

# 'FAMILY:

become what you are'

(Familiaris Consortio 17)



**A PARISH KIT  
TO CELEBRATE  
THE GIFTS OF THE FAMILY**

A resource from the Australian Catholic  
Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life

Especially designed for the Feast of the Holy Family

### When to use this kit:

Any Sunday. However:

- ♥ Specially recommended for the Feast of The Holy Family.
- ♥ Also appropriate for a Family Sunday in your diocese.

### Why use this kit?

- ♥ The Christian family is at the heart of the Church, and needs our constant recognition and affirmation.

### What this kit offers:

- ♥ This kit offers a chance to focus on and affirm all Christian families.
- ♥ A recognition that "As the family goes, so goes the Church, and so goes human society as a Whole."<sup>1</sup>
- ♥ An affirmation of families trying their best to live Christian lives.
- ♥ Quotes from families.
- ♥ Practical steps for families.

### This kit contains:

- ♥ A reproducible leaflet: 'Family: become what you are.'
- ♥ Bulletin clips and homily notes.
- ♥ A copy of Landmarks no. 5 'Family: An Adventure in Love.' Available from: The Story Source (02) 93140867 storysource@ozemail.com.au

# 'Family: become what you are'

## A letter to parish personnel



Dear Friends,

Sometimes, international meetings in Rome seem far removed from the everyday experience of Australian families. However, it is possible for action to filter down from 'the top' and this parish kit is one example.\*

The Holy Father has said, "As the family goes, so goes the Church, and so goes human society as a Whole."

The family is under more and more pressure from society every day. As the Church, we need to affirm our families to "become what they are," so that their strength and gifts to the Church and society, may be recognised and celebrated.

With this in mind, the enclosed pastoral kit is offered for use in parishes around Australia. It is simple and can be used flexibly according to local and diocesan needs.

It contains catechetical points based on the Holy Father's address to the Third World Meeting of Families and homily for the Jubilee of Families.

The kit is specially recommended for the Feast of the Holy Family. Affirmation and practical support for family life on this day can promote a sense of solidarity with other families and the universal Church.

Thank you for your ongoing support for families.

Yours in Christ,

*Leonard A. Fairhead*

Chairman,  
Bishops' Committee  
for the Family and for Life

\* This kit is a fruit of the Third World Meeting of the Holy Father with Families in 2000.

*'The future of  
humanity passes by  
way of the family.'*

(FC, 86)

## Bulletin Clipboard

### Families are special

We all need families and we all need to support families. Support comes in many forms; prayer, a kind word, inclusion in an event and practical help. Be aware of what your family needs. It may only be a listening ear and an open heart.

### Some hints for families

- ♥ Play 'Shipwrecked', a game where we write each family member's gifts and talents and talk about how each member would help us survive on a desert island.
- ♥ Bring a grandparent or an older relative to Mass. Let them know how valuable they are in your family.
- ♥ Reach out to a family who may be lonely or in need. Invite them over for a meal with your family.
- ♥ As a family, volunteer your time, gifts and talents to help organisations that help families.

### Suggestions for building family

- ♥ Pray as a family.
- ♥ Celebrate Baptism Day as well as birthdays.
- ♥ Improve your communication. Really listen with your heart.
- ♥ Enjoy a family meal. Let the children decide on the menu and table decorations.
- ♥ Have "Family Space", where you share ideas, make plans, listen to each other and 'be there' for each other.
- ♥ Sharing the Sunday Eucharist is a powerful way of bonding with our family. Make Sunday family day. Celebrate Mass then spend the rest of the day doing something everybody enjoys.

## How to use this kit

- ♥ Decide the most appropriate Sunday to focus on '**Family: become what you are.**'
- ♥ Recommended for the Feast of The Holy Family.
- ♥ Photocopy the handout '**Family: become what you are**' and distribute at Sunday Mass.
- ♥ Consider adding clipboard items to bulletin on that Sunday or subsequent Sundays.
- ♥ Consider providing copies of the Landmarks issue on Family: an adventure in love.
- ♥ Consider encouraging the reading of the papal document *Familiaris Consortio*.



## Homily Thoughts

(The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph)

In his homily to the Jubilee of Families, the Holy Father said: "...taking the Family of Nazareth as your example, although called to an incomparable mission, it travelled the same path as you do, amid joys and sufferings, prayers and work, hopes and distressing trials, while always rooted in fidelity to God's will."

The Holy Family faced many challenges.

- ♥ An unexpected pregnancy and the resulting spreading of rumours.
- ♥ The difficult choices facing Mary and Joseph, and the danger that they experienced.
- ♥ The refugee status they experienced for some time
- ♥ The feelings of anxiety when they lost Jesus for three days in Jerusalem.
- ♥ Mary was widowed
- ♥ Their son died a criminal's death.

All these trials in one lifetime, yet, through it all they remained faithful to God's way.

This feast is an opportunity to thank those family members who have loved and nurtured us. It's a time to reach out to those family members who are estranged from our love. It is an opportunity to recognise the wonderful individual gifts each and every one of our family members has.

Today's feast presents us with an opportunity to focus on the family, which is always the beginning of any call to a vocation.

We also need to remember the all-inclusiveness of family life. Every human being is a member of a family; married, single, widowed, divorced, young and old.

As family members, we all possess the gifts and blessings of:

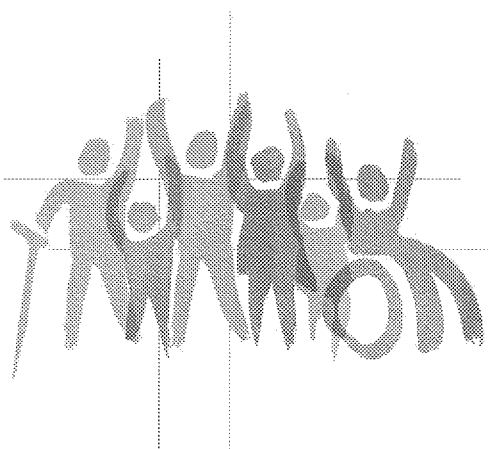
- ♥ Unconditional love
- ♥ Life
- ♥ Forgiveness/reconciliation
- ♥ Healing
- ♥ Witness

It is indeed a time to celebrate and thank God for the gift of family; our family and the universal family of God.

Today, we especially pray to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph for our own families and the families of our parish.

## Suggestions for the Mass of the Feast of the Holy Family

- ♥ Promote the Feast of the Holy Family Mass through pulpit announcements and bulletin advertisements, encouraging families and extended families to attend this special event.
- ♥ Display a special floral arrangement in the church.
- ♥ Display special family decorations (eg photographs) in the main entrance or lobby of the church.
- ♥ Invite the liturgy committee to form a family choir for the Mass.
- ♥ Display and light a special 'family' candle during Mass.
- ♥ Invite families to donate goods for a food hamper as part of the offertory of the Mass for underprivileged families of the parish.
- ♥ Invite a family of the parish to present the offertory gifts.
- ♥ Invite the congregation to recite a 'family commitment' prayer, included in this kit on page three, as part of the Mass.
- ♥ At the end of Mass, a brief sharing by one or two families on their own family's experience of God's love.
- ♥ Impart a blessing for families as part of the concluding rite of Mass.
- ♥ Give out holy cards of the Holy Family of Nazareth with a family prayer on the back.
- ♥ Invite everyone to attend a party, picnic or supper following Mass.



## Examples of General Intercessions

- ♥ Lord, we praise and thank you for the gift of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, who has been the great defender of Christian family life.
- ♥ Heavenly Father, inspire and guide the leaders of our Church and State, so that they may cherish, protect and sustain family life.
- ♥ Father, we pray for all those preparing for marriage. May their love for each other continue to grow and mature.
- ♥ We pray for all married couples. May their love become an even greater gift to the Church.
- ♥ Father, we pray for all children and young adults. May their lives be protected, nourished and sustained.
- ♥ We pray for all families. May the Holy Family of Nazareth be a guide and source of blessing to them.
- ♥ We pray for people living the vocation of single life and for priests and religious. May they see themselves as vital family members and be fully included as such.
- ♥ We pray for all families affected by death, divorce or separation. We pray with thanks for the courage and hope and faith of people who are walking this path of suffering and are a powerful witness to God's grace.
- ♥ Lord, inspire, guide and bless all those who work in the field of marriage and family life. Through their expertise and love, may families find the healing, encouragement and support they need.
- ♥ Lord, remember all those family members who are touched by sickness. Be with them and those who care for them.
- ♥ Father, we pray for all those family members who have gone before us. May their example of love and witness be treasured by us. May they continue to be part of our lives through the Communion of Saints.

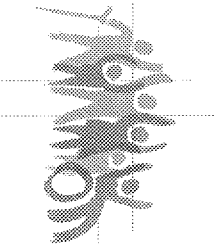
This parish kit is also available on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference website:

[www.catholic.org.au](http://www.catholic.org.au)

Published by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life. October 2001.

## Tips for Families

- ♥ Share your Sunday Eucharist with your family.
- ♥ Make a special time with your spouse once a week to keep your relationship a priority.
- ♥ Organise family story nights. Retell your favourite childhood memory or ask an older family member to share a story.
- ♥ Make prayer time creative. Let family members have turns organising family prayers.
- ♥ As a family, take on a project that helps the wider community (e.g. help out with St Vincent De Paul, help a local charity, provide weekend care for children without extended family.)
- ♥ Affirm life. Avoid violent words and actions; and instead look for peaceful ways of resolving conflict. - become a voice for life.



**"Do not be afraid of life!"<sup>1</sup>**

**"I say to you both, mothers and fathers... Together proclaim the value of the family and of life. Without these values there is no future worthy of man."<sup>1</sup>**

1. John Paul II; October 2000.

Published by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life. November 2001. This leaflet may be reproduced.

In the year of the Great Jubilee, Catholic families around Australia responded to a simple survey on Family Life. Some of their stories appear in this leaflet.

## Commitment

### Prayer

Heavenly Father,

You bless us with the gift of life and love so powerfully present in our midst through families.

In praise of your gifts we offer you in return our commitment to love one another as family - as our own family, as church family and as part of the great human family.

In whatever state of life we find ourselves, whether married or single, widowed or divorced, priest or religious, young or elderly, we commit ourselves to the task of loving one another, bearing with one another, forgiving hurts and calling each other on to the fullness of your plan for our lives.

Father, our world is in great need of the witness of loving families.

Amidst all our joys and struggles may we never give up on your extraordinary gift of family life.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**Family:**

become

what you are

This message from the Holy Father both affirms and challenges Christian families.

As the 'domestic church', the family is called to proclaim the life and love of God.

What an extraordinary calling. How can we live up to this?

According to the Pope, we already are! In so many ways, our families already bear the imprint of divine love. Every time we persist in our efforts to love, to forgive, to reach out and try again after failure, we are bearing witness to the God who created us in love, for love.

The Pope is acknowledging and affirming this goodness, this presence of grace in our lives, when he says 'become what you are.' In other words, keep on loving, grasp life ever more fully, never settle for less, keep seeking the fullness of who we can be as family members.

We need not be discouraged by our failures and imperfections, we need only set our sights on our God's grace, gifts and blessings and reach for 'more'.

What are some of these gifts?

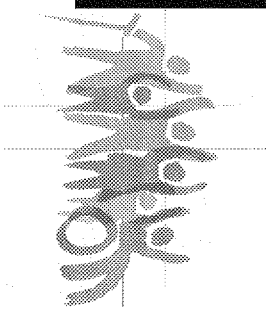
## Families Speak

*Every night we eat together at the table with whoever is home. We say a prayer for those not present. If you are not there you know that you have been named and that you are remembered. We include our daughter's partner who is part of the family.'*

*'We had a brother born with down syndrome about three years ago. He is doing well and acts like any other kids, we love him very much.'*

*'I feel special to be adopted. I feel loved that my family took me in. I'm happy when my birth mother writes to me. I thank God for letting me be me.'*

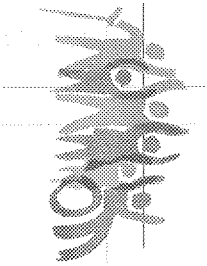
*'To me being an aunt involves listening, laughter, unconditional love, joy, fun, being myself and providing a positive role model.'*



## Gift of Life

The gift of marriage brings forth new life, as in children and an openness to others. Children are God's promise of renewal; they are the springtime of the family and society, a sign of hope for the world and the Church.

Indeed, the supreme gift of marriage is the human person; the child. But, a child is not something owed to someone, but is a gift from God.



**"Let us commit all our forces to defending the value of the family and respect for human life from the moment of conception."**<sup>1</sup>

## Gift of Witness

Living in a family is participating in the work of the Lord, it is a sharing of the mission of the Church. It is indeed, holy.

But, it is also a gift to the wider Church, strengthening and affirming those around the family. It is also a witness to the world that love shared is a reflection of the great love and care Christ has for all people.

When we love each other unconditionally as family, we demonstrate the love of God to society, which is a strong form of evangelisation. All families are missionaries in their own right.

*'Me (mum) and my 2 daughters have been through some difficult times. Being a one-parent family isn't always easy and with working and having to rely on other family members for help can be stressful. But when it comes to the end of the week and we all sit down together we still manage a smile. We have each other and that's all that really matters.'*

*'We were shocked to learn of our child's severe disability and wondered about God's plan. But, now the simplest achievement brings great celebration in our family. We see that our child has a very important role in our family and our world.'*

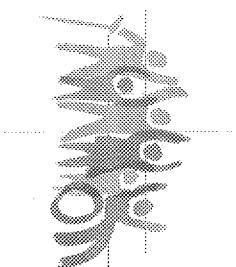
*'My husband is not a Catholic but very 'Christ Like' man in his way of life and his attitude to others. He comes to Mass often with our child and I and is dedicated to bringing our children up in the faith.'*

*'We were devastated when we discovered our infertility. But, we soon understood God's plan for us and what a great gift we have in our adopted children.'*

## Gift of Unconditional Love

Love is the cornerstone of the family. Love brought us to life as a family. It is through love that God is revealed.

The family is the first place we learn love and caring, and how to live co-operatively and productively with others. We help each other to grow and reach out to serve those in critical need. No matter who we are or what vocation we have, we all belong to a family.



## Gift of Forgiveness

We are most vulnerable to hurt by those closest to us. So some of our deepest hurts occur in families - whether through serious events or daily pinpricks.

However, what is inspiring is the repeated acts of forgiveness that occur in families. They are so frequent that they are overlooked - until occasionally they are absent.

Yet family members repeatedly pick up the pieces and start again and show acceptance and support for each other in the face of hurts. By helping to build a 'civilization of love', and witnessing to the infinite love and forgiveness of the Father, families become the main training ground for that peace for which the whole world yearns.

*'Our life is simple and uncomplicated. We live on the family farm with my parents in law, who now live for their grandchildren, and my mum is only one hour away. We are truly blessed, we hope always to stay in love with Christ.'*

*'We have been married for 20 years. We are lucky to be born and grow up in a Catholic family. I left Vietnam in 1982. I came to Australia in 1983 and reunited in 1984 with my wife and son. We are very grateful to the Australians who helped my family and all the Vietnamese boat people.'*

*'My family is a large one and at times there is so much confusion, noise and calamity that you can't hear yourself think. But whether Mum's feeling too exhausted to do anything or Dad's had an epileptic fit, or my sisters are stressed or worried, or the children are up to some sort of mischief, you can bet your life there is always someone there to listen, someone to encourage you, someone to help you, or someone simply to push you on the swing - with all its confusion and chaos at time, I wouldn't want my family any other way.'*