

# HOME AND PARISH:

Partners in Faith

by Dr. Joseph White

Introduction: The Importance of family in our Catholic faith

**Reflect on some of your earliest experiences of faith.**

- **What role did family play in shaping these experiences?**
- **Who was your model for Christian living when you were a child?**
- **How have you experienced your parish as “extended family”?**

## Catholic Teaching on the Family

- **God and Church are revealed as family.**
- **Family is a sign and image of the Trinity (CCC, 2205; Gen. 1:26-27)**
- **Christ’s relationship with the Church revealed as a marriage (Eph. 5, Rev.)**
- **God reveals himself as parent; fellow Christians as brothers and sisters**
- **“...Parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of faith of which they are the first ‘heralds’ for their children” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2225).**

**“As the family goes, so goes society, and so goes the world in which we live.”**

**-- Pope John Paul II**

From Pope Benedict XVI

**The family...is the “cradle” of life and of every vocation. We are well aware that the family founded on marriage is the natural environment in which to bear and raise children and thereby**

**guarantee the future of all humanity. However, we also know that marriage is going through a deep crisis and today must face numerous challenges. It is consequently necessary to defend, help, safeguard and value it in its unrepeatable uniqueness. If this commitment is in the first place the duty of spouses, it is also a priority duty of the Church and of every public institution to support the family by means of pastoral and political initiatives that take into account the real needs of married couples, of the elderly and of the new generations. (*Angelus Talk, February 4, 2007*)**

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

**Marriage is related to the common good in society.**

- Higher levels of health and happiness and lower levels of alcohol and drug abuse for both adults and teens.
- Married people earn more, save more, and build more wealth compared with people who are single or living together
- Inverse relationship between marriage and crime

## **New Consensus among Scholars and Researchers that Marriage and Family Matter**

**“A large body of social science research indicates that healthy, married-parent families are an optimal environment for promoting the well-being of children. Children raised by both biological parents are less likely than children raised in single- or step-parent families to be poor, to drop out of school, to have difficulty finding a job, to become teen parents or to experience emotional or behavioral problems.”**

**-- National Council on Family Relations**

**“Children in two-parent families generally had access to more financial resources and greater amounts of parental time. They also were more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, progress more steadily at school, and have more supervision over their activities such as television watching. The presence of**

**two parents continues to be one of the most important factors in children's lives."**

**-- U.S. Census Bureau**

WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE?

**It is time for us to take bold steps to support the family in our parishes and communities. These steps should be based on an awareness of changing family needs and demographics and should include every aspect of parish life. Our parishes will thrive or die out based on the way in which we support and connect with families.**

Making the parish a place that reflects the importance of family: It starts with family-sensitive parish leadership

- **The parish staff: a collaborative team?**
  - Time together
  - Offers of help
  - Role flexibility
- **Ministry leaders**
  - Silo mentality undermines the family-sensitive environment
- **The pastoral council**
  - Ensure that council membership includes people in different stages of family life as well as different types of family situations
  - Talk to people from a variety of families. Ask them how the parish helps or hinders their life together.
  - Plan activities for the council that would encourage family involvement.
  - Design processes for the council meetings that include sharing of family faith experiences

- Consider taking a major survey of parish families
- Where appropriate, cooperate with other parishes in implementing family ministry. Which activities and ministries can best be addressed through regional efforts?

**-- from NACFLM (1994)**

## Family friendliness in specific areas of parish life

### **The parish catechetical program**

- Grade level program
  - Involvement of parents as volunteers
  - Parish program-home communications
    - Newsletters and flyers (NACFLM “Family Flyers”)
    - Use of social media
    - Use of spiral model
    - “What did you learn” door gate
    - “Ask me” questions
- Intergenerational experiences
  - Seasonal celebrations
  - Sacramental prep retreats
  - Other retreats
- Adult formation
  - Practical
  - Variety by phase of family life, etc.
  - Available/possible (times, babysitting offered, etc.)

### **Youth Ministry**

- **Let the youth see you with your family. Involve your family by**

**story or presence whenever it seems natural to do so.**

- **Invite parents and guardians to assist with planning content and scheduling of youth activities and/or to serve on an advisory board.**
- **Include activities that involve multi-generational events**
- **Integrate youth and their families with the parish community**
- **Provide models of rituals for families to celebrate rites of passage in their own homes**
- **Inform families about what they might expect from a youth after a retreat experience**
- **Provide for regular communication (social media, etc.)**
- **Resources for parents re: drug use, sexual activity, discipline problems, etc.**

--- NACFLM (1994)

## **Worship**

- Seasonal resources
- The Mass
  - Children's Liturgy of the Word or Children's worship aids
  - "Mass readiness room" instead of "cry room"
  - Homilies that connect the Scriptures to everyday family life
  - Aids for family prayer
  - Catechetical moments in the liturgy
  - Note which liturgical ministries invite whole-family participation (or adapt, if necessary)
- Sacramental Formation
  - Marriage preparation that builds a solid foundation
  - Baptismal Preparation that meets the needs of families – during prep and after
  - Parent and family participation in preparation for Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation
    - Parent education and resources

- Parent meetings
- Parent-child at-home activities, prayers, etc.
- Parent-child retreats

## RCIA

- **Include in prayer and rituals an awareness of family spirituality (e.g., what family members and experiences have helped to bring them to this moment)**
- **Offer opportunities for both participants and their family members to connect with other people who have gone through the process to discuss its implications for family life.**
- **Include the importance of family responsibilities when discussing the Christian call to service**
- **Assure that the team and/or those invited to speak to the participants reflect the diversity of parish households**
- **Provide suggestions for participants that will help them to facilitate dialogue with other family members about the RCIA process**
- **Be sensitive to family needs of participants**
  
- **Alert participants to the possibility of their making changes in their lives as they go through the RCIA process and how other members in their family may react to these changes**
- **Offer opportunities for the other members of the household to become involved in the RCIA process (e.g., introductory meeting, welcoming them to classes, explanations of liturgical celebrations)**
- **Avoid placing non-practicing family members in awkward or embarrassing situations during liturgical celebrations**
- **Identify marriage situations that are problematic at the onset of the process and make the necessary pastoral response**
- **Arrange for social functions that would include family members**  
-- NACFLM (1994)

## Evangelization

- **Design or provide prayer services for parish gatherings that include sharing of family faith experiences**

- **Develop or provide rituals that help to foster faith in everyday life for the households of your parish**
- **Be aware that alienated Catholics might have left the Church for family reasons. Providing opportunities for healing family relationships can be a vehicle for evangelization.**
- **Be invitational. On posters, flyers and bulletin announcements invite family members to come together to parish activities that seem appropriate for this (special Liturgies, workshops, pancake breakfasts)**
- **Offer workshops for parents on media literacy and Christian values**
- **Be sensitive to interfaith marriages in parish planning, especially at Sacramental moments**

--- NACFLM (1994)

the CHANGING U.S. family...

**In the 1960s, 90% of U.S. children lived with both biological parents until adulthood.**

**Today, only about 60% of U.S. children live with their own biological (or adoptive) married parents**

**1 in 3 children is born to a never-married mother**

**45% of marriages in the U.S. end in divorce**

**Percentage of population that is married:**

- 59% today
- 62% in 1990
- 72% in 1970

**26% of the adult population has never married**

REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES WITH PARTICULAR NEEDS

### **Single-Parent Families**

- **Realize that schedules and time constraints are different for single parent families and make every effort to accommodate them**
- **Be mindful that joint custody is a reality and some children might**

travel from home to home, losing some continuity in their lives and needing that continuity in their Christian community.

- Include single-parent families in the life and activity of the parish in visible ways (e.g., bringing up the gifts)
- Minister to the needs of divorced and single parents (e.g., STM divorced and single parent group; structured programs like *Divorce and Beyond*)
- Minister to the needs of children with divorced parents (e.g., Rainbows)

### **Remarried and blended families**

- Seek couples who have experienced remarriage and family blending for leadership and consultation in remarriage ministry
- Challenge yourself and other parish staff and volunteers to dispel negative connotations about stepfamily living and to learn more about the uniqueness of blended families and how to apply the information to their ministries
- Support blended families to participate in family life activities within the parish, especially those that will enhance the marriage relationship
- Realize that some remarried couples might not have worked through the annulment process and are not receiving the sacraments. Invite couples to consider the annulment process as a possible source of healing the pain of the past.
- Seek out resources especially for stepfamilies (e.g., Elizabeth Einstein)

--NACFLM (1994)

### **Families of Persons with Disabilities**

- Include families of persons with disabilities in the life and activity of the parish in visible ways (e.g., bringing up the gifts)
- Include in the parish mission statement a commitment to joyful inclusion of all persons, including persons with disabilities. Include statements of reasonable accommodation on catechetical registration and other event/program registration
- Familiarize parish staff with the American Disabilities Act in relation to the Church

- **Make an assessment of all parish facilities to determine if there are architectural or sensory barriers to participation in parish life**
- **Use person-first language and be aware of attitudes or stereotypes that might pose barriers to persons with disabilities**

### **Families of Persons with Disabilities**

- **Be aware of national Church documents and guidelines related to persons with disabilities (Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities, Opening Doors, Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities)**
  - **Provide opportunities for aging parishioners and their families to learn about age-related disabilities and accommodations (talk with your state department of aging and disabilities services)**
  - **Educated catechists regarding best practices for catechesis of children with disabilities:**
    - **Resource: *Catechists for All Children* from Our Sunday Visitor**
  - **Become working partners with organizations that support persons with disabilities**
  - **Offer resources and activities for families of persons with disabilities, using the “Access Parish” model (contact Charleen Katra in the Diocese of Galveston-Houston for more information)**
- \*Other Resources: National Catholic Partnership on Disability (ncpd.org)**

### **Families in Crisis**

- **Crises involving practical needs**
- **Grief and Loss**
  - **Resources – Bereavement Ministry Program from Ave Maria Press, *Grieving with the Help of Your Catholic Faith* from OSV**
- **Divorce and Separation**
  - **Resources – *Divorce and Beyond*, Rainbows**
- **Family conflict and other emotional/personal crisis**
  - **Resources – catholictherapist.com, marriagefriendlytherapists.com**

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

**National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers**

**([www.nacflm.org](http://www.nacflm.org))**

**(see especially *Linking Parish and Home* series)**

**For an outline of this talk: [www.SharingCatholicFaith.com](http://www.SharingCatholicFaith.com)**