

## **X Incontro Mondiale delle Famiglie**

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## ***Permanent Accompaniment of Spouses***

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## Permanent Accompaniment of Spouses

Dear brothers and sisters, we are very much blessed and truly grateful to be here sharing our experience in accompanying spouses who are just like us, embarking on a long journey in an everchanging society. We stand up here not because we are exemplar, but really because we often tumble along this road and many times we have been greatly supported by other couples' companionship to withstand a lot of the challenges.

In the presentation slide, you may see a couple pictured as a pair of terra cotta porcelain Chinese couples in traditional style. Both of the husband and wife look like frozen and having no eye contact with each other. This is an "Icy" marital relationship and the challenge here is that: how do you "break the ice" or "melt the ice" without breaking these fragile figures which reflect certain situations of the marriages? We believe the secret is in building and sustaining an Accompaniment Community.

Just like we have heard and been inspired by the first Conference Theme: The Domestic Church and Synodality, can be, and has to be brought into the presence of the Accompaniment community. In the slide we show the conclusion of a marriage accompaniment training program conducted in Taichung Diocese, Taiwan. Bishop Martin, the parish priests, and of course many couples all actively participated in the whole program, truly showing the communion of the Community!

To deter the very harmful social impact inflicting upon the newly weds, a good and comprehensive premarital program is like a vaccine (a proven effective one, of course), which may not keep virus out of your body 100% of the time, but significantly reduce the big risk of marriage breakdown. To be sure, a good premarital program has to be tailored made for the engaged couples to cope with the modern challenges - developing good communication skill, managing the finance, aspiring for children, having a common spiritual life and etc... And certainly this kind of frequent programs require an dedicated and diverse group of couples to serve the purpose - so the need for manpower is great! But do not overlook the positive feedback loop that we can create here: the beneficiary, that is, those who attend the premarital program, are the perfect candidates to become the benefactor, that is, the future companions. This is the Essence of permanent accompaniment!

Here I want to share with you a very successful program. It is a "Re-Formation" program specifically for the parish priests who really need to have a retreat and then to reload, especially in confronting the contemporary challenges in pastoral care to youth, and to marriage and families. The program simulate the real Accompaniment Programs so as to develop what the Holy Father passionately calls out, "This is what I am asking you: be shepherds with the smell of sheep." In the slide, a Bishop in China was seen devoted into the discussion group in drafting pastoral solutions for couples in conflict.





Listening is a very crucial element of the accompaniment. In times when people are forever busy, and during the pandemic, the format of listening should be and can be creative. What we have instituted in Taipei Diocese of Taiwan is to train more 20 “volunteer operators” on a Family Hotline to listen to the incoming calls of those who need companionship in the marriage through phones or other social networking platforms.

In the Accompaniment Community that we hope to build and to sustain, care for young children is very important. Developing family toolkits for children can be the first step. In the slide you can see a few handwritings and drawings of young children. These are the visions they saw after parents read them the Sunday gospel. You will be very surprised how children understand the WORDS with all their senses. And why not inviting the young people in the family to become part of the companions to younger children? In the slide you can see high schoolers working on developing fun spiritual exercises for younger kids.

We know for sure there are many couples, at different stages of their marital life, calling for help/dialogue/accompaniment, but who are suitable to be their companions? These accompanying couples not only need compassion to begin with, but also need the understanding of the Church’s teachings. For this, we are calling out on the Faculty of theology to be a key sponsor of the Accompaniment Community.

These couples who serve as companions also need to be equipped with fundamental skill in counseling. What you see in the slide is a week long workshop conducted in Malaysia. For this, we call out to the counselling professionals to join the task force.

PATRIS CORDE (With Father’s Heart) In six episodes of short recordings, six fathers come before the camera to speak about their hearts. Their sharing speaks on how they feel and learn to be a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, and a working father. Again, you will be surprised how much heart-felt appreciation of these recordings are well received by viewers. These sharing reflects the often overlooked feature of the Accompaniment Community, the presence and the voices of the fathers. So yes, fathers, you should speak often, with father’s heart.’

We want to build and to sustain the Accompaniment Community. And these are what we have learned and what we really want to share with you:

1. The challenges for Christian marriages are real and ever changing;
2. Synodality is an open invitation to all;
3. Take premarital program very seriously, it lays a solid foundation;
4. Re-formation programs have long lasting benefits for parish pastors;
5. Children need accompaniment, too; and fathers need to speak about their hearts;
6. We need creativity, motivation and all the resources - compassion, theology, counselling.

We are called to join and sustain the Accompaniment Community, “Come, and you will see”. Now, do you want to join us? Please say, “I do”!

**CONFRONTA CON TESTO PRONUNCIATO**

