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Ohio Catholic clergy meet to bolster marriage

Michael O'Malley Religion News Service | Nov. 5, 2009

A couple process out of Our Mother of Sorrows Church in Greece, N.Y., at the end of their wedding ceremony in 2008. (CNS)

Nearly 700 Ohio Catholic priests and bishops are gathering in Columbus Nov. 5-6 in an unprecedented attempt to bolster marriage, which they see as an imperiled institution.

The two-day conference is in response to soaring divorce rates, people living together without marital commitments and the growing trend of same-sex unions, said Dan Andriacco, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

?In general, the state of marriage is not as healthy as we would like it to be,? he said.

The work by the Ohio clergy will be forwarded to the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, which is preparing to publish a pastoral letter on marriage and family life.

The letter, ?Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan,? is expected to be adopted by the U.S. bishops conference next month in Baltimore. A lead writer of the letter, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., will be the keynote speaker at the Ohio gathering.

See an NCR story about the pastoral letter: **Bishops' draft pastoral warns of dangers to marriage** [1]

Read an NCR editorial: **On marriage, the bishops should start over** [2]

?Because it's a national letter from the bishops, it should get on the radar screens of all pastors and remind them of the best practices for marriage ministry,? said Bill Boomer, director of the Cleveland Diocese's Department for Marriage and Family. ?Since this is a priority of the bishops, it will help parishes to make marriage more of a priority.?

The number of Catholic weddings nationwide dropped 48 percent between the mid-1980s and 2004, according to Boomer. ?We'd like to slow that down and reverse it,? Boomer said.

Speakers at the Columbus meeting -- said to be the first statewide gathering of all Ohio Catholic clergy -- include Scott Stanley, a professor of psychology at the University of Denver and an expert on marriage.

He will present research showing that married people have stronger and longer-lasting relationships than people living together without vows. Stanley will also stress the importance of premarital education and counseling, which, he said, is valued more by the Catholic Church than Protestant churches.

?As far as the theological side, Catholics, more than Protestants, have a much richer view of the place of marriage in all of life and in spiritual life,? he said. ?That's not as clear in Protestant teachings as far as I've seen.?

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