

From the Office of Family Ministry

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Every year, the reflection of contributors to the September edition of 'Journey' has focused on events that had or were soon to take place in the Archdiocese. The year 2020, with its COVID-19 pandemic, has made event planning impossible and has brought previously unimaginable changes to home, parish, and Archdiocesan life. I am sure that other writers will also address reflections on their own COVID-19 experiences.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, a future full of hope”. (Jeremiah 29:11)

This scripture passage is my source of hope and trust whenever I am facing difficulties, and that is true for the challenges created by this pandemic. On the weekend of March 15th, I moved into the Sisters' residence at Providence Manor. Just one hour before my arrival came the announcement that Providence Manor would be locked down. With no visitors, no volunteers, and the chapel closed, public health protocols would become our way of life. To protect the Sisters at the Motherhouse from the virus, those living elsewhere could not visit Heathfield. The Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre closed two days later, and scheduled meetings and workshops were cancelled. Thanks to prayers, effective leadership in each of the mentioned institutions, and dedicated adherence to public health regulations, the residents of Providence Manor and our Sisters at the Motherhouse were kept safe from the coronavirus. The efforts of the Archdiocese to offer spiritual, emotional, and physical support to the faithful created new and innovative parish life connections.

Response from the Pastoral Centre

Regular news updates on the virus were a constant reminder of the challenges families were facing every day and the ways in which they were adapting to those challenges. Meetings of Pastoral Centre staff were held via ZOOM, enabling us to connect with one another, share experiences, and offer support. The Family Ministry office looked for new ways to provide effective outreach to the members of the New Life Group for Separated and Divorced Catholics. Telephone calls and e-mail messages were somewhat helpful, but they did not match the confidential and safe environment of our bi-weekly support group meetings. A few ZOOM meetings enabled face-to-face support, but not all members had access to that technology. When inquiries were received from new individuals who had been referred to us by a counsellor, priest/minister, or friend, we endeavoured to provide whatever support we could, looking forward to the time when we could resume our regular Support Group meetings with required safety protocols.

What is Ministry to the Separated and Divorced?

Briefly, our ministry to Separated and Divorced Catholics is centered on the love of Christ and the belief that any person whose marriage has ended in separation or divorce deserves the loving, caring, healing support that Jesus would extend. Ministry to separated and divorced Catholics strives to adhere to the traditional teachings of the Church and endeavours to balance those teachings with the infinite love, mercy, and compassion of God. The reality is that Catholics who are separated and divorced endure much pain and suffering because of their inherent belief in the permanency of marriage. Our group offers them a safe environment where confidentiality is ensured; where they are free to speak without being judged; and where compassion is evident in the care and concern of others who have experienced similar pain and struggle. Oh yes, it is not by accident that this group is called “New Life”! Each individual really goes through a life, death, and resurrection experience, strengthening their understanding of the Paschal Mystery.