

The London SW Sector organised a Day of Reflection and Prayer at the Catholic Formation Centre in Tooting on October 2014, to coincide with the presentation of the cause for the canonisation of Fr Henri Caffarel

The highlight of the day was the following talk given by 93 year old Canon Frank Sullivan, chaplain of New Malden 3 team.

WHAT MAKES A CATHOLIC MARRIAGE SUCCESSFUL IN THE 21ST CENTURY? by Canon Frank Sullivan

What makes a Catholic Marriage successful in the 21st Century? I don't know the answer. The Synod on the Family is breaking new ground. It is **opening up a dialogue** which one hopes will be conducted with openness, honesty, humility and compassion. Pope Francis will publish his response to the Synod in 2015, then we may have a better idea of how to respond to his question.

Marital Spirituality is about about how you as a couple live out on a daily basis your dialoguing covenanted sacramental relationship

In the past fifty years the church has issued five important documents concerning Marriage and family: 'Humanae Vitae', 'Familiaris Consortio', Pope John Paul's letter to Families 1994, 'Evangelium Vitae', 'The Theology of the Body', 'Dignitas Connubii', (instruction for tribunals handling causes of the nullity of marriage).

One should mention Teams Study Topic, 'Being a Family Today in the Church and in the World' 1993

My interest is about what contributes to the spirituality of the couple, and its significance for the future of the Church in the 21st Century.

It's about 'Evangelii Gaudium'. It's about the importance of the contribution married couples should be playing in the realisation of Pope Francis' vision of the Church becoming an evangelising community. It's about encouraging married couples to go out to the world with the Good News of Christian Marriage- something that is attractive and inviting, something that will draw people in.

Unless we are prepared to take seriously our responsibility as Christians, a responsibility to GO OUT to the whole world with the Good News – others will not COME IN. This responsibility flows from our Baptism,

Pope Paul VI issued 'Ecclesiam suam' a third of this document was about the need for open, honest dialogue at all levels within the church, and with other Christians, non-believers and science and business. This document has a significant influence on 'Lumen Gentium' and 'Gaudium et Spes'. Second Vatican Council spelt out the need for the church to continue this process of dialogue.

A result of this dialogue was the publication of the much criticised survey conducted throughout the Church on Marriage and family Life. The findings formed the agenda for the first week of the Synod on the Family.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, commenting on the first week of the Synod said: `the discussions of the first week served to crystallise the hopes and difficulties raised in that week.

“It is proving to be a stimulant to very searching and creative discussions in the small language group of which I am a member.

“I appreciate the spirit of the report which seeks to proclaim and strengthen the pastoral care of the Church. The warmth and the reach of the Church's pastoral care is crucial even if not always known or experienced.

“The report, obviously composed under pressure, has easily given rise to some misinterpretation. Its nature has to be understood. It is not a doctrinal or decisive document. It is, as stated in its conclusion, 'intended to raise questions and indicate perspectives that will have to be matured and made clearer reflection.'

“The process of this Extraordinary Synod is being conducted with great openness. This Report comes at the half-way stage. I know that one of the deepest desires of the Synod Fathers is to blow a trumpet for marriage and family as central part of God's plan for our happiness and fulfilment.

There is now to be another year of preparation for the Synod to take place in October 2015. During this time the views expressed will be examined and classified to form the Agenda for the Synod. During that time there will be a wide-ranging discussion throughout the church with different groups continuing to present their comments through various media. What goes on in next Year's Synod will certainly influence the church's thinking about what makes Catholic Marriage successful in the 21st Century.

Raymond Hunthausen, Retired Archbishop of Seattle, now aged 93, was present at all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. In 1982 he published a Pastoral letter on the Sacrament of Matrimony entitled `**A Sign for our time**'. I think this document was prophetic. I think its content will direct attention n to the significance of understanding the importance of communicating to couples the difference between Marriage, and Matrimony, and the latent power in each Matrimonied couple.

Thomas Vandenberg a Priest of the Archdiocese of Seattle wrote a booklet based on this Pastoral Letter. There are seven chapters. After each chapter there is a list of discussion questions, some of which I will be asking you to discuss.

Though this booklet was written in 1982, I think the questions it asks are as valid today as when they were first written. I think the questions they ask are the most valuable parts of the booklet. They are direct and challenging, perhaps a bit too direct for some couples.

Listen to this extract from section 50 of the Pastoral Letter: `*The witness of matrimonial couples reminds the Church of its primary mission: to proclaim Jesus to the world through its members relationship of love for one another. When this happens, the Church will be as attractive and irresistible as a couple in love*'.

The introduction to Chapter 6 begins with a quote from Section 40 of the Pastoral Letter:

*What our Married People **are** speaks more profoundly to the world than what they say..... even more profoundly than the teaching office of the Church..*

I hope these two texts, and those which follow, will help you to understand why I find this Pastoral Letter so attractive when it speaks about the Importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony, and the role of Married Couples in helping 'to make Catholic Marriage successful in the 21st Century'.

Chapter 1 is entitled: The Sacrament of Matrimony as a Church experience

Section 4 of the Pastoral says: *'As is true for all the Sacraments, Matrimony has an essential relationship with the Church. Marriage as an institution has an existence apart from the church, but the Sacrament of Matrimony does not'.*

Baptism does much more than free someone for Original Sin. It is a rebirth of that person into the family of God. The Church is saying 'We welcome you. You are now one **of** us, one **with** us as we share the journey of faith together. The Church is making a commitment to the baptised. It is a call to belong, to freely choose to share life with us. In return the new member of the church makes a similar commitment to the People of God. The Sacraments of Initiation are completed by Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In receiving the Body of Christ the baptised also enters into Communion with Christ and all the members of his body, the Church. The Sacraments are not just for the sake of the individuals who receive them. They are also for the life and health of the whole Church.

So too with the Sacrament of Matrimony. It is not only for the couple's life together, guaranteeing them the help of Christ to meet every crisis of married life in a Christ-like way. It is also for the life of the whole Church. This means that when a man and a woman choose to marry in the Catholic Church, they do so not just with eyes for each other, but also with eyes for the faithful of the church. Their life together is not just for their own joy and fulfilment: it is for the very fullness and life of the church. Not only do they enter a covenant with each other; they enter into a covenant, as a couple, with the whole body of Christ.

Matrimony requires both husband and wife to have a depth of faith that allows them not just to say 'yes' to each other but also as a couple to say 'yes' to their fellow believers.

Baptism is a Vocation, a calling from God to join with Christ in his continuing work of bringing about the Kingdom of God – bringing about the reign of God in the mind and heart of each and every person, through their freely given obedience to God's law of love. Matrimony is a vocation – a call to a Matrimonied couple, as a couple, to share the love that God has placed in their hearts with others.

Matrimony and Holy Orders are not just private affairs. Just as a Priest having received the Sacrament of Holy Orders is accountable to the whole Church for the way he lives his life, so also a Matrimonied Couple because they are called in a

special way to imitate the love of Christ for his bride the Church, are accountable to the church community for the way they live.

As a Church we have a responsibility for all marriages, whether or not they are conducted in a Church. The Matrimonied Couple are called to be models of married love. They **receive** the Sacrament of matrimony on their wedding day. They BECOME the Sacrament of matrimony – a sign – as they live their relationship. They ARE the Sacrament of matrimony They deserve reverence as much as a Priest deserves reverence. Their contribution to the life and health of the Church is significant and deserves recognition.

Chapter 2 is entitled Matrimonial Spirituality. It relates to Section 30 of the Pastoral Letter which states: *Crucial to our understanding of matrimonial spirituality is to admit that it is sexual....Sexual love is a constitutive part of matrimonial spirituality, not something secondary or accidental*,

Marriage is much more than a friendship or a partnership or a contract. It's a call to intimacy and belonging. It transcends the individual identities of the man and woman. Essential for their desire for one another, is their desire for sexual union, to be two in one flesh, It is the highest expression of intimacy and union available to any two human beings.

The profound depth of the unity of Christ with the ~Church is spoken of as a mystery. The married couple in their intimacy and their human sexual relationship, most clearly point to the desire for intimacy and love that Christ has for his bride the Church.

Jesus prayed that his followers would be one: *Father, may they all be one. May they be one in us as you are in me and I am with you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me (john 17.21)*

When surrounded by the selfless love of Jesus, the sexual desire between husband and wife enables them to experience an absorption in each other that can best be described as ecstasy - a word that describes the spiritual experience of mystics when absorbed into the love of God,

Sexual desire is at the very heart of the couple's spirituality as a couple. It cannot be separated from their way of life. It is at the very core of their way of life. It affects their openness to each other throughout the day, their readiness to listen when the other needs to be heard, their wiliness to share hopes, fears, dreams and disappointments, and to empathise with their spouse's resultant feelings. When the sexual desire between the husband and wife is strong, there is no room for selfishness, manipulation, egoism, or the quest for personal satisfaction and fulfilment at the other's expense. This kind of sexual desire cannot be confused with lust, which is essentially self-centred and abusive.

Sexual desire here approximates to passion, which in the Christian tradition denotes the kind of love which gives totally of self so that another can live. A wife cannot describe herself without including her husband and he cannot describe himself with including his wife.

It is their self-giving love that enables them to be vulnerable to each other, free of defences and distrust, ready to forgive and to heal. If their sexual genital activity is divorced from or not expressive of their on-going relationship, it is bound to heighten feelings of loneliness, distrust, guilt, of being used.

Love –making’ is a good word, Sexual intercourse is so much more than a means of pleasure and the reduction of tension. Through sexual intimacy a couple literally ‘make love’. When here is a lack of intimacy, or when their sexual intercourse is only seen in terms of a regrettable duty, it is less like to ‘make’ love.

Sexual intercourse should never be seen as a means to an end, such as withholding it as a punishment or doling it out as a reward. This is sexual exploitation.

This level of intimacy is no threat to his or her individuality. He or she is not longer just a son or daughter. They are now also a husband or wife. Their relationship needs – for love and acceptance, to belong, for self worth and for autonomy are met when he or she are also allowed to be herself or himself while in their relationship. It’s a relationship in which the joys and sorrow are shared, a life in which each enriches the other, to their mutual enrichment. It’s a relationship that endures until death us do part.

It involves a Trinitarian Spirituality. Intimacy of relationship is at the very heart of the life of the Trinity. Each person in the life of the Trinity is only revealed and understood in relation to the other. In an intimate married relationship each person is revealed and known by and through their dialogue together. Love is a gift of God. It’s their love that we share with others. It’s not given to keep to ourselves. It is given to share with others. Christ is present in your relationship. You are living cells in his body. He has not other body now but yours to do his work of bringing about a kingdom of love.

If there is no sexual passion between a couple it affects their matrimonial spirituality also. Sexual passion may or may involve sexual intercourse. If there is no sexual passion they are not living God’s plan for them. Others are bound to suffer.

Their love for each other affects the wider family of the church... As a Sacramental couple the evidence of the love for one another encourages others, whether married or single.

Married Couples need encouragement, especially from other married couples. That is why Teams are so important. The intimacy that grown between the couples as they share the ups and down, the joys and sorrows, the fears and disappointment of their relationship, the more they learn from each other, the moiré encouragement and support they receive. As couples come to realise the need to make their love for each other more visible through giving signs of affection in public, the more encouragement that can be to others to do the same.

Chapter 3: Matrimonied couples as Prophets. Section 31 of the Pastoral reads:
The Christian Married Couple witnesses in that communion to which the entire

Church is called. Without this witness the Church would lose sight of its deepest meaning, settling for a unity based on externals.

Since the Second Vatican Council we have come to view the Church in many ways. To look at the Church from the 'inside' and see what binds the members together is to see them as communion. To look at what the Church stands for is to view them as Sacrament – they are to be signs of God's love for each and every person. Couples have a truly prophetic role to play in the Church

A prophet is not one who foretells the future but one who sees clearly how this or that fits into God's plan – how it 'speaks' for God. While many desires and needs of a husband and wife are met in their love relationship, the motive is their love for each other. It is not a 50-50 proposition but a covenanted relationship, giving to one another 100-100 per cent. There is an interdependent relationship without demands for fairness and justice. They are not living as married singles, living independently of each other. To play down one's marital identity is relegating matrimony to a second class status.

Jesus preached a message calling for self-sacrifice, self-denial, giving so that others may live. Marital love is an invitation to conversion, a proposal to enter into relationship with God and one another. Even when couples argue or fight over issues that are bound to arise in their marriage, the more basic issue is always their relationship. Their efforts at forgiveness and reconciliation testify to their love for each other and their desire to be reunited. When a husband sees the goodness of his wife after having hurt her he will experience sorrow and compunction. He will see his sin and realise he is unworthy of his wife's love. He is humbled and asks forgiveness and seeks reconciliation.

Marital love is Life-giving. The generative power of love between husband and wife has the capacity to continue with God the work of creation. A man becomes a Father and a woman a mother. In the task of ensuring the physical, emotional, educational and spiritual development of their children, their committed, tender and compassionate love is a powerful expression of God's tender, compassionate and sustaining love. In many ways children are made in their parents' image and likeness. In this sense they are prophets to their children. Their love 'speaks' of God's love, his goodness, his mercy, his compassion and concern for each of us. And they are prophets to those around them showing to others what Fatherhood and motherhood and parenting mean.

Marital love is so much more than fulfilling duties. Everything about a husband and wife relationship is an invitation to intimacy and the communion of persons. Lasting hurts and pains cannot be tolerated as couple love cries out for healing and reconciliation. Only then can their love be life-giving to each other.

Chapter 4: A call to the Church – a call to the church to recognise the latent power in couple relationship. – a call to enable couples to recognise the importance of their love at the level of faith, to see their relationship as a Sacramental sign of Jesus' love for his bride, the Church – to help couples to see with the eyes of faith the importance in seeing Christ's love incarnate and visible in and through their *relationship*.

Section 35 of the pastoral letter says: *A sacramental couple, living in unity with one another as a way of life reveals the deepest identity of the church as a 'communion of saints'.*

As they live out their relationship, matrimonied couples learn to lean on the Lord. They see the need for prayer, for the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They see the need to pray together and to meet up with other Catholics, Catholic couples and Prayer Groups. Reflecting on the Scriptures together. Reading the lives of the Saints, especially modern saints, they learn that Holiness comes slowly – through what Pope John Paul called 'the Law of gradualness'.

Chapter 5: An unclear sign. Section 50 of the Pastoral says this: *The witness of sacramental couples reminds the Church to proclaim its primary mission – to proclaim Jesus to the world through its members relationship of love for one another.. When this happens the church will be as attractive and irresistible as a couple in love.*

The church has changed in many ways since the Second Vatican council. Some changes have been regarded with joy, others with resentment. Some people have left the Church. This disunion has led the Church to be seen by some as joyless, but others having experienced great joy through experiencing Charismatic style music, through Life in the Spirit Seminars, through Marriage Encounter weekends, Celebrate weeks, or New Dawn.

Sadly some couples are so busy doing good things that they never seem to find time for each other or time for their relationship with God. These are the times when they become an unclear sign of Christ's love for his bride the Church.

Hurts get buried away. Sensitivity and tenderness diminish. Anger and criticism creeps in. Defences are established and passion for one another seems to have evaporated. Love and Attention is poured out on the children. Sometimes the distance in your relationship creates unease in them. There comes a time when you know you should do something about it, but Pride prevents you from taking the first step

These are the times when matrimonied couples need to be reminded of their responsibility to find time for their relationship... These are the times when the monthly Team meeting can be a great help, a jolt to the mind, a reminder to be open and honest in sharing their feelings and their thoughts, a time for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation

Chapter 6: So the world may believe. Section 40 of the Pastoral letter says: What our married people are speaks more profoundly to the world than what they say – even more profoundly than the words of the teaching office of the church. As matrimonied couples we are living cells in the body of Christ. If a cell is unhealthy it affects the health of the whole body. The 'love' level in the Parish Community depends for the most part on the loved level in each married couple, in each cell. Matrimonied Couples meeting together and reflecting on their faith and on their relationship can be a powerful force for good in a Parish.

As Pope Francis forcefully reminds us, to evangelise is a fundamental responsibility of every Baptised Person, every Sacramental couple. Going out as a couple to other couples and inviting them into your team, or gathering several couples and starting a new Team is a service to them and to the Church as a community. Pope Francis wants to see an attractive church full of the Joy of the Gospel. Others will know us by our love, by our love, yes they will know us....and know God better, know Christ better, know themselves better. I'm sure you have discovered over the years The value of meeting together, but how much in recent times have you as a couple invited others into your Team. Have you become disillusioned by the times your efforts to persuade others have borne no fruit?

The international leadership evidently hope that the Team meetings to reflect on Discerning the sign of the times will stimulate couples to reach out. Pope Francis hopes and prays that Evangelii Gaudium will bring about a renewal of Parish Life and create parishes full of Spirit-filled Evangelizers . I am impressed by some of the articles and discussion topics in back numbers of the monthly newsletter.

Father Caffarel and a few couples in Paris had a vision for Married Couples around the same time that Fr Chuck Gallagher and a few couples in New York had a vision for married couples The couples who have become part of Teams of Our Lady, Worldwide marriage Encounter, and the new movements in the church are looking to the Pope and the Bishops to provide a teaching that will help make the Church's Teaching on marriage more attractive and inviting to those within the church and those outside.

Couples involved in Teams, Marriage Encounter and other marriage movement in the church are the couples to whom the Church is looking, challenging them to create a dialogue within the Church and with other Christian Marriage movements in order to influence the wider community of the beauty and the richness of Christian Marriage, including its sexual dimension.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. In what ways is your love as a couples giving new life to the whole church, especially your parish community?

Question 2. When was the last time you welcomed a new member to your Team?

Question 3. Prophets are people who speak up, or speak out for God, for Christ, or the Good news of Catholic Marriage? When was the last time you spoke up with enthusiasm about Catholic Marriage?

Question 4. What sort of things make you or others hesitant to do so?

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FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION – THEN SHARE WITH YOUR SPOUSE AND DISCUSS

These questions have been taken from the above. I suggest you write down your personal response to the question, then had your response to your spouse, and then discuss your responses

1. Marriage as an institution has an existence apart from the church, but the Sacrament of Matrimony does not'.

How does your awareness of Marriage as a Sacrament influence your response to each other?

2. Sexual desire is at the very heart of the couple's spirituality as a couple. It cannot be separated from their way of life. It is at the very core of their way of life. It affects their openness to each other throughout the day, their readiness to listen when the other needs to be heard, their willingness to share hopes, fears, dreams and disappointments, and to empathise with their spouse's resultant feelings. When the sexual desire between the husband and wife is strong, there is no room for selfishness, manipulation, egoism, or the quest for personal satisfaction and fulfilment at the other's expense. This kind of sexual desire cannot be confused with lust, which is essentially self-centred and abusive.

Can you relate to what is said in terms of your own relationship? How?

3. Marital love is Life-giving. The generative power of love between husband and wife has the capacity to continue with God the work of creation. A man becomes a Father and a woman a mother. In the task of ensuring the physical, emotional, educational and spiritual development of their children. their committed, tender and compassionate love is a powerful expression of God's tender, compassionate and sustaining love. In many ways children are made in their parents image and likeness. In this sense they are prophets to their children. their love 'speaks of God's love, his goodness, his mercy, his compassion and concern for each of us. And they are prophets to those around them showing to others what Fatherhood and motherhood and parenting mean.

Prophets 'speak out' for God. They, in a sense 'reveal' God's 'mind' to others. How does this passage speak to you?

4. Marital love is so much more than fulfilling duties. Everything about a husband and wife relationship is an invitation to intimacy and the communion of persons. Lasting hurts and pains cannot be tolerated as couple love cries out for healing and reconciliation. Only then can their love be life-giving to each other.

What are your thoughts and feelings after reading this passage?

5. As they live out their relationship, matrimonied couples learn to lean on the Lord. They see the need for prayer, for the Eucharist, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation They see the need to pray together and to meet up with other Catholics, Catholic couples and Prayer Groups. Reflecting on the Scriptures together. Reading the lives of the Saints, especially modern saints, they learn that Holiness comes slowly – through what Pope John Paul called 'the Law of gradualness'.

How often do you pray together? Read the Bible together? Share your personal prayer with your spouse?

6. Sadly some couples are so busy doing good things that they never seem to find time for each other or time for their relationship with God. These are the times when they become **an unclear sign** of Christ's love for his bride the Church.

Hurts get buried away. Sensitivity and tenderness diminish. Anger and criticism creeps in. Defences are established and passion for one another seems to have evaporated. Love and attention is poured out on the children. Sometimes the distance in your relationship creates unease in them. There comes a time when you know you should do something about it, but Pride prevents you from taking the first step

These are the times when matrimonied couples need to be reminded of their responsibility to find time for their relationship... These are the times when the monthly Team meeting can be a great help, a jolt to the mind, a reminder to be open and honest in sharing their feelings and their thoughts, a time for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation

7. All of us fail from time to time to deal with issues that give rise to negative feelings of anger, resentment, criticism and sadness. They make us an unclear sign of God's love. Are you conscious of any ways these things have affected your children?

8. As matrimonied couples we are living cells in the body of Christ. If a cell is unhealthy it affects the health of the whole body. The 'love' level in the Parish Community depends for the most part on the loved level in each married couple, in each cell. Matrimonied Couples meeting together and reflecting on their faith and on their relationship can be a powerful force for good in a Parish.

As Pope Francis forcefully reminds us, to evangelise is a fundamental responsibility of every Baptised Person, every Sacramental couple. Going out as a couple to other couples and inviting them into your team, or gathering several couples and starting a new Team is a service to them and to the Church as a community. Pope Francis wants to see an attractive church full of the Joy of the Gospel. Others will know us by our love, by our love, yes they will know us....and know God better, know Christ better, know themselves better

I'm sure you have discovered over the years the value of meeting together, but how much in recent times have you as a couple invited others into your Team? Have you become disillusioned by the times your efforts to persuade others have borne no fruit?

If the answer is 'Yes' then try this as a Team or with other Teams.

Get a copy of 'The Marriage Course' by Nicky and Sila Lee a DVD available from Alpha Resources (Other Marriage Courses are advertised. Google The Marriage Course – Alpha Resources)

Study the literature, form a Promotion team. You will need a DVD player or a laptop, projector, screen, amplifier and speakers. Find a venue, advertise the course and present the course. If necessary substitute tea and biscuits instead of the meal. Having experienced the benefits of the course then invite them to Join your Team or set up a Piloting Course for a new Team