



August 12, 2022

Dear Parish Family,

In a popular reading often picked at weddings, we hear proclaimed, “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, *and the two of them become one body*” (Genesis 2:24). This line has rich theological implications which I wish to articulate in this pastoral letter in regards to the Sacrament of Marriage. The reason for this letter is to express the importance of a new ministry that many are already aware of and how that ministry pertains to our parishes and to the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage.

We are calling this new ministry our Convalidation Ministry. This ministry is led by the laity and supported by the clergy. It originated from a growing need that is *not* unique to our two parishes. Over the years, the universal Church has seen a drastic rise in the number of lay faithful entering into civil unions apart from receiving the Sacrament of Marriage in Church. Because of this, many of our faithful are living in grave sin and are thus barred from receiving Holy Communion for the good of their souls in order not to jeopardize them further. As Saint Paul says in Sacred Scripture, “*For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself*” (1 Corinthians 11:29). We, as a community of believers, want to help any individuals who find themselves in situations where impediments exist which keep them from living in right relationship with God. We desire for all of our parishioners to be in full communion with us and to once again receive the life-giving sacraments of Holy Mother Church that are needed for this life in preparation for the life to come. Worthy reception of Holy Communion is how we best live out being part of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Most Catholics are unaware that a person who is baptized into the Faith is required by the guiding law of the Church to also have their marriage blessed in the same Faith. Since most couples are initially unaware of this when they enter into a civil union, it poses a problem later when they realize that they are no longer in good standing and have incurred impediments which exclude them from receiving Holy Communion. Our Convalidation Ministry will help walk with those couples in getting those impediments removed and their union blessed. Others find themselves in situations where they are in their second marriage or third marriage, and even though they might be aware of the situation and have a desire to have their current union blessed in the Church, they find it difficult to move forward since their first marriage has yet to be determined to be sacramentally null and void (annulled). This Convalidation Ministry will also seek to assist anyone who finds themselves in this particular situation by first placing them in prerequisite meetings where I will personally walk with them through the annulment process in hopes of getting them to a place where they are free to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage.

At this point, one might have questions. Why do I need to have my civil union blessed in the Church? If I love this person, isn't that enough? How does a civil union and the sacrament

of marriage differ? These frequently asked questions, dear family, are what brings us to speak about the beauty of the line from *Genesis* that I opened this letter with, “*and the two of them become one body.*” It is in the Sacrament of Marriage that man and woman truly become one, not just on a mere physical or biological sense, but on the deeper level of the soul as they share the common goal of heaven by living out their everyday lives and role as *helpmate* to the other.

To better answer these questions, we must also look at how the Church defines the Sacrament of Marriage, which is different from civil unions. Canon 1055, defines marriage as, “the matrimonial *covenant*, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a *partnership of the whole of life* (that is to say fidelity and permanence) which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring has been *raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament* between the baptized.

This tells us that marriage is first a covenant which is an exchange of persons. This is different from a civil union which is a legal contract—something that can be severed or voided when it no longer suits a particular need. Covenants are long lasting. This covenantly language of marriage speaks of a permanence to a particular relationship and of a fidelity. Anyone who has lived out the Sacrament of Marriage knows that to have permanence and fidelity takes work, and it looks a lot like the cross which is the ultimate sign of total gift of self to the other in order that the other might have life. Yes, the Sacrament of Marriage when lived out is a visible sign to all of us of the love that Christ has for his Bride, the Church, as he poured Himself out for Her. Secondly, this covenant of generous love is between two baptized persons, a male and a female. It is these two individuals who establish between themselves a partnership while also inviting God to be a part of their relationship. Lastly, it is Christ himself who raises it to the dignity of a Sacrament. The Sacrament of Marriage is not something arbitrary as the world would have us think. Rather, it has been determined by God to be the special vocation in which He has called man and woman to live together in this particular state of life. In doing so, the couple is not alone in their struggles. Christ, as he does in all of the sacraments, gives his abundant grace to those who enter into this covenant.

If you are interested in learning more about the beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage and find yourself in either of these situations where you need someone to walk with you and your spouse in getting your union blessed, please reach out to us. There are information cards located in the back of the church and more information can be obtained from our parish office. We look forward to journeying with you as all of us continue onward on this pilgrimage to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Your Parish Priest,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jethro Bruce". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".