



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Office of the Bishop

927 South Logan Boulevard

Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Phone: 814-695-5579

Facsimile: 814-695-8894

www.ajdiocese.org

March 30, 2012

Dear Friends in Christ,

During the past year I have had the opportunity to experience marriage as any pastor would do as part of our ministry. I officiated at the wedding of a member of my family; I was asked to pray for a newly married couple who are expecting their first child; I spent time talking to spouses who are experiencing some of the stresses and difficulties that occur in married life; I have spoken with some who are recently divorced or widowed; I celebrated special Masses for couples who marked their 1st, 25th, 40th, 50th, 60 + year of marriage; and I have talked with young people at various places around the diocese about the importance of marriage as a vocation.

Yes, marriage is a vocation in which a man and woman call each other to a faithful, life-giving, and life-long commitment. It is also a calling from Christ the Lord who has revealed to us that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament through which God's grace is given in a unique way to spouses and their children who are a gift from God.

We are all aware that there are many forces within our culture that work against the fundamental goodness of marriage. One of the negatives for a number of people is that marriage involves sacrifice and they are not ready, willing, or able to make the sacrifices that can sustain a marriage. It is fundamental to our Catholic faith that sacrifice is redemptive and life-giving. We are able to connect with the redemptive grace of Christ's sacrifice through the sacraments, including marriage.

In the past few years, the Bishops in our country have expressed a renewed commitment to efforts that assist in building up marriage in the minds, hearts, and experience of Catholics. As part of that commitment within the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, on April 29, 2012 we will begin a Marriage Building Initiative.

At various times throughout the year there will be a number of diocesan events that will highlight marriage and ways in which all of us can build up this very important vocation, sacrament, and social institution. You will also experience homilies, prayer intentions, and bulletin reflections throughout the year that focus on various aspects of marriage. Young people will experience additional catechesis on marriage in our Catholic schools and religious education programs.

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I invite you to give your special attention to the ways in which this Marriage Building Initiative will be presented. I encourage everyone to take to heart the renewed understanding that we can gain by our reflection on the meaning of marriage as taught by Christ and the Church. More details concerning this Marriage Building Initiative can be found in your parish bulletin, *The Catholic Register* newspaper, *Proclaim TV Ministry*, and at our diocesan website.

Please join me in prayer that this Marriage Building Initiative will be an experience of grace for all married couples, those preparing for marriage, and everyone in our Church and in our society who are the beneficiaries of the sacrifice, love, and life that is shown to us through the covenant of marriage. I wish to thank all of you in advance for your attention and participation in this Marriage Building Initiative. With prayerful best wishes, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark L. Bartchak". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown