

Family
An **adventure**
in love



A parish kit to celebrate the
25th Anniversary of
Familiaris Consortio
Sunday 19th November, 2006

A Resource from
the Bishops Commission for
Pastoral Life





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In a nutshell

25th Anniversary of Familiaris Consortio (JPII)

What:

An opportunity to affirm and inform families in unity with the Universal Church.

When:

Celebrated on November 19, 2006.
(material could be used on other Sundays, eg Feast of the Holy Family)

Theme:

The role of Christian family in the modern world .

Aims:

- Affirm families as the basic schools in love
- Encourage further reflection
- Pray for families
- Raise awareness of a landmark Church document on the family

This kit contains:

- A reproducible leaflet: 'Families: An Adventure in Love'
- Suggestions for the Liturgy
- A copy of Landmarks No.5

Thank you for celebrating the gift of family.

A Letter to Parish Personnel

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Dear Friends,

I am writing to invite you to join with other parishes on Sunday November 19th in using the enclosed parish kit as a resource for supporting family life.

The date chosen for the release of this material (the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary time) is based on the 25th anniversary of the publication of Familiaris Consortio (FC). However, it could also be used on other Sundays, for example, the Feast of the Holy Family.

Family issues are always high in the consciousness of most parishioners. So this could help to raise awareness of some of the gems of advice in Church teaching.

The reproducible leaflet is the major means of communication in this kit. It is a reader-friendly abbreviated version of 'Landmarks' No.5 on FC. It can also be downloaded from the website of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life (www.acbc.catholic.org.au) and it could be distributed through a parish school newsletter.

I believe the issues facing families represent some of the most important challenges facing our Church and our society. I strongly encourage you to use the enclosed materials as part of our national effort.

Thank you for your ongoing support for families,

In Christ,

Bishop Eugene Hurley

Chairman,
Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life



Suggestions for the Liturgy

Homily Ideas (33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time)

1st Reading: Dn 12:1-3

2nd Reading: Heb 10:11-14.18

Gospel: Mk: 13:24-32

Today is the second last Sunday of the Church's liturgical year. So the readings deal with 'the final things', the inevitability of our own passing and of the passing of all creation as we know it. It is a time for taking stock of the major issues in our lives. We do this with our material affairs and we need to do the same from time to time with our relationships, especially our relationship with God.

Today many parishes around the world are also observing the 25th anniversary of the publication of a landmark Church document on family, Pope John Paul II's 'Familiaris Consortio' or 'The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World'. The leaflet in your parish bulletins gives a 'taste' of what this document is all about. So today is a good opportunity to look at the readings in the light of one particular part of our spirituality, namely family life.

The first reading, the prophecy of Daniel, refers to the resurrection of the dead and the Last Judgement. It is a very short and very blunt reminder that our actions in our lives have inevitable consequences. Applying that to family life, Familiaris Consortio is a lot wordier and a lot gentler. As the leaflet in your bulletin reminds us, family is very much an adventure in love. We all know from experience what a challenge family relationships can be. However that is because the stakes are so high. What other relationships can fill the yearning in our hearts and give such a sense of belonging?

On the other hand, some people seem to be trapped in a difficult life. They constantly try to be forgiving but they don't seem to get any recognition for that in return. It's patently unfair. Often these are the unsung saints of our world. As Daniel prophesied in the first reading, they can be the real 'learned' of this world and they will 'shine as brightly as ... stars for all to see.'

The second reading from St Paul reminds us that Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins. However, we still need repeated forgiveness for our many failings. No marriage would survive more than a few weeks if couples did not say sorry for the inevitable number of little ways in which we take each other for granted or put ourselves first. Saying sorry is all part of the commitment to love each other 'for better or for worse' and it is lived out in all sorts of daily ways.

That's why Familiaris Consortio refers to the family as the 'first and fundamental school of social living'. In fact, while we are rightly concerned about the problems of modern families, most families should take a bow for the ways in which they teach the fundamentals of social life to their members – learning to forgive, to thank, to praise and to care for each other.

In the Gospel, Jesus talks of the passing of the world as we know it. It is a reminder that many things that seem so important in our current lives will eventually pass. For each person some things are specially important and we jokingly say we couldn't live without them. Often they are good in themselves, maybe our microwave, an ipod or a planned holiday overseas. But these are peripheral to life.

What really counts, when the chips are down, is the state of our relationships – with each other and, ultimately with God. Family life is everybody's life-long training ground in relationships. Ultimately, we have to face the wonderful fact that God created us in his own image – with the capacity to love. And we have a whole lifetime of family relationships to work on it. So let's take this time to pray and to reflect on family life. I particularly encourage you to learn more about Familiaris Consortio.

How to use this kit

The basics:

1. Photocopy the handout Family: An Adventure in Love and distribute at Sunday Mass on 19th November or the Feast of the Holy Family.
2. Consult liturgy notes for this day.
3. Consider adding clipboard items in the bulletin on that Sunday

Bulletin Clipboard:

Family issues: Parishes around the world today are observing the 25th Anniversary of a landmark Church document on the family known as 'Familiaris Consortio'. See the leaflet 'Family: an adventure in love' which gives a 'taste' of what this is all about. Take time out to pray and reflect on the most important relationships in our life.

Family issues: Well known sayings like "the future of humanity passes by way of the family" come from a landmark Church document known as 'Familiaris Consortio'. This is the 25th anniversary of its publication. See the leaflet 'Family: an adventure in love' which gives a 'taste' of what this is all about. Take time out to pray and reflect on the most important relationships in our life

Prayers of Intercession for families

- We pray for Pope Benedict XVI as he looks for new ways to support families. May he continue to promote the truth with compassion.
- We pray for all families – may they be sources of love and encouragement for their members.
- We pray that government and community leaders may provide justice for all families, especially those with special needs.
- We pray for those who experience hurt in their families, that they may be comforted and not lose heart.
- We pray for the faithful departed, especially those of our parish family.

Conclusion:

God of love, you gave us families in which we can experience love and share it with others. May we learn to support our family members in your name. Amen.

A forgiving home

For years after my divorce I prayed that I would be a good parent to my children. Then one day it dawned on me that the more at peace I was with my ex-husband, the more at peace my children would be.

After that my prayer changed. Each day I asked Jesus to bring forgiveness and healing into the woundedness of my married life. I prayed that, with this forgiveness, I could communicate to my children that they were the fruit of our love, even if that love was imperfect.

Over time I have seen the power of this kind of prayer. There is a growing peace in our home. The children feel freer to talk about their daddy, what they miss about him, how they feel angry sometimes. And I can handle their questions more peacefully than before. (Terry)

It takes courage to be family

In *Familiaris Consortio*, two key themes emerge: COMPASSION and TRUTH. Catholic beliefs about marriage and family can be painful for many people. The wounds of hurt and disillusionment run deep. Faced with such pain we can be tempted to stop speaking the truth; for instance, we might avoid saying things like 'Marriage is forever'. But when we do this we only undermine our capacity to live the truth. We rob married people of encouragement, we rob our children of inspiration, and we fail to recognise the enormity of a divorced person's loss. Instead of diluting our beliefs, let us SPEAK them with love and sensitivity; let us gently LISTEN to each other's experience of joy, loss, hope, loneliness and REACH OUT with healing hands.

Jesus grew up in a family

Family love can change the world. Think of Jesus of Nazareth. His public ministry did not arise out of the blue. It was in the hidden and uncelebrated years of family life - growing up in the home of Joseph and Mary - that the foundations of his ministry were laid. May we have confidence in the love which lies 'hidden' in our own families and its bearing on the future of the world. May we respond to John Paul II's summons:

'Family, become what you are.' (FC,17)

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One night...

When our baby daughter was very sick, her ear infection made it too painful for her to lie down in her cot. My husband sat up all night cradling her feverish little body in his arms so that she and I could both sleep. This incident has given me an image of God's love which I will treasure always. (FP)

I have always been lucky in my life even though people have trouble believing me when I say this. "You're in a wheelchair. How is that lucky?" The answer is I have the best family in the world. (Chris)

Okay. We all admit it. Family life is difficult.

What family does not know the fatigue of constant giving, the tension of a personality clash, the heartache of a tragedy, the dull pain of daily irritations?

Family life is a challenge because the stakes are so high. What other relationship can hold out so much promise: a lifelong sense of belonging, a rare depth of intimacy, the experience of creating life itself?

Family life is indeed a risky adventure in love; a relational experience at the core of human existence with the power to make or break not only persons, but society itself.

Small wonder, then, that the Church is so interested in families - their joys and hopes, worries and sorrows. In fact, one of the first things John Paul II did as Pope was to hold a world meeting of Bishops on the topic of 'Family' from which emerged a landmark document called: *Familiaris Consortio: The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*.

This year, 2006, is the 25th anniversary of that document, so let's revisit some of its pearls of wisdom...



Something sacred

In our love-making, Geoff and I are aware of something sacred happening. It is as if we are saying to each other: "Take, this is my body, given for you." For us, sexual intercourse is a sacred "rite" through which we celebrate and strengthen the love bond between us. (Sue)

- What are some of the ways you give of yourself in spousal and other family relationships?
- What strengths and sacrifices have shaped your experience of family?

All three of our children are gifted in a large number of diverse ways. Most importantly, they are wonderful people and greatly loved. People who regard the fact of their having a disability as their prime feature are totally missing the point. Any child is a blessing and a gift to her or his parents. A child with a disability is no different. (Mary)

The Christian family

Put simply: the mission of the family is to BE what it IS, namely 'an intimate communion of life and love' (FC,17). How does it do this? In four ways:

1. Families form community

'Love one another' says the Gospel. If the world is to be a place of love, it has to start with the tiniest cell of human loving: the married couple and their family.

In the eyes of the Church, sexual intercourse involves a sacred 'language' of the body by which a spouse says: *I give you all of me - my manhood/womanhood, my capacity to bring forth life, my deepest self. And I want to receive and accept all of you.* It is this selfgiving union between man and woman, and its openness to the generation of new human life, which makes marriage a foundation stone of the wider family community, the Church and society.

Through countless loving actions in the daily lives of spouses, children, extended family and neighbours, the family acts as a little 'power cell' of hope in the world. From the presence of a newborn child to the wisdom of an elderly grandparent, all members have the grace and task of building community, making the family 'a school of deeper humanity'. (FC, 21)

2. Families serve life

Bringing up a child is one of the many precious fruits of marriage. It includes the responsibility of helping the young person to live a fully human life. *Parents are the prime educators of their children.* Certainly other people and agencies can help; but nothing can replace the parents and the family.



It is in the atmosphere of the home that a child 'catches' a spirit of love or discovers its lack. It is through the religious practices of the home that a child first senses a reverence for God or feels the absence of faith. It is in the family unit that a child first learns 'those social virtues which every society needs' (FC,37), including a spirit of service, self-sacrifice and respect for one's sexuality.

'The family is the first and fundamental school of social living.' (FC,37)

Says *Familiaris Consortio*: Do not think of your family responsibilities as secondary to the mission of the Church. When you teach your children (and they teach you!) to love, to pray, to celebrate the sacraments and to serve one's neighbour, you are not just 'helping' the Church's mission *you are living its very mission!*

3. Families shape society

In a society that is becoming increasingly dehumanised by its glorification of material power, families offer a humanising and personalising influence. In a family, one's value as a person is not determined by salary, status, age or ability. Rather, a family says to each member: *We love you simply for who you are: you belong to us.*

4. Families have a mission

Just as we refer to Jesus as 'prophet, priest and king', so are Christian families called to:

- Share their faith with enthusiasm and conviction;
- Be open to the sacred;
- Live justly and exercise their social conscience.

Queen Emily

At a family meal on the eve of Emily's first communion day, all her big brothers and sisters dressed up in formal wear - suits, bow ties, evening dresses, the works - and made it a very special occasion in her honour. Pretty amazing given their usual attire of jeans and T-shirts!

We had a lot of laughs and Emily felt like a queen. The body of Christ we received the next day was all the more a special experience because of the presence of Christ we had celebrated in one another the night before. (M & MJ)

- What's one of your fondest memories of growing up in a family?

'The future of humanity passes by way of the family.' (FC,86)