



BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0725

Martedì 07.10.2014

Pubblicazione: Immediata

Sommario:

◆ **Synod14 - 4ª Congregazione generale: "La pastorale della famiglia: le varie proposte in atto (II parte, Cap. 1)"**

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Introduzione del Presidente delegato, Card. Luis Antonio Tagle

Testimonianza dei coniugi Jeff e Alice Heinzen (Diocesi di La Crosse, USA)

Alle ore 16.30 di oggi, alla presenza del Santo Padre, si tiene nell'Aula del Sinodo in Vaticano la quarta Congregazione generale del Sinodo straordinario sulla famiglia, per la continuazione del dibattito generale, che segue un ordine tematico in corrispondenza con le parti e i capitoli dell'*Instrumentum laboris*.

La sessione tematica di questo pomeriggio: "La pastorale della famiglia: le varie proposte in atto" (II parte, Cap. 1) si è aperta con la presentazione del Presidente delegato di turno, Card Luis Antonio Tagle, Arcivescovo di Manila (Filippine), che ha introdotto la testimonianza dei coniugi Sig. Jeffrey Heinzen, Direttore del *Natural Family Planning* nella diocesi di *La Crosse* (Stati Uniti d'America) e Sig.ra Alice Heinzen, Membro del *Natural Family Planning Advisory Board* della Conferenza Episcopale (Stati Uniti d'America), presenti al Sinodo come Uditori.

Ne riportiamo di seguito i testi:

Introduzione del Presidente delegato, Card. Luis Antonio Tagle

In this Congregation, we shall pass to the treatment of the Second Part of the *Instrumentum laboris*, namely, **The**

Pastoral Program for the Family in Light of New Challenges. Under this heading is found Chapter One entitled, **The Pastoral Program for the Family: Various Proposals Underway.** It covers numbers 50 to 60. To refresh your mind, this chapter treats the following topics: *The Responsibility of Bishops and the Clergy and the Charismatic Gifts in the Pastoral Care of the Family* (50); *Marriage Preparation* (51-56); *Popular Piety and a Familial Spirituality* (57); *Support for a Familial Spirituality* (58); and *Testimony on Behalf of the Beauty of the Family* (59-60).

The interventions will be preceded by the personal, real-life testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Heinzen. Both come from the Diocese of La Crosse in Wisconsin, in the United States of America. Mr. Heinzen is the President of McDonnell Central Catholic School System, belongs to the Knights of Columbus and is Director of the Office of Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of La Crosse. His wife, Alice, is Natural Family Planning Coordinator in the same diocesan Office. Mr. Heinzen has a Master of Science Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. Mrs. Heinzen has an Master of Science Degree in Training and Development and a Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education. She is also a member of the Natural Family Planning Board for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers.

The Office for Marriage and Family Life of the Diocese of La Crosse assists the Bishop in offering support to priests and their parishes in the 19 counties of western Wisconsin in the remote, proximate and immediate preparation for marriage and pastoral care of married couples through events in marriage enrichment, mentoring and Catholic counseling. The Office collaborates with the Office for Catechesis and Evangelization to promote a thorough catechesis on the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. It supplies parenting information with the *Teaching the Way of Love* series and *Parent's Place Website*. In addition, the Office is proactive in defense of life from conception to natural death, promotes and provides service in Natural Family Planning services and supplies support and training to parishes in the Ministry of Consolation.

Let us now listen to Mr. and Mrs. Heinzen.

[03011-02.01] [Original text: English]

Testimonianza dei coniugi Jeff e Alice Heinzen (Diocesi di La Crosse, USA)

"Marriage, a Life Journey of Authentic Love"

My husband and I have asked ourselves this question: "How did our parents live their lives as a married couple that has led us to where we are today as faith-filled married Catholics?"

In our reflection we realized that the witness of our parents, revealed in their daily actions God's plan for marriage and family life. I have fond memories of participating in neighborhood Corpus Christi processions and my father leaving early for work to attend daily Mass. During the month of May, I remember our family praying the rosary. I remember the frequent tender kisses my parents readily gave each other. We knelt beside our bed search night in prayer to ask for protection and blessings on our family. Every Sunday, we attended Mass as a family, then went from Church to visit our relatives. To all this we can add our mothers who reminded us to always love our siblings, to use our best manners with others, and to save our pennies to help those less fortunate. Our homes were schools of love and virtue and our parents were the primary educators.

Our parents bore faithful witness to the joy and beauty of God's plan for love and life. Unfortunately, not only in our evaluation of current culture, but also due to our pastoral experience, we know that many young people do not see the witness of married love that we experienced. So many youth grow up in homes broken by divorce or with no experience of married parents due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies. We have entered, as some social scientists have described, the age of the diminished family structure. This is more than a crisis. To quote Saint John Paul II, "[T]he role of parents as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it." Sociological research testifies to this problem and information in the *Instrumentum Laboris* confirms it. Children raised without the blessing of married parents, who have created a home animated by love and faith,

will likely struggle to trust in God and their neighbors. How can they create life-long marriages?

Our diocese in the United States is not unlike those around the world. We have seen the number of marriages decline each year and the rate of cohabitation increase. We have seen a steady drop in the number of baptisms. We have watched our youth fall prey to the confusion of a hedonistic culture. We know countless divorced adults who have joined other faith communities because they do not feel welcomed in the Catholic Church. And, our hearts ache for single parents who struggle to care for their children. Like you, we strive to find simpler, more effective ways, to better share the blessings of God's plan for marriage and family.

The *Instrumentum* documents pastoral programs that attempt to address the negative issues impacting marriage and family life. Sadly, these efforts are not meeting the magnitude of the cultural challenges facing us today. We must develop more robust and creative methods to share the fundamental truth that marriage is a divine gift from God, rather than merely a man-made institution. This will require us to examine the methods by which we teach our children about the nature of human sexuality and the vocation of marriage. When speaking of the call by God to serve, marriage should be included in all programs designed to explore vocations. And, it should compel us to ask how we provide for the aftercare of marriage that can help couples deepen their relationship. We therefore see the issue before us not as a crisis of truth, but rather as a crisis of methodology. How do we as a Church, effectively share what we know to be true in practical, simple and convincing ways, so that all men and women are challenged and supported to live life-long marriages and build homes that reflect the domestic Church?

In all of our pastoral planning, we must remember that "nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Solutions to the identified crisis can be found. This Synod has the ability to provide aid to husbands, wives and families. Let us open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit so that God's will may be accomplished.

[03012-02.01] [Original text: English]

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