

Celebrating

St Valentine

Honouring life-long marriage and romantic love

St Valentines Day

A Resource for parishes and schools from
The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

In a Nutshell

Aim of this resource:

- To encourage families, parishes and schools to affirm the value of marriage, specifically on St Valentine's Day
- To provide practical suggestions for parishes and schools to celebrate World Marriage Day (Feb 14, 2010)

This kit contains:

1. A reproducible leaflet 'Be My Valen-time!' to be distributed to parishioners on or around St Valentine's Day.
2. Notes for the liturgies around St Valentine's Day.
3. Newsletter inserts.
4. Tips for building a marriage friendly community

How to Use this Resource

1. Reproduce the handout 'Be my Valen-time' to distribute to families at Mass or via the school. Alternatively, some of the content of the handout could be included in the parish/school newsletter.
2. Use the liturgy notes to highlight marriage during the parish Mass or school paraliturgu.
3. Use the newsletter clipboard for simple ways of supporting marriages through the newsletter.
4. Review the Tips for building a Marriage Friendly Community for ways that your parish or school could highlight the importance of marriage and utilise the giftedness of married couples.



St Valentine's Day

Sunday February 14th, 2010

Dear Friends,

Few would question the gift that a loving, stable marriage brings to the family and wider community. Indeed, research findings confirm that marriage provides benefits to both the couple and their children. And yet, loving, stable marriages don't attract a lot of attention from church and community organisations until they become unstable. It is thus vitally important that we make frequent use of opportunities to affirm marriage and highlight the value of a loving marriage to the community.

In recent years, St Valentine's Day has become increasingly secularised. 'Saint' has been dropped from the title and the emphasis has shifted from romantic love in the context of life-long marriage, to romantic relationships of any persuasion. This parish initiative is a bold attempt to reclaim the sacred from the secular and use the innate joyfulness of the feast to promote and affirm marriage and life-long romantic love.

I invite you to use the resources enclosed to focus parish attention on the role of marriage and St Valentine.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Eugene Hurley
Chairman, Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

Liturgy Outline

Introduction

Today we celebrate St Valentine's Day – a feast that rejoices in romantic love and lifelong marriage.

[See the Fact File, page 3]

Opening Prayer

Father in heaven, the loving plan of your wisdom took flesh in Jesus Christ and changed history by his example of love.

May our fulfilment of his command reflect your salvation to the ends of the earth.

Readings

Feb 14, 2010 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

First Reading: Jer 17:5-8

A curse on those who trust in humanity, a blessing on those who trust in the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps: 1, R: 39:5

Happy are they who hope in the Lord.

Second Reading:

Cor 15:12, 16-20.

If Christ is not raised from the dead, your faith is in vain.

Gospel: Lk 6:17, 20-26.

Happy are the poor, woe to the rich.

Homily

[See Homily Notes, page 3]

Prayers of the Faithful

Celebrant: Mindful of God's covenant of everlasting love, let us pray with hope and trust in the power of that love to transform our lives.

- For our parish community: that in this divided world we may be a sign of unity and an instrument of peace. We pray in faith.
- For the world in which we live; that in spite of all the obstacles and difficulties, the human family may grow in understanding and cooperation. We pray in faith.
- For those who are preparing for marriage: that they may build a relationship of intimacy and tenderness for which we all long. We pray in faith.
- For married couples: that they may rejoice with one another in moments of strength and be compassionate towards one another in moments of weakness. We pray in faith.
- For those who have suffered broken promises: that they may find healing and peace. We pray in faith.
- For widowed people: may the gifts of love, support, courage and hope be made present to them within this community. We pray in faith.
- For all here present: that this celebration may encourage us to persevere in the way of love. We pray in faith.

Celebrant: Heavenly Father, may the radiance of your love light up our hearts. May we know and experience your presence with us as we journey joyfully and courageously in the ways of love. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Offertory

Invite 2 couples to bring forward a symbol representing a significant part of their married life. (e.g. Bed quilt, baby bottle, bible, briefcase, maintenance tools, handkerchief, map etc). As they reach the sanctuary, they (or the commentator) should explain in 2-3 sentences what the symbol is and why they chose it.

Blessing of Couples

Invite the married & engaged couples to stand and/or come to sanctuary for a blessing. Have the congregation extend their hand over the couples as the priest says...

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us turn to the Lord and pray that He will continue to bless your marriages with His grace.

Father, look with tenderness upon your daughters gathered here; give them love, grace and peace. May they always follow the example of the holy women whose praises are sung in the scriptures.

Bless your sons gathered in your name; may they always have the strength and compassion which comes from the Gospel.

Together, may each couple continue to both praise you in their gladness and turn to you in their troubles so that you may fill them with the joy of salvation. Keep them faithful in their marriages, and let them be living examples of Christian love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

St Valentine's
Day

Homily Notes

The readings today contrast those who live in the Lord and those who live apart from the Lord's grace. This is true of each of us individually. It is also true for married couples.

Married life is full of both blessings and woes. The joys of family, of being loved without condition, of belonging to another certainly bring great blessing to couples. Likewise, marriage can also be the source of deep pain and unwelcome challenges. We hurt each other, disappoint one another, we let each other down. Selfishness, misunderstanding, defensive reactions are all part of each couple's experience. Then there are the times when the stresses and strains of things outside the marriage take their toll: financial problems, difficulties with one of the children, tension with extended family, losing a job, sickness. All these things can put marriages under stress. There's not a couple here, who can't testify to the hard times in marriage.

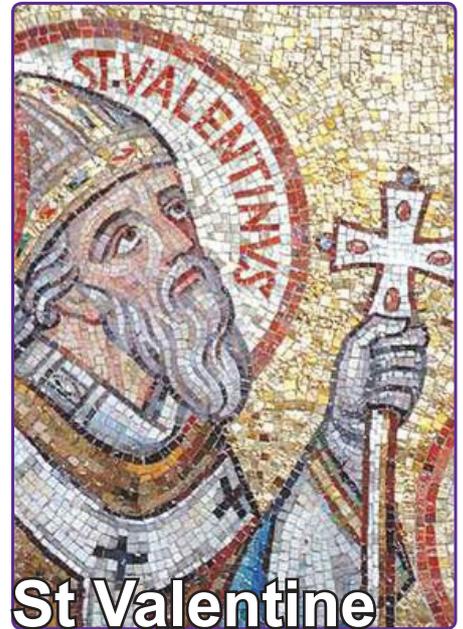
Yet, no matter how difficult things get in our relationships, the Lord's grace and blessing is available to us if we seek it. Like the crowds in the gospel who came to hear Jesus preach and be healed, if we come to him and ask for healing, the Lord always responds. He responds with eagerness. He responds with urgency. Yet only rarely does he respond with a miraculous cure. No, God loves us more deeply than to just effortlessly fix our problems. In the same way that a loving parent won't do a child's homework for them, when we ask God for help in our relationships he does much more than just 'fix it'. Rather, he draws close to us in our troubles; God gives us the gift of his presence, a presence that encourages us and helps us find deeper reserves of love. He gives us the gift of Jesus Christ as an example of self-sacrificial love.

This is true for all us in all the troubles we may face in our lives. And it is certainly true in the difficulties we face in our marriages and relationships.

[Recount a story from a couple, based on your pastoral experience, who turned to God in their time of trouble (e.g. sickness in the family, 'falling out of love', unemployment etc). Give only brief details on the trouble. Then share how they responded. What happened when they tried to get their spouse to change? What happened when they let anger or self-pity take hold? And finally, what happened when they turned to God? What grace did they receive to help them cope with the challenge?]

Marriage is a wonderful example for us all. Jesus loves us so passionately, so deeply, that he desires to be with us for eternity. Jesus calls himself 'the bridegroom' because his love for us is like the love we see in a married couple. Freely given, total and unconditional, through good times and bad, faithful and exclusive until death, fruitful and life-giving. Marriage illuminates the nature of Jesus' love for us – it's a spousal love, full of urgency and the desire to draw us into intimacy with him.

** Alternatively, you could ask a couple to give testimony on how they handled a challenging situation.*



Fact File

Today we celebrate St Valentine's Day – a feast that rejoices in romantic love and lifelong marriage. In many countries of the world, the feast coincides with Marriage Week.

St Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time of Emperor Claudius II. His association with young lovers is well known even in modern times. The story goes that Claudius, urgent to recruit soldiers for his armies, decreed that all weddings be suspended so as to encourage more single, unfamiliar men to serve in combat. Seeing the anguish of the young couples forbidden to marry, St Valentine allegedly performed secret weddings in defiance of the Emperor.

Another legend holds that while awaiting his execution, St Valentine restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter. On the eve of his death, he is reported to have penned a farewell note to the young girl signing it, "From your Valentine".

He was beheaded on February 14, 269 AD and buried on the Flaminian Way where archaeologists have unearthed a catacomb and an ancient church dedicated in his name. He is the Patron Saint of engaged couples, happy marriages, love and lovers.

We celebrate today not only the love shared by those couples among us, but also the love of the Great Lover, Jesus. Christ, our bridegroom, invites us to join him in an everlasting covenant; an eternal love union that is reflected in the love of each and every dedicated married couple.

ref: www.catholic.org/saints

Newsletter

Clipboard

Tips for Couples

Give your spouse a St Valentine's date he/she will remember: revisit one of your early romantic encounters (e.g. first date, proposal etc). Plan the whole date: organise a baby-sitter, bring refreshments and nourishment, photos, music and let the romance flow!

Celebrating St Valentine's Day

A day to honour married couples.
Join us...

Sunday Feb 14th,
Mass: xx time
and afterwards for....

St Valentine's Day

Wishing our faithful married couples a joyful St Valentine's Day. Thank you for your example of love.

Tips for Couples

Make St Valentine's Day last all year. Plan twelve dates on or near to the 14th of each month. Make sure each date includes time to share what's happening in your life together.

Tips for Couples

Make St Valentine's Day something special this year. Instead of flowers or chocolates, give the gift of your presence. Make a commitment to set aside 10 minutes a day to share the highs and lows together.



Resources for Parishes & Schools

Many dioceses have a marriage office or council that offer resources to support parishes and schools. For local information, visit:
www.catholic.org.au

In addition, there are a number of Catholic organisations and movements that provide resources to strengthen marriage and assist couples to discover their sacramental potential.

Catholic Society for Marriage Education

www.csme.catholic.org.au

Celebrate Love Seminar

www.celebratelove.com.au

Christian Family Movement

www.cfm.org

Couples for Christ

www.cfc-australia.org

For Your Marriage - US Bishops

www.foryourmarriage.org

Marriage Encounter

www.wme.org.au

New Families Movement of the Focolare

www.focolare.org

Schönenstatt

www.schoenstatt.org.au

Renaissance of Marriage Conference

www.thepmrc.org/renaissance

Retrouvaille

www.retrouvaille.org

Teams – a Movement for Married Spirituality

www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au

Building a

Marriage-friendly Community

The most important part of a marriage-friendly community is cultivating an affirming and empowering mentality towards married couples. They are a tremendous resource in proclaiming the gospel. They are not simply another group with pastoral needs; they are a key resource for evangelisation. Try these ideas to empower and enliven marriage in your community.

1. Have an annual 'celebration of Marriage' to affirm couples and the giftedness of marriage (e.g. St Valentine's Day (Feb 14), Marriage Week, or National Marriage Day (Aug 13 in Australia)).
2. Celebrate significant wedding anniversaries – have a regular 'Congratulations' column in the parish/school newsletter, invite couples celebrating an anniversary to be blessed by the community at Mass, or have an special annual Mass to which couples could be personally invited.
3. Ask a couple (or several) to give a short testimonial on how God has blessed them through their marriage. They could share it at an appropriate time during the Sunday liturgy or it could be published in the community newsletter.
4. Invite couples (rather than individual spouses) to take up ministry or be members of the parish pastoral council or school parent council. Couples bring a special charism to the children's liturgy, youth group, welcoming team, bereavement ministry, or pastoral planning. Seek out those who have a vibrant sense of their sacramental witness for leadership.
5. Establish a 'marriage/family ministry' made up of couples to plan and execute marriage initiatives in the community.
6. Make information about marriage strengthening resources available to parishioners through the newsletter, notice board and parish web site.
7. Combine resources with the parishes/schools in your deanery to host a marriage enrichment event (such as couples retreat or weekend workshop).
8. Sponsor a couple to represent the parish/school at a marriage conference or marriage education training course. Make sure they share their experience with the community on their return. (e.g. Renaissance of Marriage, MARENC)
9. Hold a movie night for couples with a positive marriage message (e.g. Fireproof, The Story of Us).
10. Purchase some marriage resources for the parish lending library (e.g. Threshold magazine subscription (CSME), Holy Sex (Gregory Popcak), Good News about Sex and Marriage (Christopher West)).
11. Run a Theology of the Body Study Group for couples of your community. (Resources available from www.livingwellmedia.com.au).
12. Invite a couple to speak about the vocation of marriage to the youth group, senior school classes or the RCIA group.

Tips to Celebrate St Valentine's Day

1. Talk about SAINT Valentine's Day, rather than simply Valentine's Day – it is after all a feast based on the life of a saint!
2. Honour married couples with a special Mass, or when the feast falls on a weekend, at the Sunday Masses.
3. Mark the occasion with a simple celebration after Mass (e.g. a glass of champagne, a St Vals cake, wine and cheese)
4. Suggest that parish couples make a group booking at a local restaurant to continue the celebration.
5. Host a parish dinner for parish couples - include the married and engaged.



Time Well Spent

According to Bill Doherty, the best way to make time available for each other is to establish couple rituals. A ritual is defined by three key features:

1. It is repeated
2. It has a beginning and an end
3. It is emotionally meaningful. (This third feature is what distinguishes a ritual from a habit).

Couple rituals help build connection and intimacy - they create the critical space in a busy schedule for couples to focus on each other. When we're busy, we often don't have time to spend together let alone remember to schedule it! A couple ritual acts like a permanent diary date that keeps the romance alive.

Some couples have regular date nights or special anniversary traditions. The backbone of a couple's intimacy however is built on small, every day encounters: the Essential Daily Ritual (EDR). Just as our bodies need minimum daily vitamins, so also our relationship needs EDRs to keep our marriage healthy. This might be a daily coffee debrief, a sharing of highs and lows, a nightly snuggle before sleep, or a connect kiss and hug when rejoining at days end. Often these EDRs arise spontaneously and evolve naturally over time. Others are actively negotiated. Whatever way you establish your EDRs the most important thing is to have them.

This year, make St. Valentine's Day, last all year long... make a choice to spend more time together.

Create an Essential Daily Ritual (EDR) for couples!

Ground rules:

1. **No third parties:** it's not a couple ritual if the baby, your best friend or the TV is present.
2. **Bookend your ritual with a starting point and ending point.** An external trigger linked to a regular event works well for the starting point, such as at the end of dinner or immediately when you both get home. The endpoint ensures that the ritual doesn't become burdensome. So set a time limit (eg 15 mins) or link it to a spontaneous conclusion, like the time it takes to walk around the block.
3. **Keep it enjoyable.** The goal is emotional connection. Dealing with hurts or major decisions are important but don't let them intrude on your EDR. Schedule another time for these toughies.



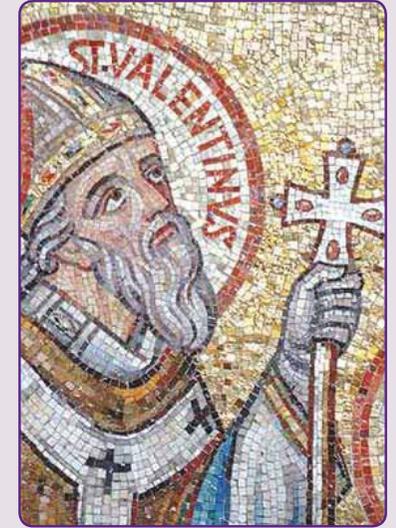
A resource from the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council
for the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life
Authors: Francine & Byron Pirola. Reproduction permitted

Be my Valen-time

Insufficient time together is one of the biggest contributors to relationship breakdown. Whether our relationship is flying or sinking, time together is like a balm, healing the bumps and bruises of life and encouraging feelings of affection and tenderness. And with St. Valentine's Day approaching, it's the perfect opportunity to give the gift of time.

According to family therapist Bill Doherty, when couples were surveyed about the most difficult part of maintaining a relationship, the number one item was a lack of time. Even those who listed communication as the culprit, when questioned further, they said the problem was insufficient time to communicate!

We'd all like more hours in the day. The challenge is to find ways to more efficiently manage the time we **do** have to meet the needs of the most important relationships in our life.



St. Valentine was a priest in Rome at the time of Emperor Claudius II. His association with marriage arises from the story that Claudius, urgent to recruit soldiers, decreed that all weddings be suspended so as to encourage more single, unattached men to serve in his armies. Seeing the anguish of the young couples forbidden to marry, St. Valentine allegedly performed secret weddings in defiance of the Emperor.

He was eventually arrested and imprisoned. While awaiting his execution, St. Valentine restored the sight of his jailer's blind daughter. On the eve of his death, he penned her a farewell note signing it, "From your Valentine".

On February 14, 269 AD he was beheaded. He is the Patron Saint of engaged couples and married lovers.

ref: www.catholic.org/saints

St. Valentine's Day | February 14

The Time Drought

Modern relationships are plagued by busyness. While children certainly make a couple's time together scarce, even newly weds complain of a 'time drought' in their relationships. The busier couples get with activities outside their relationship, the more time-starved their marriage becomes. And the less their relationship is the central source of affirmation and meaning in their lives, the more detached spouses become from each other.

Tragically, when their relationships are time-starved, couples often end up arguing during the little time they do spend together. Of course arguing about the mundane issues is really a symptom of a deeper problem. When our emotional needs for intimacy, affection and companionship are not being met, we feel neglected, lonely and resentful. Innocent gestures are frequently misinterpreted: his dirty clothes left on the floor are a symbol of his lack of care; her 'not tonight dear' tiredness an expression of her indifference. Arguments flare more easily when relationships are time deprived making the precious time spent together stressful and unpleasant.

Overscheduled parents!

Being parents of five, it's easy for the kid's activities to take over our family life. We have made the decision to limit the kid's activities to a maximum of two and explained that we would not be attending every game or training session. It's still busy and we sometimes have to defend our decision when the kids want to take up a new interest, but we feel like we are in charge of our life and family, instead of being ruled by the training schedule of the coach. One of the unexpected benefits of our rule has been more time for our children to play with their siblings and develop self-entertaining skills. Net result: less stress and more time for relationship, including our marriage!

Take the Test! - Time Sheet Exercise

1. Make a list of all the things that are important to you in your life, like your spouse, family, health, faith etc. Give them a score:
A - Extremely Important | B - Very Important | C - Somewhat Important
2. Now make a Time Sheet of your typical day or week. Write down the different activities that you do and the approximate time spent on each (e.g. sleeping - 6 hours, grooming - 30 mins, work - 8 hours).
3. Evaluate your Time Sheet. How much time do you spend on the things that you ranked with an A compared to those with a B or C? How did your spouse fare in your Time Sheet?

Quantity is part of Quality

Many people justify the lack of time spent with their loved ones by saying "we have quality time". In truth, quality time is only effective with a foundation of **quantity** time - low intensity companionship which builds trust and openness. Quality time requires emotional vulnerability. This disposition can not be turned on and off at will; it is nurtured through leisurely quantity time spent together, often in routine activities like washing up, gardening or going for a walk. Just like food, quality doesn't help if there's simply not enough of it - we need a staple diet of Quantity Time to keep our relationship healthy.

Fortunately, we don't need to have enormous, uninterrupted slabs of time together in order to experience the benefits. Regular, brief get-togethers make a backbone of trust and connection and accumulate to build a solid foundation of quantity time. Small changes in our schedule or routine can make a huge difference. For example, scheduling a few extra minutes in the morning before leaving home for an unhurried good-bye kiss, phoning each other during the day and reconnecting at day's end with a long hug sets the tone for the day's interaction.

The Date Claimer

For years, organising a night out together with a travelling husband seemed like an impossibility. So we have begun a practice of 'date claiming'. Anytime one of us has a mundane chore to do like picking up one of the kids after a dance, we make it a 'date'. We have 'return the DVD' dates, 'fill up the car' dates, even 'weeding the lawn' dates. Rather than the typical 'divide and conquer' strategy that many busy couples adopt, we consciously choose to join each other in our individual chores whenever we can.

Give your marriage a tune up! Every marriage can benefit from one of the many couple retreats or enrichment experiences available.

Celebrate Love Seminar
www.celebratelove.com.au

Marriage Encounter
www.wwme.org.au

New Families Movement of the Focolare
www.focolare.org

Schöenstatt
www.schoenstatt.org.au

Teams – a Movement for Married Spirituality
www.tol-oceania.catholic.org.au

Christian Family Movement
www.cfm.org

Couples for Christ
www.cfc-australia.org

Retrouvaille
www.retrouvaille.org

Renaissance of Marriage Conference
www.thepmrc.org/renaissance

Catholic Society for Marriage Education
www.csme.catholic.org.au

For Your Marriage - US Bishops
www.foryourmarriage.org

Busy, Busy!