

## Spring 2004 Newsletter

### **The Chicagoland Healthy Marriage Initiative** **Director's Column: Lenten Reflections**

#### **The Chicagoland Healthy Marriage Initiative**

Today in the United States, a third of all children are born to unmarried parents. Research shows that in a home where both biological parents are present, children have higher cognitive ability and receive more education. As adults, they are more likely to earn higher wages, to get married, and to have more financial assets than those who grow up in other types of households. We ascertain from this data that the best way to help increase the general economic well being of children may not be to just increase parental employment or wages; instead, it is to strengthen and support the family structure. This situation so strongly affects children, parents, education, and the economy, that many organizations, including the government, are now striving to focus on and nourish the roots of the family structure: marriage.

The Family Ministries Office is beginning work to form an area-wide coalition to further strengthen marriages and families. This coalition will include faith-based organizations from various traditions, as well as governmental, social service, and other secular agencies, including institutions of higher learning.

A first step in this broad effort is the creation of the Chicagoland Marriage Resource Center. This web-based community resource will serve as a clearinghouse for all marriage education activities and programs in the greater Chicago area. It will serve as a platform to offer and expand existing programs from a wide variety of providers with the objective of reaching the largest possible array of participants. The website is [www.chicagolandmarriage.org](http://www.chicagolandmarriage.org).

The resources offered may include, but may not be limited to:

- Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged and married couples.
- Marriage mentoring programs which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities.
- Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills.
- Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage, and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health.

Our goals include:

- Increasing the number of premarital couples who are equipped with the skills and knowledge that will improve their chances of forming and sustaining healthy marriages.
- Increasing the number of parents in a healthy marriage raising children.
- Increasing the number of trained mentor couples who can help other couples through difficult times.
- Increasing the number of trained marriage educators in the community and the array of relationship courses available.
- Increasing public awareness about the skills and knowledge that will improve people's chances of having and valuing a healthy marriage.

The Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago has a long history of supporting families, and we are honored to be collaborating with other area organizations in this work of foundational value to American society. - *Juliet Beriou*