

Recapturing the Mystery of Marriage

(Sydney, NSW, 20 Feb. 08) — 120 delegates from across Australia, New Zealand, Europe and Africa gathered at St Joseph's Spirituality Centre, Baulkham Hills on Friday 15 to Sunday 17 February for a cutting-edge conference hosted by the Pastoral and Matrimonial Renewal Centre (PMRC) at which keynote speakers from around the world offered dynamic leadership formation to a wide cross-section of lay people involved in marriage ministry.

Although many today draw the conclusion that marriage is an outdated and irrelevant artefact of a bygone era, PMRC is steadfastly confident that modern marriage is not only relevant to the long-term health of society but is something that can also be deeply fulfilling. Their recent conference, entitled ***The Renaissance of Marriage***, drew married couples of all ages, singles, celibates and those in leadership positions within marriage agencies to hear from a stellar cast of international speakers. Keynote addresses covered topics such as fertility, pornography, sexual addiction, pastoral care of the divorced and remarried, educating young people in love and couple spirituality. Speakers included Gonzaga and Paskazia Lubega from Uganda; Edmund Adamus Director of Pastoral Affairs from Westminster Diocese, UK; James and Nicole Parker of Harvesters and FertilityCare, UK; Fr Gerald Gleeson, Catholic Institute of Sydney; Jonathan and Karen Doyle of Choicez Media, Canberra; Ron and Mavis Pirola, Pontifical Council of the Family and Directors of PMRC Australia.

Convenors Byron and Francine Pirola are thrilled with the outcome of the conference. "The Renaissance of Marriage" says Francine, "has clarified for us once again the foundational resource that married couples represent within our society at large. Too often in the Church we are side-tracked by the problems and failures of marriage. We focus on the *needs* of couples and families, and forget, that they *are* the Domestic Church. This conference has verified again that marriage is clearly a leading force for evangelisation!"

"Far from being a relic of the past" adds Byron, "we firmly believe that marriage as envisioned by the Church is a credible and realistic response to the challenges of modern living. If marriages are failing today, it's not because marriage itself is at fault. Rather, couples need to be called and empowered to fully embrace the Church's vision for their marriage – a passionate, tender, intimate and life-giving encounter with their spouse."

Marriage educators, Louise and Mike Kelleher from New Zealand, attending the conference for the first time, said: "What distinguishes this conference from others we've attended for marriage and relationship educators is not just the quality of the speakers. We've been reminded that the Sacrament itself is a key part of the message." They added, "Yes, we need training to help run marriage courses in the Church, but we also require the witness of other sacramental couples to inspire us and others to greater ambition for our own marriages. The conference has been invaluable in providing this aspect for us in a contemporary and highly relevant way."

ENDS.

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Notes to Editors:

1. PMRC (The Pastoral & Matrimonial Renewal Centre) was established in 1978 by Fr Charles (“Chuck”) Gallagher SJ, the founder of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, to develop resources to enrich and empower the Body of Christ in understanding that our primary identity is relational. It was established in Australia in 1979.
2. Fr Chuck and his associates were a prophetic voice proclaiming the central place of the Sacrament of Matrimony in renewing the Church and the world. When Pope John Paul II delivered his epic *Theology of the Body* audiences in 1979 an obvious synergy between the Pontiff’s theology and the work of the PMRC became apparent. Ten years later Fr Chuck began working closely with Ron & Kathy Feher (Philadelphia) and Byron and Francine Pirola (Sydney) to develop *Celebrate Love* – a marriage enrichment programme that provides a practical counterpoint to the insights of the *Theology of the Body*. The weekend seminar, *Celebrate Love*, is both educative and experiential allowing couples to encounter themselves and their spouse in a radically new way.
3. The programme was first piloted in Washington in September 1989 and in Australia on Feb 1992. Since that time, an estimated 5,000-10,000 couples world wide have experienced the seminar. Also developed, as part of a suite of resources on the topic, is *Embrace* and *Engage* (both for engaged couples), the Passionate Love Weekend (for couples, clergy and dedicated singles), *Living Love* (series of short exercises for couples), and the *Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage and Family*.
4. The PMRC programmes have undergone substantial offshore expansion over the past five years. *Celebrate Love* is now established in Great Britain, New Zealand and Uganda as well as USA and most capital cities in Australia. Couples from all these areas converged on Sydney in February 2008 to attend ***The Renaissance of Marriage*** – an International Catholic Lay Leadership and Formation Conference.
5. For more information about PMRC and the conference, visit www.pmrc.org.au and www.celebratelove.com.au/conference