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# SEEKING HEALING AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH FOR PEOPLE FROM DIVORCED OR SEPARATED FAMILIES

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# TALK OUTLINE



- I. Statistics for Perspective
- II. Seven Wounds of Adult Children of Divorce and Suggestions for Spiritual Healing
- III. Other Suggestions for Pastoral Accompaniment



# STATISTICS FOR PERSPECTIVE

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**1 million children a year** suffer through and experience their parents' divorce since 1974.\*

This means that there is *at least* an estimated **48,000,000 children of divorce** since 1974, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of children of divorce in the 1960s.

**25%** of all young adults are children of divorce.\*\*

\*See W. Bradford Wilcox "The Evolution of Divorce" in *National Affairs*, Fall 2009. \*\* See Elizabeth Marquardt et al., "Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?" in *Torn Asunder* (2017).

# WHAT ABOUT OTHER SITUATIONS?



From 2011 onwards, roughly about **21 percent of children** are born into cohabiting households and the majority of these children will see their parents break-up by the time they turn fifteen.\* These children of cohabitation separation experience similar pain to adult children of divorce.

\*W. Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriages Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (2011), pg. 1.

## What about the effect on faith?

**2/3** of young adults who were regularly attending a church or synagogue at the time of their parents' divorce say that no-one – neither from the clergy nor the congregation – reached out to them at that time.\*

**25%** of Americans claim no formal religious identity now, a crisis research shows that in part is caused by children of divorce leaving their faith because they believed that the Church wasn't listening or ministering to their wounds.\*\*

\*Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, pg. 155.

\*\*"How Decades of Divorce Helped Erode Religion" in the *Washington Post* citing the study "Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion" by the Public Religion Research Institute.

# What about the effect on marriage?

Parental divorce *increases* the chances of their children to divorce in their own marriages by at least **40 percent**.\*

\*Nicholas H. Wolfinger, *Understanding the Divorce Cycle: The Children of Divorce in Their Own Marriages* (2005), 74, and "More Evidence for Trends in the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce" in the journal *Demography* vol. 48, no.2 (May 2011): 581 - 92.



“ THE PAST AFFECTS US, BUT IT DOES NOT DOOM US TO REPEAT OUR PARENTS’ MISTAKES. **REAL SPIRITUAL HEALING AND GROWTH** IS POSSIBLE, BUT WE HAVE TO CONFRONT HOW THE PAST IS **FILTERING** OUR PRESENT. ”



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“EVERY **LAYER** OF THE WOUND  
IS A **LESSON FOR LOVE**.  
OUR WOUNDS THROUGH GRACE ,,  
CAN BECOME **LIFE-GIVING**  
**RESOURCES**.



“

BY HIS WOUNDS YOU  
HAVE BEEN HEALED.

”

-1 PETER 2:24



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# SEVEN WOUNDS OF ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR HEALING



1. The Wound of Silence

2. The Wound of Broken Identity

3. The Wound to Faith

4. The Wound to Love

5. The Wounds of Anger, Anxiety, and Sin

6. The Wound of Unforgiveness and Resentment

7. The Wound of Meaningless Suffering



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# THE WOUND OF SILENCE

Understand  
the intense  
pressures to  
be silent from  
within and  
without and  
to not  
address the  
wound...

Trauma

Survival Mode

Loss of Childhood

Resiliency Myths

False Guilt and  
Shame

“Happy Divorce  
Talk”

Fear of Upsetting  
Parents/Divorcees

Sleeper Effects

# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

## The THREE “G’s”

- GIVE VOICE TO THEIR PAIN
- GRIEVE TOGETHER
- GOD SUFFERS *WITH* THEM





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# THE WOUND OF BROKEN IDENTITY



# WOUND TO IDENTITY

- Deep ontological questions
- Emotional homelessness
- Torn between two/many worlds
- Appearance/personality



# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- God's beloved child – deepest identity
- Genealogy of the person (JPII)
- Baptism
- Sign of the Cross





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# THE WOUND TO FAITH

“

OFTEN THE DEEPEST CAUSE OF SUFFERING IS  
THE VERY ABSENCE OF GOD.

”

– POPE BENEDICT XVI



# WOUND TO FAITH

- Parents meant to image God's love
- Seeming hypocrisy
- Transferring flawed image of parents onto God
- Questions about suffering
- Lack of support from church communities



# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- God is transcendent – can help heal and transform our understanding of Father, etc.
- God is immanent, not distant from our pain
- Parishes as a family of families





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THE WOUND TO LOVE:  
FLAWED VISION OF MARRIAGE AND  
UNHEALTHY SELF-PROTECTION

# WOUND TO LOVE

- Damaged views of love and marriage
  - Cynicism
  - Romanticism
- Unhealthy self-protection
  - A stance learned from broken relationships
  - Keeping others away from our true selves
- Difficulties with discernment





# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- Renewed vision of marriage – joy AND growth
- Acknowledge self-protective tendencies – counteract with self-giving virtue
- Mentors and witnesses





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# THE WOUNDS OF ANGER, ANXIETY, AND SIN

# ANXIETY, ANGER, SIN

- Anxiety – distrusting joy, worried about needs
- Anger – can be righteous but can be sinful
- Sin – often arises from unhealthy ways of coping; it compounds pain with greater shame and low self-esteem



# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- Scriptures about peace and meekness
- Not identifying self with emotion
- Developing virtue and greater trust in God
- Working toward forgiveness of self and others
- Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Therapy





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# THE WOUND OF UNFORGIVENESS AND RESENTMENT

# UNFORGIVENESS

- Forgiveness is hard, especially in big areas
- Resentment traps us in the past
- Misunderstandings about forgiveness



# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- Authentic understanding of forgiveness
  - An ongoing process
  - not identical to reconciliation
  - Compatible with healthy boundaries
- Receive forgiveness often ourselves
  - Sacrament of Reconciliation
  - Divine Mercy Chaplet





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# THE WOUND OF MEANINGLESS SUFFERING



# A MEANING TO SUFFERING?

- Am I empty-handed?
- Does my suffering have a purpose beyond this pain?
- Risk of discouragement or despair



# IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALING

- Christian meaning of redemptive suffering
- Meaning of healing: a way of life with Christ
- A mission with the wounds
- Cultivating interior joy





# OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR PASTORAL ACCOMPANIMENT

# General Advice

- Adult children of divorce and separation are not just a group in need of pastoral care, but are witnesses to authentic love that they can, at times, see more clearly on account of their wound.



# Community and Ministry Awareness

- Talks and trainings for leaders
- Priestly and diaconate formation
- Young adults
- General audience



# Marriage Preparation and Enrichment

- Specific, detailed content for ACODs
- (Remember the risk of divorce)
- Connect ACODS with mentors



## Dedicated, Specific Ministry

- Something “just for” ACODs
- A “trickle-down” approach is not enough
- Life-Giving Wounds retreats, support groups, and other resources
- Offered to ACODs encountered anywhere
- Great for both parishes and campus ministries.



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For more resources on this topic:

**[www.life-givingwounds.org](http://www.life-givingwounds.org)**





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Questions? Discussion time

## Prayer for Those from a Broken Home

O Eternal Father,

You created me in your image and likeness and you long to hold me always in your loving embrace. Your love has sustained me in my trials and struggles.

Each day, I will live as a beloved child of God, confident in your divine mercy. I will place in you all my trust and hope, for you lift my gaze from shame, fear, and the pain of division to your unparalleled love for me on the cross.

By the power of Christ's great wounds, heal the wounds left in my life by the tragedy of my parents' separation or divorce, or family brokenness. Help me love, despite the pain. Help me forgive, no matter how deep the hurt. Help me have peace and virtue when old and new wounds arise. Remain with me, Holy Spirit, so that I may be a wellspring of healing for others.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

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“Let the Children of Divorce Come to Me”



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