



Jacob's Well

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A Membership Newsletter of Catholic Divorce Ministry, North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics, Inc.

Developing A Prayerful Lifestyle

- Morning offering: Ask God to enter into your chaos.
- Unnecessary noise: Don't rush to turn on some music when it gets quiet. Pause and let silence in.
- Listening hearts: Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to notice God working and speaking amid the noise.
- Recognize God in others: Follow Christ by seeing him in everyone and loving them in each and every moment.
- Use your talents: He gave you certain gifts, so use them to glorify him even in the mundane.
- Gratitude: Focus on your blessings instead of complaining about the busyness of your life.

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Who Started Ministry to Separated and Divorced

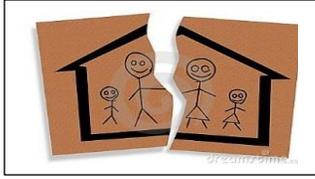
Greg Becker

The late Father Jim Young is considered to be the founder of the North American Conference of Separated and Divorced Catholics (NACSDC), currently known as Catholic Divorce Ministry (CDM) the international organization for separated and divorced Catholics. This is correct as he was certainly the advocate from the Church's clergy and it is proper to remember him as the founder. He was, however, not the founder of the Church's ministry to the separated and divorced.

In the early first century, a Samaritan divorcee was surprised to find a young Jewish Rabbi striking up a conversation with her. Samaritans and divorced women were two groups who were considered undesirable by Jewish society. But this man continued to talk and showed that he was well acquainted with her problems and was truly concerned for her well-being. The woman who was defensive at first was won over by his gentle and accepting manner. While we don't know if she actually took his advice, she certainly accepted his ministry and her life was forever changed. And the rabbi, having given her the great gift of her dignity and self-worth, left her and walked on into history.

We don't know the woman's name and know her only as the "Woman at the Well", but the rabbi was Jeshua Bar Jonah or Jesus Christ as we know Him. Through that encounter, He demonstrated the manner in which all who were to follow Him were to treat and minister to the separated and divorced. He had not only talked to her but had reached out to her from the start. It is He who founded the ministry and He who still calls people to it like Father Young, Father Vince, and Monsignor O'Connell and all who are part of His ministry. So if anyone asks you how and when the Church got into the separated and divorced ministry, tell them that it's just "what Jesus did." ■





Divorce through a Child's Eyes

Zoey Maraist

Jen Cox was 7 years old when she learned her parents were getting a divorce. They were standing in the doorway. She was playing in the cul-de-sac with her neighborhood friends. Her mother was crying when they called her over and told her. Missing the point, she quickly returned to the game. “We’re getting divorced,” she told her friends.

In the coming months, Cox learned what that really meant. Her dad moved into the guest bedroom, and then moved out to live with his girlfriend. She and her mother moved into a smaller house down the road.

“I remember going to my dad’s for the first time, and I was very sad to leave my mom, but so excited to see my dad. I remember feeling very torn. That’s the reality of a kid going back and forth,” she said. “They’re constantly torn. It doesn’t really go away.”

Sarah Hart was also 7 years old when her parents got divorced. “I kind of had a sense that things weren’t going well,” she said. “My dad was moving in and out — it was a tumultuous relationship.” After the divorce, her parents tried to do as many family activities together as possible with her and her brother.

“But it was always like walking on eggshells,” said Hart. “Always living in a state of uncertainty, wondering when the next fight was going to happen.”

Dan Meola was in sixth grade when his parents separated. “My dad, trying to comfort me, would say, ‘I did this for you.’ That really created a neurosis in me,” he said. “I felt that I somehow showed him with my body language, with my actions, that I wanted this, and I didn’t.”

The wound of silence

“From the outside, it looks like I was not impacted by my parents’ divorce,” said Cox, a parishioner of Blessed Sacrament Church in Alexandria. She has a good relationship with her mom and dad. She graduated from Marymount University in Arlington. She bought a home. It took her a long time to realize she had hidden her pain from herself, and her parents.

Fearing the loss of their parents’ love and acceptance, many children of divorce are unwilling or unable to talk about how the split has hurt them. “Even (as a child) if I was allowed to say something, I probably wouldn’t have because I didn’t want to hurt my mom or my dad. I took that responsibility on,” said Cox. “You just stay silent.”

“Parents need the children to be OK,” said Meola. “Kids pick up on that and (they don’t) talk about it with their parents or peers. We didn’t have time to think about our own feelings.”

Divorce is so commonplace that people have stopped thinking of it as a trauma, he said. Cases where abuse, addiction or abandonment force separations are noticeably traumatic, but even amicable divorces take a toll, said Meola. After the separation, children can feel like they’re in survival mode. “As my one friend says, you just freeze,” he said. “Trauma freezes you — sometimes for decades — and you have to thaw out.”

Some children of divorce stay silent because they are filled with guilt and shame, believing they contributed to their parents’ separation. “A friend of mine told her dad, ‘Good, I’m glad you’re leaving.’ She felt great shame for so many years. That can wreck a kid,” said Meola. “It took her a long time to realize this, but she said it because she wanted her dad to fight for her.”

Even once they grow up, adult children of divorce can feel pressure to stay silent. Meola remembers the first time he talked to fellow Catholics about the pain of his parents’ divorce. After he had finished speaking, a woman told him that if he spoke out he would make divorcees feel bad.

“I wanted to crumple up into a ball,” he said. “I had a million and one reasons to be silent. No child of divorce wants to make anyone feel guilty.”

Finding the pain

The more Hart grew in her faith, the more she realized the wounds she carried from her parents' divorce. "We are the physical incarnation of the union, and when the union is broken, it hits the center origin," said Hart, a parishioner of St. John the Baptist Church in Front Royal. "It touches the deepest part of our identity."

As with many children of divorce, Hart felt a sense of homelessness — that she was growing up in two different worlds. She felt a loss of her childhood. She felt doubtful that God could love her unconditionally.

In high school, Cox felt proud that her parents' divorce hadn't affected her. But over the years, she experienced depression and anxiety. She never felt good or capable enough. She feared she couldn't be loved. And eventually, she understood her struggles were scars from her parents' divorce.

"I carried a lot of shame for realizing it had affected me. It (seemed to) prove I wasn't strong enough," she said. "When my therapist told me I was allowed to grieve the loss of my parents' marriage, my mind was blown. I had never heard that before. It's a loss of your family life up to that point, what you thought your life was going to be and who you are."

Meola, along with staff from the Pontifical John Paul II Institute in Washington, created a retreat for adult children of divorce called "Recovering Origins." The retreat will be held for the first time outside Washington at the San Damiano Retreat Center in White Post in September.

As he's met more and more adult children of divorce through the ministry, he's seen the resulting pain manifest itself in different ways. Some people stop believing that marriages can last. Some people become cynical when things start to go well in a relationship. Some avoid parenting.

"At the core it's a crisis of identity, which then becomes a crisis of faith," he said. "It becomes a question of, why did God bring these parents together for me?"

Healing through faith

In the Gospels, Jesus visits his disciples in his resurrected body, still wearing the scars of his crucifixion. "The only way I think you can make sense of it is that those wounds, too, glorify God," Meola said. "There's a secular way of thinking to see wounds as a mess, as an impediment. They can be life-giving."

The "Recovering Origins" retreat focuses on bringing healing through the sacraments, through Christian community and through the simple truth that God loves all his children. "In the natural order of things, God wants his love to be mediated by parents. But they are only an image of God's love — there's a deeper love," said Meola. "You are God's beloved."

The journey of healing is one of constant forgiveness, said Hart. "There is a choice to give a new beginning to the ones who have failed us, to open your heart even wider to God's love acting through us. It brings such unexpected joy and fruit and freedom," she said.

The pain of a parents' divorce rears its head at every milestone, at every holiday, said Meola. "(But) each time, I get a little better at it. I build up the virtue of forgiving, and I become a little bit more healed."

The culture runs away from its wounds, or anesthetizes them, he said, but through faith we know that a wound can help us better serve those who are suffering. "God doesn't want our wounds to have occurred in the first place, but through grace they cannot just be healed, but can become a resource of love." ■

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Bumper Stickers

Rev. Albert A. Grosskopf, S.J.

A native San Franciscan Rev. Al Grosskopf was a friend of Father James J. Young, a Paulist Priest who founded NACSDC. He has ministered with divorced people for many years. Fr. Grosskopf is pastoral minister at Sacred Heart Jesuit Center, Los Gatos, California. Fr. Al is a Priest Consultant to CDM and a regular contributor to Jacob's Well

Here we present his homily for the 31st Sunday B (Mark 12:28-34)

What a price we have to pay as loyal patriotic voters. Weary as we are with all the political posturing and wrangling, statements and misstatements of the last few months. What must we do to be rid of all this political hype? In an election year political candidates attempt to reduce their message to sound bites and bumper stickers. Complex ideas and extended discussions seldom make it into prime time coverage. The truth is, we tend to remember catchy phrases more than complex ideas anyway.

It takes great skill to make such a reduction in a way that doesn't sacrifice the truth. It was this very request for simplification that confronted Jesus when a teacher of the Law asked him the question contained in today's Gospel. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?" The scribe wanted what we all want. He knew that the Hebrew Scriptures contained over 700 commands, and numerous chapters of commentary or explanation of those commands. He wanted to get to the bottom line. He was asking Jesus for a bumper sticker slogan.

To his amazement and to ours, Jesus does just that. "Love God with all that you are, and love your neighbor as yourself." The first part is from Deuteronomy and the second from Leviticus. Together they form the cross of love's command- love deep all the way up to God; and love wide, all the way to your neighbor. Deep and wide. We can't choose just one dimension of love. We can't choose to love God but be unconcerned for our fellow men and women. We can't choose to be involved with social issues and separate that concern for a devotion to God.

Our society has made such a mush of love through romantic novels and love songs and TV soaps that the truth is obscured, that love is something you feel, and only what you feel. We talk about falling in love, as if we are somehow out of control and at the mercy of our feelings. How many marriages are destroyed over a spouse who says "I can't help it, I just don't love you anymore." On Engaged Encounter weekends, we speak of love as being a decision.

Jesus doesn't ask us to love only those for whom we currently *feel* love. He doesn't ask us only for love for God and neighbor when the feeling hits us. He commands love. Love is more than hormones or emotions. It's a commitment of the will, strength, heart, and mind. Love survives in the face of lovelessness because it is God's love flowing through us, not just our own love, which is at work.

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We will love our neighbor in the way we love ourselves. In other words, if we loathe ourselves, we will find it difficult to love our neighbor. If we think we have no value, we will find it difficult to ascribe value to others. If we give to our brother and sister the same respect we naturally give to ourselves, we will be transformed and we will transform others. And how we value ourselves and our neighbor flows from what God tells us in the Book of Genesis, that we are created in God's image, male and female, and so we are valued and value others as images of God. So love God, love your brothers and sisters, and love yourself. Sounds like a really good bumper sticker, and not political at all. ■