Oftentimes in family life, we only focus on what’s going well, or share the positive aspects of our day-to-day lives. Think about Facebook or any social media platform, where we often see only the “best” of each other’s journeys. But as we all know, sometimes families suffer, often due to no fault of their own. Our lives are a mystery, and while we wish we always knew “why” things happen or how to fix them, those answers are not always available to us on this side of heaven.

For these reasons, I’m grateful for two new outreaches beginning this year in our diocese that will help families to heal: a divorce support group for those who are divorced or separated, and a grief support group for parents who have lost a child. The divorce support group is already almost halfway through, having begun on Thursday, January 7. Topics are covered through the series “Surviving Divorce” by Ascension Press that include Dealing with Depression, Learning to Forgive, and Loving All Church Teachings. Participants are invited to share as much, or as little, as they would like about their own journey, while remaining respectful of their previous or separated spouse. The focus is on healing, developing a deeper prayer life, and building friendships among members. Please keep this group in your prayers as they continue in their meetings, asking for the intercession of their patron Saint Raphael the Archangel, who is the patron of healing and happy meetings.
Any parent who has lost a child of any age, for any reason is welcome to attend. When I was part of hosting a similar retreat in Florida a couple of years back, parents of all ages attended, including a mother who lost her adult son and a mother who had lost her infant daughter several decades prior. We all need healing, and sometimes healing takes time. Another important aspect of grief is that everyone will grieve in different ways, and we need to be respectful of that. The most important aspect of grief for all of us to remember is that Christ Himself is the Divine Healer. While we may want to try and “fix” someone at times, that is not our job. We are there to listen, love and encourage, always pointing people back to the One who can bring true healing.

While both of these outreaches are Catholic in content, anyone is welcome to participate — Catholic or not, religious or not. The entire purpose is to extend Christ’s healing ministry, which He offers to the entire world through His Church. All of us can participate in one way or another, and I encourage you to do one, two, or all three of these things:

1. **Pray for these outreaches and those participating.** Nothing is more important than prayer when it comes to any outreach. Your prayers are powerful and effective, as St. James reminds us in his epistle: “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful,” - James 5:16 (NABRE)

2. **Invite friends or family who may benefit.** If someone is on your mind right now who may experience healing through one of these outreaches, God may be asking you to invite them! If not you, then who will? A personal invitation is always the most effective way to encourage someone to participate. Let me know if you’d like more detailed information on either of these outreaches. I can be reached at jreyes@victoriadiocese.org or 361-573-0828 x 2265.

3. **Consider volunteering with one of these ministries.** There are many ways we can help, and needs that can be filled. Perhaps you can send a care package to participants? Or write them a card with a few friends? Maybe you can donate snacks or bottled water, or even donate books or resources. We all have a part to play in Christ’s ministry of healing, and if interested in helping, please let me know!

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter, and please do pray for all of the families in our diocese—that they may receive whatever healing they need. Each family needs help in one way or another, and thankfully, God has given us each other to be companions on the journey, helping one another to find everlasting peace in Him.

All for the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, all through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, all in union with St. Joseph. **Amen.**