded in the sacraments -- intentional, regular communities of faithful families fighting arm-in-arm to live holy vocations to marriage and family life.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Parents need to be formed DEEPLY so that they can grow into their full stature and be the best parents they can be. I think formation occurs best in smaller groups but optional groups will only attract a few people. Homilies are the place where formation is going to have to happen. By formation I mean principally formation in prayer and the Church's teaching.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Explain why the Catholic view of marriage and family makes more sense than the alternatives that are out there. This means explaining what love is from a Catholic perspective and what love requires. And finding interesting ways to support that.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

We desperately need more closeness, personal contact, and coordinated church community support that will surround us not just with spiritual help but in a more direct way. During family crises we often feel abandoned and alone.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

Supportive community, like minded friends, an oasis from the secular world where we can rely on orthodoxy and ask tough questions. A place where we can count on a sense of humor and mutual support. Friendship.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

People who get the struggles of family life and know how to walk with individuals (Personal Accompaniment). Teams of couples who are trained to not be judgemental but merciful - know the language of Mercy- and have the time and patience to pray and be available to mentor families.

We need JOYFUL soldiers on the front line protecting our young families and couples - this takes a serious commitment; time; training; prayer and lots of love.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Families need Fathers (priests) in their parishes that are willing to tell their children (parishioners) they are wrong and that there is a better decision for some of our choices. Do not be afraid that some parishioners may get upset or throw a tantrum, all "kids" do at times but it is the Father's responsibility as the head of the family (Eph 5) to love his children and teach them. It is easy to say "love each other" and "be kind" but take another step and give specific examples. Talk about the tough topics like pornography, abortion and marriage. I recently read an article from Bishop Paprocki and I am thankful for his willingness to teach the truth on the Catholic Church's definition of marriage even though many others would shy away from the

topic. His letter to the Diocese of Springfield was written with fatherly care and understanding.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

They need clear and concise ways to explain church teaching on: same sex marriage, sacredness of marriage, baptism, the real presence.

I know I feel inadequate in speaking about these topics. We need Support from our pastor and support from our fellow parishioners. We are after all family. That seems to be lost. We forget that we are family.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

We need our priests to speak about this issue honestly, with clarity and charity, understanding the sensitive issues of divorce and same-sex attraction that inevitably will be present among a portion of their parishioners, and lead the way in offering programs and initiatives that actively seek to teach everyone, particularly families with children, about the specific attacks on marriage and family along with some very straightforward strategies for addressing these issues.

Our parish has purchased Formed and it has many wonderful resources including leader's guides, that could be used to teach about the attacks and the responses we can take. I recently took a final grad course supposedly on Cultural Foundations of Education. It was instead a course with an agenda that was anti-Christian, anti-family, and attempted to break down the concept of two genders. As a fully mature adult, I found myself initially intimidated by the practices, the subtle and not so subtle pressure, of this course. Ultimately it lead me to research on my own what the Catholic Church has to say on these topics and how to defend my faith in a way that could be heard by others. I should have had some access to these resources prior to such an encounter and it created in me a sense of the urgency of protecting our families and teaching our children how to defend themselves against these false ideologies.

We need our priests to speak boldly and we need to allow laity to take true leadership roles in creating an environment where the family is defended and protected.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Small group faith formation opportunities. Christ life, Alpha, Evangelical Catholic, for example.

Opportunities for families to come together.

Families need to be evangelized at all levels. Thy do not understand why being Catholic is any different from anyone else.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Having good options to have fun is pretty important for the kids during those pre-teen/teen/young adult phases of life. We know that they will be given many other choices for not-so-good options from the world.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

First of all, more teaching and support for prayer. The rosary, the sacraments and every other legitimate form of prayer. If we don't pray how will our faith grow? The experience of Our Lord's love, the answering of prayer even when it is no, or not now, is most important. This needs to be a daily occurrence just to survive the culture. Our Churches need somehow to be open more, and we need to encourage people to pray. That God is equally available to everyone without exception! More teaching on how to pray and how to listen and the connection to faith it produces. Also how the grace received gives us peace and how this peace then spreads outside our family. How to handle conflicts peacefully.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I think we need to know that our pastors and priests care about us. We need holy, kind and compassionate shepherds to give us guidance as we carry our crosses and work our way to Heaven.

Families need to see and experience God's love in and through His servants, the priests and the Church. They need priests who are passionate and on fire with the Truth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We need to build up the Church to be more welcoming, especially to our young people who seem to leave once they get to college. We need to challenge them in their faith.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

More Homilies should be directed to the issues and problems that families face today. The young people are becoming totally disconnected from the Church. The message should come from the Pulpit!

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

We need support. We need companionship with like-minded Catholics. Our family fully embraces Church teaching, and we strive to live our our faith in the midst of a crumbling society. Even within parishes many Catholics do not live out the faith and at our former parish we felt like outsiders.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

QUESTION 7

Please offer any suggestions of ways that your local parish, school, or institution might better and more directly serve your family's mission to love each other with God's love and become a light to the world about the way God loves us.

More than anything, I think that priests need to do more to talk about Catholic Social Teaching, both in local parishes and even just during homilies. I am part of the Archdiocese's Catholic Relief Services Parish Ambassador Program, and many of the issues addressed in Catholic Social Teaching simply aren't discussed during homilies. Why are so many Catholics unaware of this? Why don't priests talk about this more??? It needs to be discussed. Far too many Catholics are unaware of the Church's teachings, and so the family's mission to become a light to the world about the way God loves us is lost.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

We have to be taught and learn to evangelize -

We could have reach out socials - right now the only opportunity for many young people and adults to meet others is in bars, or on social media. We must learn how to bring people together - our own as well as those who have left us and outsiders.

Inviting people to mass can be difficult but we can explain things to them as we go along , including why communion is unavailable to them.

We could show videos on the faith like Catholicism or other WELL MADE explanatory or entertaining movies.

We can use our facilities as a welcoming and safe place for people to come together. Clergy have to be in the forefront in encouraging and supporting this.

In spite of the scandal, they cannot be hiding in their rectories and socializing with each other alone. They should be meeting and accompanying families and single people in groups.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Our church has a wonderful outreach system. The parishioners rally when needs are identified, and then surround families with physical, emotional and spiritual support.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Parishes need to work together!! Sit down with each other & see what needs there are in each parish . Then see what talent is around and see who can help with those needs .

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I would like to see our parish promote more local missionary work. Our parish does monthly food collections and periodic collections during mass, and the response is very generous. But, for me, the generosity feels void of meaning because there is no interaction with the recipients. I would prefer to work with those in need and open our childrens' eyes to the marginalized that are right in our backyard.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Family mini-retreats or retreats. Come as a family. Offer movie night or game night for little kids do parents can attend a talk.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

In addition to what we've already stated, there needs to be a greater number of opportunities for the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Ask priests how often they have dinner at the home of a parishioner. Start putting the word out that inviting your priest to dinner is "cool" and let priests know that accepting such invitations is encouraged. (Christ's representative sharing a meal with the family, in their home, at their table.) Turn the results of this over to the Holy Spirit.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Perhaps the specific churches can send a survey to all if its members and ask their opinions. It needs to be filled out by everyone in the church, not just a select few.

Delaware County, Widowed

Possibly a moms group where we could meet up once in a while. Having small children can be isolating and it would help to meet up with other moms who are also trying to raise children in the Catholic faith. Better information about events pertaining to family life in area parishes

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

More programs about the domestic church especially taking into account the attacks they are under.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Those of us who are not in the parish school need to have greater outreach. We need to know we're wanted. We need to feel supported. Most of us aren't in the school.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Family ministry, Pre- and Post-Cana conferences and training, youth catechesis consistent with the teachings of Christ and His Church, explicit support for those in troubled marriages or pregnancies.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

I believe our pastors set the tone & set the example of God's love for our entire parish. If the pastor is full of the Holy Spirit, and vibrantly reaches out and welcomes families and young couples into the parish, parishioners will follow suit, and will be drawn to this type of parish & leader.

If the pastor is very introverted, passive, & non-responsive, or if the pastor is bitter, angry and unwelcoming, parishioners will likely not be energized to reach out and evangelize, and the parish will deteriorate.

Priest & pastoral accountability needs to be put in place using surveys to parishioners from the Archdiocese on an annual basis (This will help address poor performance and pastoral issues which are causing families to leave the church. My parish has lost 30% of Mass attendees in the last year and a half due to pastoral issues, lack of leadership, and lack of accountability & responsiveness to parishioners.)

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

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- 1. Prioritize creating support networks for the current generation of parents with kids in Catholic schools. These programs need to re-catechize the majority of parents. But before programming, parishes need to prioritize connecting faithful Catholics.*
 - 2. Greatly increase pre-Cana obligations to properly form engaged couples. The Archdiocese invests a decade in future priests, who are less than 5% of the Church's population. Why only a few meetings for couples we expect to be married until they die?*
 - 3. Teach with clarity without being afraid that the parish might become smaller in the short term. There are undoubtedly pastors who, in an effort to fill pews in order to avoid closure, become lukewarm to the "hard teachings." The Archdiocese needs to make clear that it will support institutions, however small, that are fully faithful.*

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

The words on this website questionnaire are so refreshing. It truly sounds like someone is interested in real change.

I would say better catechesis in every aspect. In CCD, school, RCIA, pre-cana and homilies. Teach and defend the true teaching of the Church. Provide materials that the priest have reviewed and can recommend. Get American and Commonwealth out of the back of the Church. We need holy priests sure, but holy couples, holy teachers, holy RCIA instructors. Find the best people and ask them to declare their loyalty in a specific way.

I've doubted that this can be done in a parish for a long time because there is so much division in the Church. Once the parish has had a few liberal mission priests, the traditional Catholics stop going to missions and then the pastor stops wasting his money as an example. If a couples group gets started, the contraceptors or the non-contraceptors get uncomfortable and leave - another example. The prolife group is considered conservative, the peace and justice group is considered liberal. For some reason, never the twain shall meet. Neither can attract the other as members. The priests serve both but don't seem to help them to unite. I believe it is a 10 year process where the pastor understands that transformation (not accommodation to all comers) is the goal and he seeks the knowledge, understanding, case studies and leadership to get it done. They are only human and will make mistakes and can't do it on their own. The renewal has to be faithful to Church teaching in every respect or the decay will continue. We need unity, not a liberal parish here and a conservative one there.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

There need to be more to parish life than attendance at Sunday Mass. Many of our married friends have left the Church due to apathy on the part of our recent pastors. We miss the opportunity to share with them in the life of our parish. Our Church must stem the tide of those leaving us.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Scripture study programs, continuing ecumenical strides that have been made...local parish priests should become more visible / accessible in these enjoyable activities

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

- somehow supporting and holding up the role of stay at home mothers as a worthwhile calling - particularly focusing this message on high school and college girls, who often hear just the opposite from our culture. I'm not saying this should be presented as the only choice, but it should be honored as an acceptable and loving choice for young Catholic women.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

My previous comment remains on my mind. We work hard to teach and show our children what a life of faith in the Catholic Church looks like. But the opportunities that I love most are when our family can participate in an activity that engages the entire Catholic Church - laypeople, religious, priests - the entire family of the church coming together in a shared experience. Abby Fest is certainly one example of this. I could see something along the lines of special masses with the Archbishop for all eighth graders in the Diocese. Or a day of activity, adoration and mass for all 10th graders with various religious orders within our Diocese.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Practices or initiatives that offer ongoing contact with and outreach to/support for single young adults, young couples and young families. Only contact now is sacraments.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

More greeting times- coffee/donuts - at least once per month.

Announce new members in the bulletin each month- maybe even have a new member welcoming Mass on occasion. Figure out how to incorporate Pictures in the bulletin, entrance, etc. -- we hardly know people by name. Have things like grandparents day.

People lives are busy. Nowadays, we need to be more socially interactive on social media to get the younger families attention. We are competing with all kinds of things and somehow we need to try and influence families to save time for God's work which can be rewarding and fun too!

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

A lot of married couples rarely go out on dates. I know my husband and I haven't had a date since our daughter was born 6 years ago. Nowadays, most families live far away from grandparents, aunts and uncles. Maybe the Church could have some Parents Night Out program for a small fee and volunteers could entertain a group of children for a few hours one Friday night per month.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

Again, I think it would help couples if parishes offered more informal opportunities for married couples and families to build and foster community. Anything from kid-friendly movie nights to Theology on Tap-type men's groups would be helpful to and supportiv of marriages and families.

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

Maybe more preaching about marriage and family life.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Opportunities for parents to receive fellowship and formation that are logistically simplified by volunteer childcare.

Bible study morning groups for moms where older women in the parish volunteer to watch children during the study. For instance, several local parishes have well-attended and highly successful Walking With Purpose groups, and the local Evangelical parish has a huge Wednesday morning Mom's Bible Study ministry that's attractive because of (1) an excellent study leader and (2) several nursery rooms where kids are well taken care of and even supplied with their own age-appropriate formational activities or at least a Veggie Tales video. It is very isolating to be a stay-at-home mom in today's culture; this demographic is ripe for formation and winning hearts to deeper love of Christ and greater commitment to marriage and family life.

Regular fatherhood groups (possibly small groups to facilitate intimate friendship) to form and support men in their vocation as the spiritual heads of the household and the family protectors.

Holy Hours for marriage and the intentions and needs of married couples and families.

Most Catholic married couples are living their vocation without the example of a solid family of origin and without practical support from extended family. Formation and sacramental access is key, as well as childcare to make it possible for couples to avail themselves of these opportunities.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Try to become more familiar with the parishioners. Not just a hello and goodbye. This is easier in a smaller parish.

Philadelphia, Married 26+ years

Through creating a community or group of married couples who have more than age in common. My husband and I can't seem to connect with other immigrant and or biracial couples who can share in our struggle with racism in the city, as well as what it's like raising a child in America who is of mixed races. Although there are probably secular groups who deal with this, their agendas do not align with our beliefs, therefore we need this kind of support coming from our churches where we can feel accepted for who we are.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

In all things: 1. Articulate & point all efforts (parish, school, PREP) to each person's decision to become an "Intentional Disciple" of Jesus Christ.

2. Articulate & demonstrate how this is lived out in the context of marriage & family. (But it all only makes sense if you CARE what Jesus wants from you in the first place!)

Chester County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

I would challenge any pastor that currently hosts an annual parish festival to stop having the festival and use the time and talents of the volunteers to more directly impact the local community. If there are quilters or craft fairs, ask the parishioners to make clothes or items for the poor in the community (i.e. scarves in the winter or toys for Christmas). If there are craftsmen that support with set up and tear down at the festival (carpenters, electricians, plumbers), set up a local hobby support program instead where these trades can assist local community members (non-parishioners included) that may not be able to do minor repairs themselves (i.e. leaking faucets, uneven steps or rotting wood, install a new fan or light, fixing a door that won't shut or lock). Those that like to advertise, promote the fair and solicit volunteers, instead create a local evangelization program with door-to-door ministries and Faith education nights at the parish. Invite the community into the Parish. These are all different opportunities for parents to witness to their children and for children to learn the basics of mission and service to others.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

We need triage for our young families. After sacrament prep has been completed, contact with young families is lost. We need to figure out how to continue that.

I think the top priority here would be to teach us something that we could do or behave as future grandparents. In both cases, we really need to stop the bleeding and there needs to be a sense of urgency with this.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

While I do believe our pastors need to lead the way, I also recognize a few problems with an over-emphasis on pastors having to be responsible. First, because they are overwhelmed by many demands, the thought of having to 'add' another ministry or group may just feel too overwhelming, thus leading to the stagnation of good ideas. Second, the Archdiocese already has many materials and initiatives. Why not create family lay leaders within every parish, and allow them to have monthly or bi-monthly meetings directly with the Archdiocesan programs? This would decrease demands on the pastor, support the true rise of lay leadership, and ensure the lay groups are under the careful guidance of the Archdiocese to ensure authentic Catholic teaching and behavior -i.e., acting in love and charity.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Testimony is so powerful! We can assent to something intellectually, but what is more convincing than hearing from a live person the answered prayers God has granted, even at times miracles? We should be hearing this regularly. Constant examples of others who are trying to live out the faith .

Chester County, Married 26+ years

QUESTION 8

If you could share one thing with your Archbishop and the pastors of the Archdiocese about what you need from them to live your vocation to marriage and family life more fully, what would be it be?

Please continue to keep programs that attract teenagers to the Catholic faith (like Anthem) going so that my children grow up to be devout Catholics, and please ensure that priests speak more about issues related to Catholic Social Teaching during homilies so that Catholic families can understand how they can help shape the world to be more like the way our God wants it to be.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

God Bless Archbishop Chaput for his strong and clear teaching of the Catholic Faith.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

The pastors of each parish are key. Lamentably, many of them are not disposed to give themselves as Jesus gave himself in service. There are very few who have the disposition to work as missionaries of God.

Philadelphia, Married, 26+ years (translated from Spanish)

Churches should have more church-wide events for families (such as picnics in the summer). In general, families should be encouraged to spend more time together.

Individual families that live far from grandparents and aunts and uncles should be able to look to their "church family" for support and to spend their free time.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Ongoing formation and opportunities to grow in my understanding of my vocation

Chester County, Married 0-10 years

Don't make me feel ashamed about divorce. It was the most difficult situation I ever encountered and it lasted for years before the divorce was final. Divorced families have overcome so much heartache, pain, and embarrassment yet I didn't find any support groups at church to help

Bucks County, Divorced

Ask... more like this survey. Listen to the answers sans ego involvement, and respond. Without compromise of the Truth, act upon the sheep's requests. God bless you richly for doing this!

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Prayer and encouragement. Encouragement can come in the form of homilies; pastoral letters; conferences; talks; study groups.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

The pastor shows no interest in any ministries in the church. He has not met with any group, does not encourage any group, does not make any time for the questions by the groups and is totally inaccessible. Any questions must go through the church secretary. How can you lead a parish if you are not available? Most times, he is not at the parish. He is out at other parishes as he does not want to be at our parish. It is nice that he speaks to parishioners after mass, but there is more to dealing with us than a pleasant "hi" after mass.

4) *I understand that pastors are people too. On the rare occasion when you can get some time with the pastor when something is weighing heavily on you, it would be more helpful if it were met with concern to assist using Catholic values rather than with annoyance and trying to dismiss you as soon as possible.*

5) *As a parishioner trying to keep our parish alive, it is very important that evangelization is front and center. There is no effort from our pastor on this issue. He would rather put down the evangelization group (headed by an unpaid woman) saying that the group is not making a difference. I must tell you that it is. It is opening and changing hearts one person at a time. I have witnessed it.*

6) *As a parishioner, it is not helpful to hear comments that show jealousy (by way of negative comments) toward other pastors in the diocese. This is petty and rather than embracing what the other pastor is doing that bring people to the Lord in large numbers, they are looked down on by other priests. What a disgrace.*

Delaware County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

I would implore them to reconsider their commitment to the Common Core curriculum in their schools. Catholic education is vital to the future of the church and allowing secular government to set the standards is crippling.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Form our communities in the importance of the Eucharistic and sacramental life. How to do this? Maintain respect for the liturgy and defend it. There is no marriage that can be truly successful if Christ is not at the center. The sacraments bring us to Christ. Do like St. Peter,

keeping our attention on Christ and not looking back.

Philadelphia, Married, 0-10 years (translated from Spanish)

We just need them to live out their priesthood with joy, without fear, and with their hearts and minds in the Church (keep reading/thinking well on marriage and other topics!).

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Challenging and instructive homilies spoken from a priestly heart in love with Christ.

Montgomery County, Widowed

My message to the pastors of our great diocese would be to get the congregations excited about our faith and the message of Jesus Christ. The most relevant, inspiring information I receive about the beauty of Catholicism comes from sources outside of my parish and diocese. Organizations such as Dynamic Catholic, Ascension Press and the Art of Catholic make the faith come alive through spirited podcasts, Biblical discussions, Catholics books and insightful commentary. Yet, I learned about all these sources either from fellow Catholics or stumbling upon them on my own. My parish does not publicize these resources.

We need to captivate the young and speak to them where they are - in the everyday challenges that they face. But this means bringing the Word of God to life through weekly or daily homilies that correlate the life of Jesus Christ with their own. If not, I fear that the future of the Catholic Church in America will suffer greatly.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Priests are so busy and they can't handle every thing alone. Each parish should have a couples support team, family support team or marriage support team. They would be trained by the Archdiocese, commit to fidelity to the Church and to a period of service. The couple could arrange the mini- retreats or collect the resources.

The Archdiocese should compile a list of faithful Catholic therapists and that should be included in resources.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Sacraments, help with forming friendship (real friendship, even for men!), a place to go when problems are serious and embarrassing.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Catholic Marriage is a sacrament. It is a truly wonderful gift blessed by Christ Himself at Cana. It is also hard and takes WORK to make work. This is a truth we tend to shy away from. We're too embarrassed to admit that we could use some help – probably because everyone else's marriage looks so "together" – probably because anyone else who's hurting is doing the same cover-up that we are. Talk about struggle. Admit that imperfection is the state we're all in. Arguments happen, mistakes happen, hurt feelings happen. So, make sure that growth and healing have their chances to happen. Hold a "10 Great Dates" session at your parish (Awesome program! <https://www.10greatdates.org/>). Make sure Marriage Encounter is welcomed into your parish. Make sure Retrouvaille literature is in the rack in the vestibule and that the Weekends held at Malvern 3 times a year are advertised in your bulletin. Find out which couples in your parish have been through strife and survived. Then connect those who are willing with couples who are currently struggling. Announce long term anniversaries in your bulletins like they're the most wonderful things happening that week. Hold these couples up as the heroes they are, especially in the schools. That 3rd grader's parents have been married 10 to 15 years, make sure she knows that there's this couple named the Smiths who've been married 53 years and that we as a parish hold them in high honor. And at some point it might even be appropriate for her to know that not all of those 53 years were perfect.

And finally, ask married couples what they do for fun. My wife and I have been married 31 years and are still married today by the grace of God and the Retrouvaille program. For this I am forever grateful! Our Retrouvaille leadership reminds us of the importance of fun, and I believe that we have a responsibility that a sense of gratitude and joy be evident to others. If a couple at 10, 15, 20 years married looks to us and doesn't see something they would want for their future selves, then we as a Catholic couple have failed them. If we aren't reminding couples to have some fun in their lives then we as a Catholic society have failed them.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years

Even though I love my parish and priests/deacons it would be nice to have something offered to help educate or inspire married couples as they continue their journey in forming their domestic church! I do understand that it is difficult to do this on a parish level, but perhaps regional would work better.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

Be more clear and speak in homilies, with strong voice, against the use of the birth control pill. We think that our parish has not said one word about this. Will there be parishioners in mortal sin receiving communion, not being clear about the magnitude of this sin?

Bucks County, Married, 26+ years (translated from Spanish)

Your Excellency and Dear Fathers,

Please support the married couples and families of the Archdiocese with your prayers and with all the treasures that the Church has to offer to them to help them to thrive now, to grow in

holiness, to be a light of God's love to others, and to one day enjoy Heaven together!

Chester County, Married 26+ years

I am thankful to the Archbishop for wanting to start this initiative because it is needed.

I pray there can be some practical things each parish can do to provide for this needing to church and that married couples will find this you part of their ministry to the church, they cannot just expect to receive from the church, we must encourage them to also give.

Montgomery County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

A husband. We need men of faith and virtue.

There is a trend in young men today: they do not begin to pursue virtue until they have begun to move towards their vocation. We need to find a way to convince young men that it is worth their while to pursue virtue even without the promise of a reward (in this case a wonderful, faith-filled wife and family). So many of my female friends have wisdom and spiritual maturity that far outstrips that of our male contemporaries because they heard chastity talks in high school and changed their lives to pursue that virtue and from that virtue grew many others. But very few male friends of mine have developed the virtues it would take to be a good husband and father.

Chester County, Single/Celibate/Consecrated

It all comes from Our Lord especially in the Eucharist. Our liturgies need to be more dignified and reverent. In my Parish I do not sense this.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

Overall, I think the Archdiocese does a great job to promote activities. Esp the office for the New Evangelization

One other thing that would be great would be for more parishes within a deanery to coordinate their programs which are open other people outside their parish.

Also encourage parishes to have confession on Sundays so more children and families can witness people attending Confession and to make access to confession easier for people with young families

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Be approachable. Be encouraging. Offer more fellowship opportunities where you and your parishioners can get to know one another. And, most importantly, teach! Teach what the Church stands for in the culture war and do not be afraid to stand up for what is right. Use your homilies

and your bulletins to encourage us and affirm us in our vocation to married and family life.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Encouragement to live the fullness of the Church's teaching. There is nothing more deflating than having a priest tell you that a sin is not that bad, that the Church's teaching is out of date, or that he has no knowledge (especially re NFP) about a particular topic that might be confronting a couple. Preach the Church's teaching on marriage and family life more than anything else.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

Please keep encouraging us in our prayer life and continue to foster deep relationships.

Delaware County, Married 11-25 years

A passionate interest in shepherding their flocks. Knowing the people; having a genuine joy for their vocation; and a desire and will to lead, pastor and love God's people ever closer to Him.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

More community among married people in different stages of life and marriage. Newly married, married for 60 years, previously married with kids. Marriage doesn't always look the same and community among people in similar situations but with one faith as the foundation. I think newly married people in addition to those preparing for marriage need the most support and community

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

Prayer! This is effective and much appreciated. Also, I am bolstered in my vocation as a wife and mother when the Archbishop speaks openly and plainly about the reality marriages and families face in today's world such as he did in "Strangers in a Strange Land" and many of his public addresses (everything from commencement addresses at universities to articles for Catholic Philly). Thank you!!!

Bucks County, Married 0-10 years

To pastors - Take an interest in getting to know the families within the parish, including the children. People want and need to be recognized and acknowledged. It doesn't say much of the Catholic faith if the priests, acting in persona Christi, don't recognize and develop relationships with families. This may not be a widespread problem but it certainly is in our parish.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

To be reminded regularly of two things about marriage:

(1) That it is a gift that we should receive with profound gratitude on a daily basis. It is not to be taken for granted when fewer people enter into marriage, and fewer that have entered into marriage stay married. I'm not entitled to it, and should not act as if I am. And I should encourage other married men and women in my parish and on my block (etc) to appreciate their spouses for the same reasons.

(2) That it is a vocation to holiness just as the priesthood is a vocation to holiness. It is not for settling down, but rather for taking on a grand adventure in which we get to take on the role of hero, with the support of God's grace. Celibate vocations and married vocations must help reinforce each other then by mutual example of heroic self-giving, friendship, and love. Otherwise, it's hard to imagine how the church can be sustained in the next generation.

Montgomery County, Married 11-25 years

Support us and let us know how we can support you . Be real don't be aloof be honest and compassionate.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

Much of the teaching on love starts with prayer. I think we need more support to learn how to pray. And particularly, there's a hunger for contemplative prayer in a culture of distraction. In that prayer people experience God's love, and that's the basis for everything.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Dearest Archbishop, thank you for your guidance and faith. You are a true father figure to us. We love you. Fathers, we want to know you better and include you in our families so we can love you better. We know that although some of your brothers have strayed away into the darkness, you are not all as the media describes you. We want to bring you to our homes and families for without your presence we would not know and Love Jesus as well as we try to.

Philadelphia, Married 0-10 years

Sorry, my comments are kind of brief, I know I did not answer some things on that last page, just don't have a lot of time.

I will say that I love our Archbishop Chaput. I think he is doing a good job under challenging circumstances (I hope he hears that a lot). And I know his advisors are hard at work.

Here is one thing: Challenge priests to get out there and meet with couples in their living rooms

or in the rectory, be compassionate and understanding (we can't jam "doctrine" down their throats when they are kind of on the fence with the Church's teaching, and some are) but also bold with them, and communicate to these couples that the Church is there for them, and that it's teaching on marriage and sexuality is good and that it will bear good fruit even if practiced imperfectly.

Philadelphia, Married 11-25 years

I want to thank the Archbishop and the pastors of the Archdiocese for being willing to read the surveys. I want to commend them for being brave and recognizing the need to protect and promote marriage and family life.

Montgomery County, Married 0-10 years

More fleshing out of what a chaste married life might look like or how to balance NFP, sex, and having more children based on various life circumstances. Priests supporting couples who are living by the Church's teachings through their homilies and administrative decisions.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

I ask you to stick to the basics. No one needs to be the most technologically savvy, but continue teaching the basic fundamentals of our Faith with specific examples on how we can live them out. I recommend all priests learn from the Archbishop and his homilies. He brings the traditions of our church and teachings of Christ and the early church fathers in to our world. His teachings are approachable and understandable.

Last, we call you all Father for a reason. Just as I am the father to my children, you are the father to your children in the church. We are not friends or buddies, with our children, we are fathers. We as parishioners do not need pastors to be our friends, there are plenty of other people that can be our friends, we need you to be our shepherds and Fathers.

Delaware County, Married 0-10 years

I am an old married lady. From what I observe, however, many families need to be reminded of what family is and how to live as/be a family. Those raising children today have lost sight of the importance of God before all else and that there are some things that we do together all the time - Mass, at least one meal a day together, faith formation, praying, caring for one another and those closest to us in our families and neighborhoods.

We all need to remember the basics - manners, kindness, respect, eye contact when speaking with/listening to someone. So much of this should be done within the family. Our families need role models. Some of them can come from within our parishes.

Delaware County, Married 26+ years

Listen to the parishioners of the archdiocese. There has been a lot of damage done by the lack of truly listening to our concerns. Sometimes I have felt it was as if we didn't matter, what we thought didn't matter.

Chester County, Married 26+ years

We need our Archdiocese and pastors to acknowledge, boldly and frequently, that there is a very real threat to marriage and family. They need to teach us WHY this is such a threat. And they need to educate our families about how to defend ourselves and our children against these attacks. This needs to be an integrated and cohesive approach originating from the Archdiocesan offices and carried out by all pastors in every parish. We should all receive the same teaching, the same information, the same level of support and opportunity.

Montgomery County, Married 26+ years

Acknowledgement and support of the difficulties of marriage and individual wounded-ness of individual spouses. Couple and parenting counseling opportunities. Small group faith formation opportunities.

Clearer teaching on marriage, family from the pulpit, please. Natural Family planning training locally.

Re-directing catechesis toward the Kerygma and discipleship/ relationship with Jesus and Liturgy.

Chester County, Married 11-25 years

Some sort of personal visit a year or two after the marriage would be great, but I do not know that you have the time. Also, specific social events for young couples, couples with young children, empty nesters, etc. might be able to build more of a support system.

Bucks County, Married 26+ years