



Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth

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Dear Brother Bishops,

The observance of Valentine's Day on February 14 provides an excellent opportunity to celebrate the gift and blessing of married life and to recognize the many couples who live their vocation in faith, hope, and love. It can also be an occasion to promote, within the Church and society, a better understanding of the true meaning and purposes of marriage.

As you know, one of the pastoral priorities of our Conference is the strengthening of marriage as a Christian sacrament and a natural institution. Our efforts are supported and extended by what other groups in all sectors of society are doing on behalf of marriage and family life. I want to call your attention to two projects that occur in the month of February.

On Sunday, February 13, Worldwide Marriage Encounter is again promoting *World Marriage Day* in U.S. dioceses and parishes. Its theme is "Love One Another." This is the twenty-ninth consecutive year of a celebration that "honors husband and wife as head of the family, the basic unit of society, and salutes the beauty of their faithfulness, sacrifice and joy in daily married life." *World Marriage Day* received the Apostolic Blessing of John Paul II in 1993. It has continued to grow and spread among many countries and faith expressions ever since. Helpful resources and suggestions for celebrating *World Marriage Day* can be found at <http://wmd.wwme.org>.

National Marriage Week USA will be observed on February 7-14 with the theme statement, "Let's Strengthen Marriage." This project – now in its second year – is a collaborative effort to influence the culture by faith communities, business, media, education, and non-profit groups in order to; (a) focus national attention on the need to strengthen marriage; (b) launch new efforts for marriage education and crisis intervention; and (c) promote a message about the benefits of marriage.

The leadership of *National Marriage Week USA* recognizes "that children are best served when they grow up with both a mother and a father [and that] it is critical to strengthen the bonds of marriage to best support children so they can thrive and flourish." The website of *National Marriage Week USA* acknowledges the important role of churches and includes information about *World Marriage Day* as well as resources from the USCCB that are featured on our website, www.foryourmarriage.org.

Finally, whether you choose February or another time of year to emphasize the gift and blessing of marriage, I remind you of some other resources that are available from the USCCB.

- A large and varied collection of resources for couples who want to live a holy and happy marriage can be found in English and Spanish at www.foryourmarriage.org and www.portumatrimonio.org .
- Our pastoral letter on marriage, *Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, can be found in English and Spanish along with a study guide at www.usccb.org/loveandlife
- Video and print materials and other educational and advocacy resources that convey why marriage is unique and why it should be promoted as the union of a man and a woman can be found at www.marriageuniqueforareason.org
- A collection of short briefing papers entitled “Making A Case for Marriage” can be found at www.usccb.org/npim
- An extensive collection of essays, teaching materials, and resources for prayer and celebration developed for Catechetical Sunday 2010 can be found at www.usccb.org/catecheticalsunday
- Cards with a “Prayer for Married Couples” in English and Spanish are available in packages of 100 from USCCB Publications (www.usccbpublishing.org).

I encourage you to share this information with the clergy and lay leaders of your diocese so that together we might strive to become a “marriage building” communities of faith and action.

With gratitude and prayerful best wishes, I am

Fraternally in Christ,

+ Kevin C. Rhoades

Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Chairman
Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth