

interpersonal tensions and build healthy relationships. Moreover, the Christian counselor leads to people to a personal relationship with Christ and to liberation from the negative consequences of sin.<sup>458</sup>

The objective of marriage counseling is to help fiancées, spouses, and families to realize God's plan for their family (DDR 37), to preserve and develop emotional bonds, to assume responsible parenthood, to help in conflict and crisis situations, and in personal problems. This assistance should aim to ensure that spouses and families live in sanctifying grace, participate in the sacramental life of the Church, and more fully realize their Christian vocation.<sup>459</sup> In competent family counseling, the expertise of counselors should be combined with their personal testimony of Christian life.

The need for marriage counseling and family is also progressing because of the growing threats to marriage and family, and the increasingly difficult challenges that families must face (DDR 37). Human love, naturally oriented toward parenthood, motherhood and fatherhood, is, in many cases, threatened and undergoing a deep crisis. In these situations, marriage and family counseling centers, where assistance is given by professional advisors, especially psychologists and psychotherapists, are helpful (LtF 7). Pope Francis stressed the importance of the space offered by the Church for accompaniment and counseling on questions related to the development of love, overcoming conflicts, and educating children (AL 38). He distinguished the two forms of counseling given in centers: marriage counseling and specialized counseling, which deals with difficult family problems such as addiction, betrayal, and violence in the family (cf. AL 229). In practice, marriage and family counseling can take different forms, in parish family counseling centers, specialized counseling centers, and through helplines.

### 13.1. Parish Family Counseling Centers

JACEK GOLEŃ

The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* notes that lay professionals involved in family counseling can greatly help families, and that their mission serves society and the Christian community (FC 75). Pope John Paul II further developed this thought in his Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, where he wrote that "marriage and family counselling agencies by their specific work of guidance and prevention, carried out in accordance with an anthropology

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<sup>458</sup> G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>459</sup> E. Sujak, *Poradnictwo małżeńskie i rodzinne*, Katowice, 1988, 20-2.

consistent with the Christian vision of the person, of the couple and of sexuality, also offer valuable help in rediscovering the meaning of love and life, and in supporting and accompanying every family in its mission as the sanctuary of life" (EV 88).

Family counseling in parishes has existed for several decades, as a part of the Church's pastoral action, in the local churches with various accents and different intensities.<sup>460</sup> Nevertheless, the idea itself can still be considered fresh and timely. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* recalls that parishes and other ecclesial institutions can help and support families through, among other things, marriage counseling centers (AL 229). The Polish *Directory of Family Ministry* defines the tasks of these centers.

### Tasks of the Parish Family Counseling Centers

Family counseling services organized at parishes should maintain the specificity of religious and pastoral counseling. The center's pastoral character should be reflected in the counseling, through the care for the whole of human life as well as in the counselor's personal and professional stances.<sup>461</sup> Catholic marriage counseling has a saving dimension. It is accomplished in God's presence and to accomplish His will.<sup>462</sup>

The general tasks of family parish counseling include the education of the young generation for love, marriage and the family, the preparation of engaged couples for the sacrament of marriage, and assisting married couples and families in difficulty.<sup>463</sup> Detailed tasks include presenting conjugal and family love,

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<sup>460</sup> Parish family counseling has existed in Poland for several decades. Counselors (instructor) first began to be trained towards 1958, and this gradually made the formation of family centers possible. A strong inspiration to uphold the current activities in the difficult conditions of the prevailing communist system and the establishment of the clinic was the appearance of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. Shortly after its publication, the first instruction of the Polish Episcopate was published, emphasizing the need for functioning in every parish of Catholic Family Counseling (PIE). Under the influence of these inspirations, the pastoral care of families in Poland has organized a network of family counseling centers for fiancées and spouses, mainly aimed at preparing for responsible parenthood. In 1971 there were already 814 family clinics in which it worked. P. Landwójtowicz, *Duszpasterskie poradnictwo małżeńskie w Polsce. Studium pastoralne*, Opole, 2010, 27.

<sup>461</sup> R. Bielań, *Duszpasterstwo rodzin we współczesnej Polsce*, 267; cf. W. Szewczyk, "Poradnictwo małżeńskie i rodzinne," SMR 343.

<sup>462</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 259.

<sup>463</sup> B. Mierzwiński, "Parafialna poradnia życia rodzinnego," SMR 326–7; cf. G. Pyżlak, *Recepcja przygotowania do małżeństwa w świetle badań narzeczonych*, 161.

increasing the awareness of human dignity, shaping family attitudes, teaching the principles of responsible parenthood, showing the role of parents in education, and helping spouses and families in difficulties (DDR 39).

#### a) Presenting Conjugal Love

The first task of parish counseling is to show the truth about conjugal love. This is done by promoting education to love and chastity with the goal of fostering personal maturity and respect for the “spousal” meaning of the body (cf. EV 97). The Church also “acts as Teacher and Mother” in the field of conjugal morality. This is why Catholic counseling should shape a positive attitude and inspire the virtue of chastity during marriage preparation (cf. FC 33). It is important to present marriage as a vocation intended by God. Conjugal love, rooted in God’s love for man, consists of the total gift of self and manifests itself in the spouses’ mutual self-giving, which leads to indissoluble unity. This love implies fidelity, honesty, an indissoluble conjugal relationship, and fertility.<sup>464</sup>

Chastity helps to form mature love. It protects the dignity of the persons, introduces harmony and peace, and makes self-control possible (TMHS 17-18). It also fosters respect in the man and the woman, empathy, forbearance, tolerance, and generosity. Chastity forms the spirit of sacrifice necessary for love’s realization and frees love from selfishness and aggressiveness (TMHS 16, 31). Chastity makes it possible for a person to love God and to serve his neighbor, and it is the condition for the full realization of conjugal love.<sup>465</sup> Observing chastity is a virtue that requires some effort and, at the same time, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit that should be asked for in prayer.<sup>466</sup> The education to premarital and marital chastity is an urgent pastoral task (SPMR 102).

The awareness of young people, engaged couples and spouses regarding the value of the marriage sacrament should be strengthened in counseling, and it should be shown that the marriage of baptized, grafted on Christ’s relationship with the Church, is the effective sign of his grace. This will enable the spouses to emit and revitalize his gift. It is also important to consider the dynamics of the sacrament of marriage in the daily life of the spouses.<sup>467</sup> It is, therefore, important to highlight the connection of sacramental marriage with the sacramental life of the Church, especially with the sacraments of the Eucharist

<sup>464</sup> Cf. HV 8-9. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 208-9, 310.

<sup>465</sup> John Paul II, Annunziare al mondo la “buona Novella” sulla purezza del cuore e trasmettere il messaggio della civiltà dell’amore, Sandomierz (12.06.1999), in: IGP t. XXII, 1:1999, 1313-7.

<sup>466</sup> Cf. CCC 2345; TMHS 21.

<sup>467</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 259-261.

and reconciliation, and prayer (cf. FC 57-59), as well as the spouses' commitment to build a bond of love based on giving and receiving (cf. AL 211).<sup>468</sup>

It is necessary to form the spouses' attitude and ability to dialogue in view of building up their bond of love. The condition for this dialogue is the spouses' communion, which makes it possible for them to freely and openly exchange. This dialogue is based on their interpersonal communication (cf. AL 136), which is an expression of each one's ability to give himself/herself and to receive the other. The belief that every form of self-giving must be combined with respect for the other person and the partner's response through self-giving makes it easier to understand this. The possibility of an agreement is rendered impossible when the giving and sacrifice are unilateral.<sup>469</sup> The communication can, on the contrary, be improved, and all forms of manipulation recognized and eliminated, through mutual exchange. Teaching the fundamentals of communication and how to resolve conflicts is an effective preventive measure.<sup>470</sup> Moreover, the improvement of communication in the couple increases the spouses' own striving to grow in maturity, empathy, openness, trust, and acceptance.<sup>471</sup>

Counseling should help spouses to perceive their couple as a domestic church, where God is present among them. The spouses live out the common priesthood through their spiritual sacrifices in daily life. The readiness to sacrifice reflects their maturity, and difficulty in understanding the value of the sacrifice for the sake of the common good is a real obstacle in common life.<sup>472</sup>

#### b) Raising Awareness of Human Dignity

The second task of parish counseling is to raise the awareness of each person's dignity, from conception to natural death (DDR 39). The human person must be fully respected and always treated as the beneficiary of action, never its means or matter. Only love is a proper and complete way to relate to the person<sup>473</sup>, who has infinite value because he is the image of God and loved by Him. God directly created the rational soul of every human being.

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<sup>468</sup> G.R. Collins, *Poradnictwo chrześcijańskie*, 547, argues that presenting teaching of the Scriptures on marriage, emphasizing the importance of fostering relationships, and dedicating spouses are among the important preventive measures that should be used today in ecclesial communities.

<sup>469</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 262-3, 310-11.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 311. Cf. G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 547-8.

<sup>471</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 211-2.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>473</sup> Cf. K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 397 f., 646.

The person is characterized by his uniqueness, spiritual nature, autonomy, and freedom,<sup>474</sup> which constitute the basis of the dignity of a person, whose nature is ontic and irrevocable. Human dignity is the principal, absolute criterion of respect for a person, which does not depend on any human authority (cf. FHP 15). The person's inviolability – a reflection of God's own immutability – is expressed above all in the inviolability of human life (ChL 38).

Human life is sacred and remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, his only goal. God is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end.<sup>475</sup> The right to life is absolute and in all the phases of human development, from conception to natural death, regardless of the person's state of health and other conditions of life (ChL 38). From the moment of conception, the human being must be unconditionally respected, treated as a person, and granted his rights (DVt I, 1). The holiness and the inviolability of life, in every phase and all conditions, require that the lives of all be cared for. In this spirit, it is necessary to accompany effectively the life of the unborn child and especially single mothers who are deciding whether to give birth. Care should also be taken to protect the lives of those who are suffering, abandoned, and approaching death (cf. EV 87-88).

Sensitivity to the dignity of each person in counseling also applies to the treatment of people benefiting from help. Each person's human dignity requires truly professional help and optimal conditions of delivery. Respect for the freedom of the human person means giving help within the limits set by the good of the beneficiary, setting goals, and providing assistance adapted to the married couple's possibilities. Respecting the boundaries of a person's freedom shapes the foundations of his sense of responsibility in taking life decisions.<sup>476</sup>

### c) Forming Pro-family Attitudes

Parish counseling also has the task of promoting pro-family attitudes (DDR 39). Living in the family is the first expression of man's social nature. The family begins with the conjugal community of persons, composed of a man and a woman (LtF 7). The family, based on the marital covenant, is fully realized by the birth of offspring. Thus, the communion of spouses creates the communion of the family. Parenthood is the affirmation of the spouses' love, and children strengthen the communion of their parents. However, conjugal love and parenthood are threatened by the selfishness that has its roots in human sinfulness (LtF 7, cf. FC 69).

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<sup>474</sup> DVt 5; FHP 15.

<sup>475</sup> GS 24; DVt 5. No one can claim the direct right to destroy an innocent human being. DVt 5.

<sup>476</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 210.

For spouses, parenthood is both a gift and a task. They should turn their thoughts and hearts to God, who is the source of all parenthood, asking Him to open their hearts so that they always treat their parenthood as a gift of God and renew their love (LtF 7). Parish family counseling should shape pro-family attitudes first in adolescents and the engaged.<sup>477</sup> Most young people appreciate the value of family and recognize the success of the marital relationship in procreation. Such attitudes positively correspond to the religiosity of the young people.<sup>478</sup> At the same time, many young people present self-centered and materialistic attitudes.<sup>479</sup> As a consequence, engaged couples often have difficulties with openness to important values of family life and need help in shaping family-oriented attitudes.<sup>480</sup>

In immediate preparation for marriage, the encounters of fiancés in family counseling centers are also intended to positively show the possibility of benefiting from counseling during their entire married life.<sup>481</sup> With the help of counselors, spouses can rediscover the meaning of life and love as they grow in their vocation and pro-family attitudes (cf. EV 88).

#### d) Teaching the Rudiments of Responsible Parenthood

Parish counseling also has the task of teaching the principles of responsible parenting, including methods for detecting fertility. It serves conjugal love and the preservation of the inseparable union of unity and fertility in marriage (LtF 12). This task was at the origin of family counseling centers in Poland and the main motive for the creation of centers in recent decades.<sup>482</sup> Parish counseling accomplishes this task by preparing engaged couples for the sacrament of matrimony and helping spouses to exercise responsible parenthood. (DDR 31).

Responsible parenting requires that the spouses have a righteous conscience and acknowledge their duties towards God, themselves, the family, and society. It means knowing and respecting the biological processes of human fertility and controlling impulses and passions through their reason and

<sup>477</sup> B. Mierzwiński, "Parafialna poradnia życia rodzinnego," 326.

<sup>478</sup> L. Dyczewski, *Wyobrażenia młodzieży o małżeństwie i rodzinie pomiędzy tradycją a nowoczesnością*, Lublin, 2009, 83–9.

<sup>479</sup> Cf. K. Pawlina, *Młodzież szkolna o swoich problemach*, Warsaw, 2010, 37–43.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. A. Dzióba, *Narzeczeni wobec ludzkiej płodności. Studium pastoralne*, 107-167, 304, 309.

<sup>481</sup> AL 221; DDR 31. According to G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 511, pre-marital counseling is preventive. It is unlikely that the couple who does not want to take part in pre-marital counseling will request a counselor's help when the first signs of conjugal problems appear. It is, therefore, wise for priests to request that couples who want to get married first participate in pre-marital counseling.

<sup>482</sup> W. Szewczyk, *Poradnictwo małżeńskie i rodzinne*, 343; E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 20.

will. Responsible parents should be guided by prudent reflection and generosity in accepting offspring while taking into account their physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions. Spouses may decide – for important reasons but always with respect for the moral precepts (HV 10) – to avoid, for a time or definitively, the birth of another child.

The essential moral criterion of conjugal life is the inseparability of the conjugal union's double function in view of the spouses' unity and procreation (cf. HV 12). Man cannot willfully break this indissoluble relationship (FC 32). "The two dimensions of conjugal union, the unitive and the procreative, cannot be artificially separated without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself" (LtF 12). In marriage, a man and a woman express their union to one another as a gift and in the experience of a personal encounter. Each should, therefore, fully forgive and accept the other, in all of his/her dimensions, along with fertility. Their personal union entails a threefold responsibility: for their personal deeds, for the gift of the spouse joined by the marriage covenant, and for the gift of life that can be awoken. The spouses' union in the act of love demands responsibility because it is the moment when they can become parents (see LtF 12).

Respecting the moral principles in marriage means being attentive to the natural cyclical nature of the reproductive periods. Spouses are allowed to regulate the number of children conceived and, for justified reasons, to introduce intervals between births by limiting their conjugal union to the non-fertile periods (HV 18; cf. FC 32-33). The choice of the natural rhythm is linked to self-control, the woman's acceptance and fertility, dialogue, mutual respect, and responsibility. This choice is an expression of respect for the spiritual and physical nature of the marital communion. This respect makes the observance of conjugal chastity possible and so protects people from being used and marital love against selfishness and aggression, while promoting both care and respect for the conjugal partner and a deeper and more effective pedagogic influence on offspring.<sup>483</sup>

Conversely, the spouses' use of contraceptive means and actions excludes procreation from the conjugal act. Thus, the spouses break the double significance of their conjugal unity, and they take it upon themselves to judge God's plan. Moreover, they manipulate each other, degrade themselves, and trample upon human fertility. They also alter the value of self-giving and the inner truth of conjugal love (FC 32).

In some cases, spouses experiencing difficulties with fertility turn to illicit means of procreation and try to conceive in artificial ways, apart from

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<sup>483</sup> HV 21; FC 32-33; TMHS 21.

their sexual union.<sup>484</sup> By doing this, they also separate the conjugal unity and procreation through artificial reproduction (LP 32). They detach parenthood from the conjugal act and take away the right of children to be conceived naturally, i.e., through their parents' act of love.<sup>485</sup>

Engaged couples preparing for the sacrament of marriage do not always understand the nature of responsible parenthood and respect the Church's teaching about planning procreation. They are not always convinced of the indissoluble bond between love and the transmission of life in marriage. However, the vast majority does perceive the need to learn NFP methods during marriage preparation. Some do not recognize the benefits of natural conception regulation or focus on the difficulties associated with learning and using them.<sup>486</sup> The interest of the engaged for learning methods of fertility recognition, as well as the perceived deficiencies in the understanding and reception of the Church's teaching, underscores the need for solid preparation of the future spouses through family counseling (cf. EV 88). During the meetings, they should learn to be responsible for their mutual love and life, as well as about the inadmissibility and harmfulness of contraception, abortion, and artificial fertilization; on the other hand, they should learn how to recognize natural fertility, observe its signs, and interpret them (DDR 31).

The education to responsible parenthood is also addressed to married couples. Marriage and family counseling can help them to accept God's call and generously carry out their task of parenting, always with the attitude of serving life. In the counseling centers, spouses can learn to use natural methods of regulating fertility (cf. EV 97). The help of an advisor is especially necessary for spouses who, at the beginning of their marriage, have lacked knowledge about and respect for their own fertility.<sup>487</sup> Both engaged and married couples should be encouraged to seek advice for responsible parenting. However, the best incentive is high-quality counseling in the parish centers.

#### e) Presenting the Role of the Parents' Presence in Education

Family counseling has the task of showing the need to lovingly accompany the child, beginning at conception (DDR 39). Vatican II emphasized that parents, having brought children into the world, are obliged to educate them.

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<sup>484</sup> Cf. DVt 5, II.8; FHP 15.

<sup>485</sup> DVt II.6; FHP 15.

<sup>486</sup> A. Dzióba, *Narzeczeni wobec ludzkiej płodności. Studium pastoralne*, 167–72, 188–90, 196–205, 300.

<sup>487</sup> Cf. E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 20.



Parenting is of great importance and difficult to replace if it is lacking (GE 3). The human family owes it to humanity. Therefore, “whenever a person arrives and enters into the world without a family, there are always a gap and an extremely disturbing and painful deficiency, which is then a life-long burden.”<sup>488</sup> The spouses’ mutual love and spiritual bond together with the presence and caring parenting in their children’s upbringing are prerequisites for forming humanity fully. Consequently, the presence and care of the mother, as well as the active presence of the father, are important (cf. GS 52). God gives the spouses the privilege, the responsibility, and the grace to help children in their human and Christian growth. Parents must give a good example and guide their children’s education in the successive stages of their lives.<sup>489</sup>

Family counseling gives the opportunity to shape the spouses’ parenting attitudes and support them in their parental tasks. This is especially important nowadays when the family’s stability is threatened and a parent – or even both – is absent. Moreover, even the temporary absence of the parents – e.g., for professional reasons – has a negative impact on the educational context. Marriage and family counseling can help parents to realize the need for their presence and love as well as to understand existing relationships and forms of behavior. It can also help counteract parents’ educational neglect and its effects.

#### f) Help for Spouses and Families in Difficulty

Individuals and couples seeking help in solving family conflicts, marriage crises, and educational problems, are often received in parish counseling centers. These problems must not be underestimated because they can lead to confusion and hopelessness, emotional withdrawal, abandonment, separation, or divorce (cf. AL 41).<sup>490</sup> Helping couples and families in conflict and crisis situations and with their educational problems may also require individual help.<sup>491</sup>

Marital problems are the result, among other things, of poor communication, too little or excessive closeness in the conjugal relationship, interpersonal tensions, pressure from outsiders, and routine. Experience teaches that interpersonal tensions are most likely to arise through sexual intercourse, marital roles, a lack of flexibility, different value systems, struggles over power,

<sup>488</sup> LtF 2. See D. Kornas-Biela, *op. cit.*, 90–111.

<sup>489</sup> FC 38; TMHS 37, 59–111.

<sup>490</sup> G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 538–9.

<sup>491</sup> E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 20–1; cf. E. Kennedy – S.C. Charles, *Jak pomagać dobrą radą*, transl. by J. Kołacz, Krakow, 2010, 376–7 (English edition: *On Becoming a Counselor: A Basic Guide for Non-professional Counselors and Other Helpers*, New York, 2001).

money or religion, and differences in character.<sup>492</sup> Often crises in marriage stem from emotional immaturity, associated with unstable or changeable affectivity. This occurs in the early stages of the couple's emotional and sexual life and is expressed through uncertainty and hesitation in their personal development (AL 41). Conflicts can also be due to family habits and the spouses' ambitions.<sup>493</sup> Educational problems often appear in critical periods, for example when the children have grown up and set up their own households.<sup>494</sup>

Marriage and family counseling should highlight the value and the dignity of the conjugal community in the perspective of the community of the Divine Persons, supporting and encouraging the spouses to form their community in a temporal and salvific perspective. This is served by the wholistic conception of the conjugal community, which expresses itself in the care for unity, by ensuring the equality of persons, and learning to understand problems and how each person lives them from his or her perspective. This creates a sense of security and understanding for the spouses and helps each to see where the desire for the good of the partner has been undermined. This perspective enables the rediscovery of love, as a force that unites and re-establishes the conjugal and familial community. Opening up to God and His love and entering into a deeper union with Him has a preventive, integrative dimension. Looking from this perspective makes it possible to transcend the temporal dimension of events, to increase the potential for optimism, and to find the strength to engage in further development.<sup>495</sup>

Through counseling, spouses experiencing their own limitations, immaturity, crisis, or suffering can find in God the power to restart, trust one another, and go beyond the human limitations and stereotypes. Marriage and family counseling can help spouses to realize that God never abandons man. Consequently, they can discover crisis as an opportunity to grow. The role of counseling is, then, to support the spouses as they search for lessons within crises and experiences for further growth.<sup>496</sup>

Often the difficulties of spouses who come for counseling do not concern the rational sphere. Their capacity for dialogue and applying relational solutions is in fact often limited by emotional and affective factors (cf. AL 41).<sup>497</sup> Therefore, the immediate aim of counseling is to liberate the spouses from fear, pathological guilt feelings, and aggressiveness, and lead them to renewed

<sup>492</sup> Cf. G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 532–8.

<sup>493</sup> W. Szewczyk, *op. cit.*, 343.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 343; cf. I. Namysłowska, *Terapia rodzin*, Warsaw, 1997, 22.

<sup>495</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 307–9; G.R. Collins, *op. cit.*, 547.

<sup>496</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 309–10; E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 35.

<sup>497</sup> Cf. E. Kennedy – S.C. Charles, *op. cit.*, 379–80.

mutual exchange. This also helps to break free from internal tensions, stereotypical behaviors, and the tendency to react emotionally. Consequently, the spouses can realistically assess their situation and understand one another. They may be motivated to make changes consciously. Counseling also gives them the opportunity to develop open and unambiguous communication, assertive behavior skills, and self-control over aggressive behavior.<sup>498</sup> In the *Amoris Laetitia*, we can see a valuable hint indicating that marriage crises should not be approached superficially, but with courage and patience. This requires forgiveness and reconciliation (cf. AL 41).

Counselors in parish centers should have information about possible access to specialized counseling and treatment centers, and after identifying the individual's or the couple's problems and needs, they should indicate specialists for individual psychotherapy, family and marriage therapy, addiction therapy, pedagogical help, or judicial mediation. Family counselors should also encourage individuals and couples to participate in retreats and meetings devoted to marital issues and problematic situations in the personal and family spheres.

### Requirements for Family Life Counselors

Appropriately formed counselors (DDR 38), guided by the Christian vision of the person, marriage, and sexuality (EV 88), may be employed in marriage and family counseling centers. These counselors are most often lay pastoral workers. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* emphasizes that they need specialized formation in order to ground the pastoral proposals in real situations and the concrete concerns of families (AL 204).

The counselor's training depends not so much on professional qualifications, such as those of doctors, psychologists, educators, jurists, and pastors, who all function within the limits of their competence. Having a degree in psychology and working in that profession does give some precedence, but that is not enough for counseling. The detailed diagnostic preparation of a psychologist may not be helpful in the counseling process because observation in this process focuses on personal development and the stabilization of marriage, apart from the results of psychological or psychiatric research. Therefore, a psychologist, a physician, or a psychotherapist may be a good counselor if he or she concentrates primarily on the well-being of the person and the marriage community and is able to go beyond an unfavorable prognosis.<sup>499</sup> According

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<sup>498</sup> Cf. E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 84–7.

<sup>499</sup> E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 32–5.

to the Polish *Directory*, a counselor should have at least secondary education and relevant knowledge of the psychology and theology of marriage and the family, be able to establish relationships and cooperate with people, and have received a solid religious formation (DDR 40).<sup>500</sup>

Personality traits such as psychological imagination, perception, emotional maturity (well-developed affectivity, the ability to perceive and express emotions, with their differences, and to dominate them), and the freedom from prejudice and fanaticism based on the tolerance for values different from their own. A counselor's work can be hindered by character traits such as the tendency to dominate over others, overprotection, and considering one's own solutions as obvious and the only appropriate ones, fear and uncertainty in formulating a personal point of view, emotional ambivalence, the tendency to identify with the interlocutor, and countertransference.<sup>501</sup> The counselor should be able to leave responsibility for decisions to the person being counseled, have good listening skills, show appreciation and respect, understanding, and sincerity, and have the courage to not be perfect.<sup>502</sup>

It is required that the counselor function properly in his / her family and professional life.<sup>503</sup> The counselor's marital status and sex are of secondary importance. It is good for a center to have both male and female counselors. However, it is particularly valuable and urgent that guidance and counseling be given by married couples (HV 26, AL 223).

### Organization of Parish Family Counseling Centers

The parish family counseling center should have its own office, if possible, in a parish building. In order to protect the anonymity of those who come for counseling, it should have a separate entrance. Information including the reception days and hours as well as the specialization of the people working there should be posted on the door. The office should be aesthetically and functionally designed to create an atmosphere of peace and intimacy for conversation.<sup>504</sup> The counseling center should have the materials necessary for the

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<sup>500</sup> An especially talented counselor is not disqualified if he/she has not graduated from college. In Poland, many counselors who are professional nurses, midwives, and teachers have proven their worth. E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-3.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-56; cf. B. Parysiewicz - A. Tomkiewicz, "Podstawowe sposoby prowadzenia poradnictwa małżeńsko-rodzinnego w parafii," *Efektywne zarządzanie parafią* 12:2003, 3-5.

<sup>503</sup> E. Sujak, *op. cit.*, 33.

<sup>504</sup> Cf. B. Parysiewicz - A. Tomkiewicz, *art. cit.*, 2.

counselor's work and a well-equipped library, with reading and audiovisual materials available to those being counseled (see DDR 41).

The number of people coming to parish family counseling centers depends on its schedule. The highest number is reached in centers that are open daily.<sup>505</sup> The schedules be must organized so that people who work can come. Appointments should be made in advance by phone, for a day and hour within a short timeframe.<sup>506</sup>

Information about the opening of a parish family counseling center should be given in the parish announcements.<sup>507</sup> Its reception days and hours should be posted on the billboards of the and the center and often mentioned in the parish announcements. Information about the center should be prepared in the form of posters and leaflets available in the parish. It is advisable to mention the activities of the parish family counseling center during retreats and missions and to provide information about centers to confessors (DDR 41). The information and contacts can also be transmitted in the parish bulletin, on the websites of parish and diocesan family ministry offices, and in the local media.

#### a) The Rector's Tasks in the Parish Family Counseling Center

The parish is the place of the Church, the community of the faithful, a fraternal and hospitable home. It is deeply inserted in the human community and shares its aspirations and its dramatic events (ChL 26-27). The laity's activity in the parish is necessary because without them the pastors' apostolate cannot be fully effective (ChL 27). As the shepherd to whom to the community is entrusted, the pastor in his ministry of teaching, sanctifying and directing also cooperates with the lay faithful and supports their participation in the Church's mission.<sup>508</sup> He creates the parish's family counseling center, in consultation with the Diocesan Family Ministry, and hires the counselors (DDR 38, 40).

The parish rector, caring for his community, understands the urgent need to prepare lay people for the apostolate (cf. DA 10: ChL 27). With this aim, he should look for people to work in the parish's center, invite them to undertake the necessary studies, and help them to deepen their religious formation. Unless otherwise stipulated, the rector is also required to pay the family counselor that he employs (DDR 42). It is not easy for counselors to be deprived of

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<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>508</sup> Cf. AA 10; ChL 27.

the clergy's support for their mission and to see their self-giving effort underestimated (cf. EV 97).

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Parish family counseling is a pastoral response of the Church to today's growing challenges. These challenges, particularly in the field of education to love and the preparation for marriage and family life, urgently call for the development and consolidation of networks of parish family centers. This need is increased in the face of social models, non-Christian concepts of sexuality and fertility, of the love of engaged and married couples, and of responsible parenthood. The alarming nature of the frequent difficulties that spouses encounter in building their marriage, and of the conflicts and crises that threaten to destroy marriages, must be noted. Parish counselors, guided by the Church's recommendations, can effectively act as a preventive force.

### 13.2. *Specialized Marriage and Family Counseling Centers*

ELŻBIETA TRUBIŁOWICZ

The care for the family in the Catholic Church has always been strong. Today, when the family is going through a variety of crises at its very root, supporting families through the work of the Church is especially important. The forms of specialized pastoral assistance for families are constantly enriched and adapted to the current needs. This activity first began in the United States, in 1925, when Anton Boisen started his clinical pastoral practice in a psychiatric clinic.<sup>509</sup> In Poland, the first specialized counseling center was created by Teresa Strzembosz in 1969. The first centers served their dioceses and, then, some were created in larger urban centers.<sup>510</sup> At present, they are striving also to be present in the zones and deaneries (DDR 43).

#### Ecclesial Foundations for Specialized Marriage and Family Counseling Centers

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II defines family pastoral ministry as care and activity aimed at the realization of the "saving

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<sup>509</sup> R.C. Powell, "The Challenge to Our Seminaries—Worldwide. Guest Editorial," *Journal of Pastoral Care and Accompaniment* 59 (4):2005, 318–21.

<sup>510</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 43–4.