

International Colloquium on Marriage

Report on “The Growing Rate of Marital Failure in Our Society Today: Causes and Preventions”

Prepared from the consolidated extract of the colloquium proceedings

Catholic Marriage Forum — Sixth Anniversary Colloquium 15th July 2026

Final consolidated report

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Executive Summary

This report consolidates the key content of the International Colloquium on Marriage organised as part of the sixth anniversary of Catholic Marriage Forum (CAMF). The colloquium addressed the theme “The Growing Rate of Marital Failure in Our Society Today: Causes and Preventions” and brought together speakers from pastoral counselling, sociology, theology, psychology, and family counselling. The event was structured not simply as an academic exercise but as a practical pastoral response to a worsening marriage crisis affecting families, parishes, and the wider society.

The opening orientation by Fr. Thaddeus Anyaegbu set the tone by framing the crisis as both pastoral and social. He emphasised that the purpose of the colloquium was to move beyond complaint toward serious reflection, informed diagnosis, and realistic solutions. This interdisciplinary approach proved important because the contributors repeatedly showed that marital failure cannot be explained by one factor alone. Rather, it arises from a combination of weak foundations before marriage, selfishness, unrealistic expectations, poor communication, weak spiritual grounding, social media pressure, financial strain, emotional wounds, and inadequate long-term support after the wedding.

Prof. Anthony Atimati approached the issue from a Catholic marriage counsellor’s perspective and argued that marital failure is usually gradual rather than sudden. He highlighted faulty foundations, poor communication, broken trust, and neglect as recurring causes of breakdown, and stressed the need for early intervention. Dr. Ngu broadened the discussion by showing how modern individualism, economic pressure, secularisation, and changing gender expectations are reshaping the meaning of marriage itself. He argued that marriage is increasingly viewed as a private fulfillment project rather than a covenant sustained by community, faith, and responsibility.

Fr. Prof. P Okojie, OSB, returned to the biblical and theological foundations of marriage, stressing that Christian marriage must be understood as a lifelong covenant rooted in God’s design. He emphasised companionship, fruitfulness, shared suffering, and realism, while cautioning against idealised expectations.

Prof. Chioma Asuzu, though interrupted by network challenges, drew attention to the psychological dimension of vocation discernment, highlighting the importance of emotional readiness, personality awareness, and the identification of red flags before marriage.

Mrs. Christiana Ekheoveh grounded the colloquium in practical family life, arguing that many couples fail, not because they reject marriage in theory, but because they enter it with the wrong foundation and without sustained spiritual and relational discipline.

The discussion session moved the event from diagnosis to action. Participants called for post-marriage follow-up, stronger parish systems for marriage preparation, practical rather than overly academic teaching, and greater use of existing Church platforms such as Sunday homilies, family gatherings, and parish groups. A particularly strong concern was that many young people treat marriage classes as a formality designed only to secure wedding clearance rather than preparation for a lifelong vocation. The recommendations that emerged were therefore clear: begin marriage formation much earlier, continue it after marriage, evaluate engagement more seriously, celebrate long-lasting marriages as models, and strengthen parish and diocesan marriage apostolates. Overall, the colloquium’s major insight was that the crisis in marriage requires a whole-life, whole-Church response that combines theology, psychology, culture, formation, and accompaniment.

1. Introduction and Context

The International Colloquium on Marriage was convened under the auspices of Catholic Marriage Forum as part of its sixth anniversary celebration. The chosen theme—“The Growing Rate of Marital Failure in Our Society Today: Causes and Preventions”—reflected a concern that has become increasingly visible across society: marriages breaking down in the early years, long-standing unions deteriorating silently over time, and a rising fear of marriage among the younger generation.

The consolidated extract makes clear that the colloquium was designed as a faith-based but intellectually broad engagement with the crisis. The contributors were selected from different disciplinary backgrounds so that the issue could be examined from multiple angles. As a result, the colloquium addressed marital failure not only as a moral or private matter, but also as a social, cultural, psychological, and pastoral challenge. This report reorganises the material into a single deduplicated account, preserving the main ideas while removing repetitions that arose in the source extract.

2. Colloquium Structure and Speaker Line-up

The colloquium followed a simple but effective structure: opening prayer and welcome address, keynote-style presentations, a practical guest contribution, and an interactive session for questions and comments. The main contributors were as follows:

Speaker	Role/Perspective	Topic
Fr. Thaddeus Anyaegbu	Host / coordinator	Opening orientation and framing of the colloquium
Prof. Anthony Atimati	Catholic marriage counselling	Root cause analysis of marital failure
Dr. Ted Ngu	Sociology and culture	Sociological and cultural concepts behind the marriage crisis
Fr. Prof. P Okojie, OSB	Theology / philosophy / pastoral care	The original vision of Christian marriage
Prof. Chioma Asuzu	Psychology	A holistic psychological approach to discerning a marriage vocation
Mrs. Christiana Ekheoveh	Nurse, midwife, family counsellor	Practical and biblical reflections on marital failure

This spread of expertise reinforced one of the colloquium’s strongest messages: no single discipline can explain the current marriage crisis fully, and no single remedy will solve it.

3. Opening Orientation by the Host/Coordinator

Fr. Thaddeus Anyaegbu began with a special anniversary prayer that thanked God for six years of Catholic Marriage Forum and sought blessings for marriages, families, speakers, coordinators, and members of the apostolate. This opening prayer was important because it positioned the colloquium as more than a technical conference. It was an ecclesial and pastoral gathering rooted in gratitude, intercession, and concern for the family as a vocation.

In his welcome, he explained that the colloquium was meant to address a worrying rise in marital failure in society and to do so in a practical and solution-oriented way. He emphasised that the objective was not merely to lament the crisis, but to learn from the experience of specialists, to identify causes honestly, and to move toward workable pastoral responses. He also introduced the speakers as bringing complementary perspectives—counselling, sociology, theology, psychology, and practical family support. The tone of his introduction was therefore faith-based, interdisciplinary, and hopeful.

The host further outlined the evening's structure, including an interactive segment with questions, comments, and contributions from the audience. In hindsight, this was significant because the discussion session ended up reinforcing and sharpening the practical implications of the presentations.

4. Main Presentations

4.1 Prof. Anthony Atimati: A Root Cause Analysis of Marital Failure

Prof. Anthony Atimati approached the problem from the standpoint of Catholic marriage counselling. His central argument was that marital failure is rarely sudden. It is usually a gradual breakdown marked by accumulated tensions, neglected wounds, and unresolved conflicts. In this sense, separation or divorce is often only the visible final stage of a longer process of relational deterioration.

He identified a predictable set of recurring causes. These included faulty foundation before marriage, selfishness, unrealistic or unmet expectations, poor communication, lack of trust, financial strain, and neglect. A key insight in his talk was that many of the seeds of breakdown are present before the wedding day. Hidden secrets, marriage entered for the wrong motives, ignored red flags, incompatibility in values or disposition, and insufficient spiritual or practical preparation all weaken the union at its roots.

The speaker paid special attention to selfishness as a destroyer of marital communion. When marriage shifts from “we” to “me,” communication becomes defensive, financial decisions become contested, affection is withheld, and infidelity becomes more likely. He also stressed that poor communication is central to breakdown. Criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and silence all damage the emotional climate of the home. Trust, in his view, is the glue that holds marriage together; once it is damaged by secrecy or betrayal, the union begins to collapse.

Another important point was his emphasis on neglect. Love, he suggested, does not survive on ceremony alone. It must be maintained through affection, appreciation, communication, time together, and shared effort. For this reason, he argued that the solution to marital failure must begin early: better upbringing at home, family-life formation for children, stronger premarital preparation, seminars and workshops for young people, family enrichment initiatives, and the availability of trained counsellors. His underlying conviction was clear: Christian marriage is meant to endure until death, so intervention must come before breakdown becomes irreversible.

4.2 Dr. Ngu: Sociological and Cultural Concepts Underpinning the Crisis

Dr. Ngu broadened the discussion by moving from the interior life of couples to the wider forces shaping modern marriage. His core argument was that the crisis is not merely individual or moral; it is also social, cultural, communal, and spiritual. Modern marriage, he suggested, is under pressure from a culture that prizes self-fulfillment above covenant, endurance, and responsibility.

He described contemporary culture as one shaped by individualism—the logic of “me, myself, and I.” Once the self becomes central, marriage is no longer treated primarily as a vocation involving sacrifice, family continuity, and communal accountability. Instead, it is reimagined as a project of private happiness. In traditional African society, marriage was embedded in wider networks of kinship and communal belonging. In the modern setting, it is increasingly isolated and privatised. This shift weakens permanence because it reduces the sense of shared support and social obligation that once sustained marriage.

Social media featured prominently in his analysis. He observed that couples now compare real marriage to curated online images, especially wedding culture that highlights glamour but conceals the actual work of domestic life. Bills, in-laws, fatigue, child-rearing, and conflict are all normal parts of marriage, but when online culture presents only perfection, ordinary hardship begins to feel like failure. He also noted that economic pressure now delays or destabilises marriage. Young people feel they must achieve high levels of financial readiness before marriage, while changing expectations about gender roles add further strain.

Dr. Ngu’s analysis also noted that secularised thinking has entered Christian marriage discourse. Instead of asking what God intends through marriage, many now ask whether marriage still serves personal happiness. He described two broad waves of marital breakdown: first, the early years, where poor conflict management and unrealistic expectations cause rapid failure; second, the mid- to long-term range, where couples drift apart and buried wounds resurface. His conclusion was especially memorable: sociology can describe the storm, but it cannot anchor the ship. Theology, counselling, and psychology must therefore work together.

4.3 Fr. Prof. P Okojie, OSB: The Original Vision of Christian Marriage

Fr. Prof. P Okojie returned the colloquium to first principles. His presentation drew from Genesis, Christian anthropology, and pastoral reflection to argue that marriage must be understood as a lifelong covenant rooted in God’s design. The biblical insight that “it is not good for man to be alone” was treated as foundational, not sentimental. Marriage, in his view, is ordered toward companionship, intimacy, fruitfulness, and shared life.

One of the strongest themes in his contribution was realism. He insisted that no human partner can provide total fulfillment. Drawing on St. Augustine, he reminded the audience that the human heart rests ultimately in God. This means husband or wife cannot be made into an idol or expected to carry the weight of absolute satisfaction. Such unrealistic expectations damage marriage because they make normal limitations seem like betrayal.

He also addressed issues such as fertility, infertility, genotype, family planning, discipline, and openness to alternatives such as adoption. In doing so, he highlighted the need for prudence and wisdom before and within marriage. Christian marriage, he insisted, is not only romance; it is covenant. It involves not only joy, but pain, confusion, sacrifice, and perseverance. Although his presentation was affected by technical interruptions, the thrust was unmistakable: the Christian vision of marriage offers a corrective to fantasy, consumerism, and emotional instability by rooting marriage in God’s original design.

4.4 Prof. Chioma Asuzu: Psychological Readiness and Discernment

Prof. Chioma Asuzu’s contribution was unfortunately disrupted by network problems, and the extract preserves only part of her presentation. Even so, the preserved sections and the host’s introduction make

her intended emphasis clear. Marriage, she argued, is a vocation and must not be entered carelessly. Psychological, spiritual, and social readiness are all necessary dimensions of discernment.

A particularly important point from her contribution was that discernment unfolds gradually. Attraction to another person is not the same thing as readiness for marriage. She also drew attention to the role of personality, personality disorders, red flags, conflict patterns, and psychological tools for discernment. This perspective brought balance to the colloquium by showing that marriage crises are not only caused by external pressures or theological confusion; they may also arise from unresolved personal dysfunctions, emotional immaturity, or poor self-knowledge. Her presentation therefore underscored the need for better psychological formation as part of marriage preparation.

4.5 Mrs. Christiana Ekheveh: Practical and Biblical Reflections

Mrs. Christiana brought the colloquium down to the level of lived family experience. Her central point was that the crisis in marriage is real, painful, and deeply practical. Some couples, she noted, remain physically together while living like strangers. In her analysis, breakdown often begins with the wrong foundation and is worsened by pressure, secrecy, financial strain, infidelity, pornography, emotional baggage, unforgiveness, cultural pressure, and the loss of Christ-centered living.

Her advice to singles was direct: seek God first, avoid unsuitable unions, pursue premarital counselling, learn communication and financial management, and address personal wounds before entering marriage. For married couples, she stressed practices that protect covenantal life: praying together, reading Scripture together, inviting Christ into decision-making, forgiving quickly, mastering communication, avoiding yelling and silence, protecting time together, setting boundaries around phones, and seeking help early when warning signs emerge.

Her image of a small roof leak was especially apt. A leak ignored in the dry season becomes major damage when the rains come. In the same way, little neglected issues can one day become the cause of major marital collapse. She also argued that the Church must do more than preach at weddings. It must actively teach couples how to remain married, how to repair damage, and how to live a Christian family life over time. Her conclusion was hopeful: marriage is under attack, but God still restores what is broken if families and the Church respond intentionally.

5. Cross-Cutting Insights from the Presentations

Taken together, the presentations reveal a remarkably coherent picture of marital failure. First, the crisis is multidimensional. It cannot be reduced to personal sin alone, or to culture alone, or to poor counselling alone. The presentations showed that weak foundations, selfishness, emotional immaturity, cultural individualism, economic stress, social media influence, and spiritual shallowness interact with one another. This is one reason simplistic solutions often fail.

Second, the contributors agreed that preparation for marriage is currently too narrow and too late. Formal premarital classes, especially if compressed into a few months, cannot bear the full weight of formation that should have been taking place from childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Family life, youth ministry, Catholic schools, parish catechesis, and mentoring all need to become part of the formation ecosystem.

Third, the colloquium repeatedly stressed that marriage must be protected after the wedding, not only before it. The extract consistently returns to the idea of accompaniment, follow-up, and post-marriage catechesis. This is a major insight because many Church structures are good at preparing for ceremonies but much weaker at sustaining people after the event.

Fourth, the contributors agreed that Christian marriage must be presented positively as a covenant, a vocation, and a path of grace. Several interventions pointed out that many young people are now afraid of marriage because they mostly hear of failure. A central pastoral need, therefore, is not only to warn against breakdown but to restore confidence in the goodness, beauty, and attainability of faithful marriage.

6. Questions, Contributions, and Discussion

The discussion session proved highly valuable because it translated the themes of the presentations into pastoral questions faced by ordinary Catholics. One of the earliest and strongest contributions came from Lady Pat, who argued from lived experience that post-marriage follow-up can be transformative. She recounted attending a marriage encounter some years into her own marriage and described it as a kind of renewal that strengthened communication and preparedness for difficulty. Her intervention shifted the focus from diagnosis to accompaniment and raised the practical question of how the Church might systematically provide follow-up programs after the wedding.

Another major issue raised was the apparent lack of seriousness among many young people attending marriage preparation classes. Participants noted that some candidates are interested primarily in getting their attendance cards signed so that wedding documentation can proceed. They arrive late, engage poorly, and often see the program as a bureaucratic hurdle rather than serious formation. Responses to this concern included stricter parish discipline, stronger evaluation of participation, and a reminder that marriage is not an event but a lifelong covenant.

The host responded by invoking the catechumenal pathway encouraged by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. This reframed the entire discussion by suggesting that marriage preparation should not be seen only as a short pre-wedding course but as a gradual process that begins much earlier, from family life, schools, parish groups, and youth formation. Sister Kelechi reinforced this by recommending some form of assessment to ensure that candidates fully understand what they are taught.

Further contributions pushed the pastoral imagination outward. One participant suggested that marriage and family discussions could be integrated into mealtimes, family gatherings, and community settings rather than always requiring separate evening programmes. Another line of discussion focused on whether marriage catechesis could be built into Sunday homilies and parish worship life. The response was affirmative: priests were encouraged to use homilies, especially where the readings permit, to present the dignity, beauty, and importance of marriage and family life.

Fr. Emmanuel Abas of Lagos added that the Church is already doing much in this area, but the challenge is also societal and cultural. He described parish efforts that include workshops, lectures, and follow-up activities, while also acknowledging that many participants still attend classes with minimal seriousness. Mrs. Eugenia Essell from San Diego contributed another important perspective by arguing that marriage instruction can become too academic and insufficiently practical. She called for shorter, clearer, more applied catechesis and suggested using settings where people are already present, such as Sunday Mass

or Diocesan family-life programmes. Her moving example of parents married for 62 years highlighted mutual respect, prayer, and life anchored in God as the key supports of enduring marriage.

7. Main Takeaways from the Q&A

The Q&A session sharpened the practical direction of the colloquium in several ways. The first takeaway was that post-marriage accompaniment is essential. Formation should continue through marriage encounters, mentoring, support groups, and family-life apostolates because the first years of marriage are often the most vulnerable. Second, the session confirmed that many young people currently approach marriage preparation as a requirement to be completed rather than as formation to be received. This means that parishes need not only better content but better systems for participation, accountability, and assessment.

A third takeaway was the need to begin formation much earlier. Marriage education should be woven into ordinary family life, parish catechesis, youth ministry, and Catholic education well before engagement. A fourth was the call for more practical teaching. Rather than content that remains abstract or overly academic, participants wanted instruction that addresses real-life challenges such as communication, finances, prayer, sexuality, conflict, and the management of expectations.

A fifth takeaway was the recommendation to use the Church's regular platforms more intentionally. Homilies, family week programs, parish groups, meals, and ordinary communal settings were all identified as potential channels for marriage catechesis. Finally, the discussion repeatedly returned to the value of good examples. Couples who have remained married for many years should be celebrated publicly and invited to witness, mentor, and encourage younger people. In the face of widespread fear and cynicism, visible examples of faithful marriage carry pastoral power.

8. Recommendations

- Introduce structured post-marriage follow-up programmes at parish and diocesan levels, including marriage encounter weekends, refresher programmes, small support groups, and mentoring arrangements for newly married couples.
- Strengthen the seriousness of marriage preparation by ensuring that attendance, participation, punctuality, and understanding all matter. Completion of classes should not be reduced to signatures on a card.
- Add simple forms of evaluation to marriage preparation. These need not be academic examinations, but there should be some way of checking whether candidates have grasped the material and can apply it.
- Begin marriage formation much earlier through Catholic homes, youth apostolates, schools, catechetical programmes, and parish organisations. Preparation for marriage should be understood as part of lifelong Christian formation.
- Make marriage teaching more practical and interactive. Programmes should address communication, finances, conflict resolution, prayer, emotional maturity, discernment, forgiveness, sexuality, and family expectations in concrete terms.

- Use existing Church gatherings more intentionally. Homilies, parish meetings, family events, and communal settings should all be used to present the dignity and beauty of marriage and family life.
- Encourage priests and pastoral agents to preach positively and realistically about marriage so that young people hear not only the warnings about failure but also the good news that faithful marriage is possible.
- Celebrate long-standing marriages publicly and intentionally. Couples who have remained faithful over decades should be recognised as witnesses and invited to speak into the formation of younger generations.
- Promote marriage clearly as a vocation rather than merely a social ceremony. This will help shift parish culture away from event-management toward formation, accompaniment, and lifelong covenant.

9. Conclusion

The International Colloquium on Marriage succeeded in doing more than describing a problem. It brought multiple disciplines into conversation and showed that the current rise in marital failure is not an isolated moral issue but a broad human and pastoral crisis. The presentations highlighted the deep roots of breakdown: weak preparation, selfishness, wounded personalities, cultural individualism, economic strain, and spiritual decline. But they also identified equally clear paths of renewal: stronger formation, earlier discernment, Christ-centered living, practical relational skills, and sustained support from the Church and community.

Perhaps the most important conclusion of the colloquium is that marriage must be treated as a vocation requiring accompaniment before, during, and after the wedding. The event's strongest proposals all point in the same direction: prepare people earlier, teach them more practically, support them after marriage, and place before them living examples of faithful Christian family life. If these lessons are taken seriously, the colloquium will have served not only as an anniversary event, but as a meaningful contribution to the renewal of marriage ministry in the Church.

Appendix A: Consolidated Action Priorities for Parish and Diocesan Marriage Ministry

The following action priorities synthesise the strongest practical directions that emerged from the colloquium and the discussion session. They are included here as an implementation aid for priests, parish marriage committees, diocesan family-life units, and Catholic marriage apostolates.

Priority Area	Immediate Action	Expected Outcome
Early formation	Introduce age-appropriate teaching on marriage and family life in homes, youth groups, and schools.	Young people encounter marriage first as vocation and covenant, not merely as a wedding event.
Premarital preparation	Retain marriage classes but strengthen attendance, participation, and practical learning.	Candidates approach preparation more seriously and enter marriage with better expectations.
Assessment and review	Add simple forms of reflection, review, or facilitated feedback in preparation programmes.	Parishes can verify understanding rather than only recording attendance.
Post-marriage accompaniment	Organise follow-up meetings, marriage encounter renewals, mentoring, and support groups for newlyweds.	Breakdown risks are identified earlier and couples are not left unsupported after the ceremony.
Practical catechesis	Teach communication, finances, conflict resolution, prayer, discernment, and emotional maturity in concrete ways.	Formation becomes more applicable to lived married life.
Liturgical and parish platforms	Use homilies, family week, parish meetings, and small-group settings to speak regularly about marriage.	Marriage formation reaches people who may not attend separate evening programs.
Witness and celebration	Publicly recognize long-faithful couples and invite them to share practical testimony.	Younger Catholics see marriage as achievable, stable, and worth aspiring to.
Pastoral collaboration	Strengthen coordination among priests, counselors, marriage committees, and family-life apostolates.	Marriage ministry becomes more continuous, coherent, and effective.

This appendix does not replace local pastoral judgment. It simply translates the colloquium's strongest recurrent ideas into a compact action framework that can be adapted in parishes, dioceses, and Catholic family ministries.

By Mrs N. Ezekwe

Signed:

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