



CatholicCare Social Services | Diocese of Parramatta

... providing compassionate, professional and relevant support to the people in our diverse area

Faith in Marriage Conference aims to help support relationships

'Treat your husband/wife as if they are the most important guest in your house'

This was just one of the many practical recommendations for strengthening a marriage shared with about 120 participants at the 2nd Annual Faith in Marriage Conference.

The conference on 24 August was organised by CatholicCare Social Services Parramatta in partnership with Australian Catholic University.

Last year's inaugural conference was launched to honour and continue the work of the late Ray Reid, founding Director of CatholicCare Parramatta (formerly Centacare).

Ray devoted much of his professional life to supporting and enriching marriages, preparing couples for marriage and over the years counselling hundreds of married couples assisting them to enrich their relationships.

Prior to his death in 2012, Ray discussed how he would like his work to continue and agreed to a memorial lecture that would present hope and faith in marriage.

Bishop Anthony Fisher OP gave a warm welcome and blessing to begin the day. Dr Ryan Messmore, President of Champion College, then talked about the 'Great Expectations' of marriage.

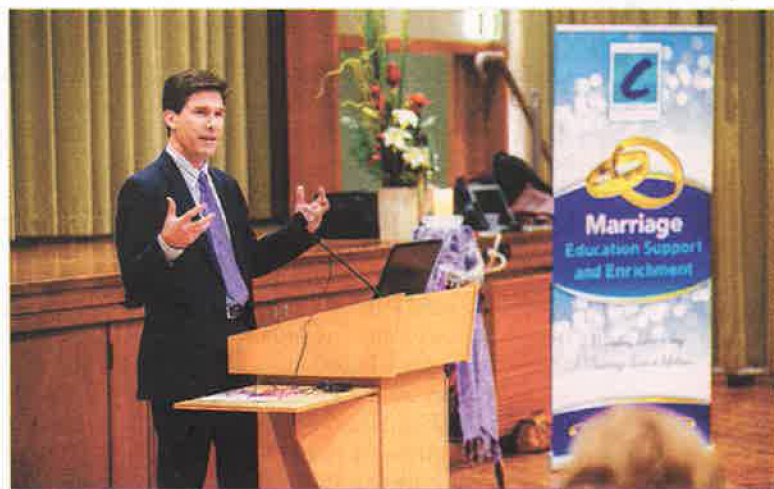
Dr Messmore spoke about the modern day notion of marriage as it is promoted by Hollywood, the music industry and advertisers.

Marriage is often depicted as being about romantic love, where love is merely a feeling and marriage based only on romantic connection, so that married couples search for tips and techniques for spicing things up or bringing back the passion.

Dr Messmore said this becomes problematic because realistically, at some point, every marriage will experience conflict and disappointment and this will not be due to a lack of emotional connection or a shallow level of intimacy, rather it will often happen precisely because the intimacy was real and deep.

A better perspective he suggests is the *Catholic Catechism* perspective of marriage "based on the will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love". (CCC 1662)

The *Catechism* states that marriage is in its essence, a covenant – a permanent, lifelong relationship between two parties who fully commit to each other.



Dr Ryan Messmore spoke about the 'Great Expectations' of marriage. Photos: Alphonsus Fok.

In biblical times marriage was understood to be that sort of relationship. The criterion for a successful marriage was not the presence of sweaty palms or butterflies in the stomach, but faithfulness to a covenant.

'the nature of love is not merely a passionate emotion but an active commitment of the will'

"Today, love is understood primarily as a noun – an intense attraction or feeling," Dr Messmore said. "In scripture, however, the nature of love is not merely a passionate emotion but an active commitment of the will. True love is something we do, not only something we feel. It is an action not just an attraction."

Prof Neil Ormerod of Australian Catholic University discussed 'Unpacking the meaning of marriage' and Mrs Ann O'Brien, Director Marriage Support and Specialist Services at CatholicCare Parramatta, led 'A marriage workout – 10 exercises'.

Ms Jo Lamble psychologist,

marriage counsellor and TV presenter offered 5 Happiness Habits and essential ingredients for building a strong marriage. Jo discussed the following:

- Validation – listen and acknowledge your partner when they are sharing their feelings or frustrations.
- Empathy – empathise with your partner when they are feeling tired, stressed, etc as important components of a healthy marriage.
- The benefits of filling the 'rain tank' by going away together, to the movies together, looking over old photos, or laughing, so the relationship continues to flourish in spite of the inevitable drain and strain daily life takes from your marital 'rain tank'.
- Be careful not to parent your partner. Communicate as two adults, not one partner reprimanding the other in a parental tone/manner.
- Be good role models for your children.

To listen to any of the presentations from the day, visit www.ccss.org.au or find us on facebook www.facebook.com/CCSSParramatta



Jo Lamble outlined the essential ingredients for building a strong marriage.

Tony and Jenny* are a couple with two young children, who have been separated for the past six months. They have experienced an increase in conflict in recent years and find it difficult to live together. They are hopeful about reconciling, but not sure how.

They commented that the Faith in Marriage Conference had given them some hope that they could relate to each other differently and after the conference decided to attend counselling to assist them in their aim