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## **A MESSAGE FOR THE SEPARATED AND DIVORCED**

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During the course of the year the members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and I have studied together the situation of our sisters and brothers suffering from the effects of separation or divorce. We have shared together on the Gospel attitudes to be adopted towards them, so I would like to share with you the results of these reflections, as well as the hope that is yours.

### **WE ARE NOT HERE TO JUDGE YOU**

We know about the difficult trials most of you have had to go through, to reach this point. It is true that one's life journey can be different from another's; we are not here to judge you in the least, either on your past or your present situation. Had we been in the same situations as you, what decisions would we have made? We can very humbly ask ourselves that question.

### **YOU ARE ALWAYS MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH**

Despite this separation or divorce you are still members of the Church, if you are baptised. You continue to be a part of the Church; in a family, there is always a special place reserved for the family member who is undergoing a difficult period. We hope that wherever you go you be cordially welcomed as brothers and sisters to our gatherings, and that you take part in our community activities. We hope that you come often to listen to the Word of God that is given to us: it is a Word that enlightens and that is vital when the situations we live are at a very low point. Your brothers and sisters will show real love for you, because it is by the love we have for one another that we are recognised as disciples of Jesus. The community is there in good times and in bad to welcome you and help you through your ordeal. The quality of our fellowship is a sign of the quality of our faith.

### **SERVICES ARE OFFERED TO YOU**

As for all members of our Church, the diocesan Church's services are available to you also, to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. All our different offices and committees have been asked to provide those services you would like to have, whether they be catechetical, youth ministry, liturgical, or family and social ministry services.

### **FAMILY PASTORAL MINISTRY**

Organisations and services are available for helping separated or divorced persons. Specific groups can contribute much to help those whose love has been wounded. Resource persons from these organisations can be quite helpful. Centres such as the Centre Sérénité in Edmundston can also bring real hope for better tomorrows. We hope more Christian-oriented groups continue to welcome and bring hope to all the separated and the divorced. It is also possible to refer to the diocesan chancery, when the validity of one's marriage is in doubt.

## **SOCIAL MINISTRY**

Very often, the lack of financial resources also creates problems. The economic slump continues to affect our milieus. It is humiliating to knock on a door to seek help. We have neither gold nor silver, and we generally cannot respond to financial requests. But we know that there are places and centres where one can get very decent clothing; we would be very happy if all these clothes could be distributed to the needy.

## **PASTORAL MINISTRY**

As Christians, divorced or remarried persons not only have permission but also the duty to take part in the Sunday Mass in order to satisfy their need of being nourished with the Word of God, and of being part of the Christian community. They grow in faith, hope, and love, by taking part in this Sunday gathering. According to present legislation, they can receive holy communion unless they have gone through a civil marriage or are living in a common law relationship. Meeting with one's brothers and sisters can be an ideal opportunity to better live one's baptismal and confirmation commitments. To those who have gone through a civil marriage, Pope John Paul II writes, in his encyclical on the family: « I warmly exhort the pastors and the community of the faithful as a whole to help the divorced and remarried, with great charity; all will work so that no one will feel separated from the Church, since they can and must share in the Church's life. They are to be invited to listen to the Word of God, to attend Mass, persevere in prayer, and contribute to the works of charity and the community initiatives in the promoting of justice. »

## **MAINTAINING THE IDEAL OF INDISSOLUBILITY**

We recently heard that in France one in four marriages ends in divorce, in Canada it is one in three, and in the United States, one in two... With statistics such as these, some people wonder whether it is realistic for marriage to remain indissoluble. If it were only a question of Church discipline, like the law governing fast and abstinence, the Church could amend the law; but the Church refuses any compromise regarding the ideal of the indissolubility of marriage because of our belief that this ideal is from God Himself, given to us by Jesus. Jesus never gave up the ideal, just as he never backed off regarding love of neighbour. That is why maintaining the ideal of the indissolubility of marriage, and loving everyone whose love has been wounded, are two attitudes that stem directly from the same Gospel.

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