LOVE IS OUR MISSION:
THE FAMILY FULLY ALIVE

Ko te aroha tō tatou Whakatakanga: ko te Whānau e Kaha Ora ana

Formation Programme Guide on Human purpose, Marriage and Family
Based on the Preparatory Catechism of the 8th World Meeting of Families Congress
September 2015 Philadelphia, USA
Love Is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive

Formation Programme Guide based on the preparatory catechism of the 8th World Meeting of Families (September 22-27, 2015), Philadelphia, United States of America

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Icon of the Holy Family, 8th World Meeting of Families, (September 2015), Philadelphia, United States of America
By NeilsonCarlin.com
The World Meeting of Families

The World Meeting of Families was founded by St. John Paul II in 1994 “to explore the critical role the family plays in society and to give families opportunities to talk about the challenges and blessings that all families have.” This event happens every three years bringing together families from around the world in faith and celebration with the “aim of strengthening the sacred bonds of the family unit across the globe.”

On September 22-27, 2015, the 8th World Meeting of Families was held at the Pennsylvania Convention Centre in Philadelphia, USA. The theme for the 8th World Meeting of Families was ‘Love is our Mission: the Family Fully Alive.’ To prepare for the event, a short catechism was made to summarize Catholic teaching on human purpose, marriage and family. This catechism has been the basis and inspiration behind this formation guide on the family.

The 8th World Meeting of Families was organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family, together with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It was the largest gathering of its kind attracting a little over 20,000 delegates’ from 100 countries. The culminating event was the Closing Mass presided over by Pope Francis with 1 million people attending.
Acknowledgments

The Centre for Marriage and Family (CMF) gratefully acknowledges the gracious support and participation of all the individuals who contributed to this resource on marriage and the family, as well as the family ministries and Christian organizations they are affiliated with, for the invaluable service they provide to families.

We also wish to thank Archbishop Charles Chaput of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia of the Pontifical Council on the Family and all the organizers of the 8th World Meeting of Families. Our experience has been priceless and “full of grace” and one that we will carry in our hearts forever.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the authors and contributors of the Preparatory catechism of the 8th World Meeting of Families Love is our Mission: the Family Fully Alive.

To our beloved Pope Francis, we thank you for your love and compassion for the family. As shepherd of the flock of Christ, we look to you to provide leadership, guidance and support for advancing a new human ecology based on God’s plan for the family;

To Cardinal John Dew, bishops and clergy, and the Catholic Church in New Zealand, we offer you this gift as our humble contribution to share the gospel of life and love to New Zealand families;

To all saints of the family including our patron saints, St. John Paul II, Sts. Louis and Marie-Azélie Martin, and St. Therese of Lisieux, we thank the Lord for giving you as beacons to light our way and to inspire us to love and serve Jesus better in one another; and

To all families that strive to become communities of life and love in spite of the vicissitudes of life, this is our tribute to you. May the Holy family be your model and strength in your mission of love.

Through Jesus, Mary and Joseph
The CMF Team
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Message

Dear Friend of the Family,

We are living in a post-modern society—one that does not know God or has chosen to live in a way that discounts His existence. Many Western countries have turned their backs on their Christian roots embracing the secular culture. As a result, the ill-consequences of this choice can be seen in communities, especially in the most fundamental unit and basic building block of society – the family.

The high incidence of domestic and child abuse, teenage pregnancy and abortion, crime and other societal ills can be traced back to the breakdown of the family. Instead of strengthening the family, governmental action at times has served to exacerbate this situation by enacting laws that trample on the rights of families and promoting ideas that inhibit or are downright harmful to the full flourishing of the family.

In this ideologically driven society where confusion is rife as to the nature and mission of the family, now more than ever it is crucial to reaffirm the eternal truths about God's plan in relation to human purpose, marriage and the family.

“Family become what you are!” is St. John Paul II’s slogan taken from Familiaris Consortio, his post-synodal exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World. In Scripture, God created the human family and redeemed it through His Son Jesus Christ. The family is a privileged place of encounter with the gift of love, for it is through the family that Jesus, God’s only begotten Son was born into the world to save man from his sins. As the domestic church, the family is a community of life and love. Its nature and mission are inextricably linked. To discover more of what its role is, it needs to become more of what it already is. To do this means rediscovering God’s plan for the family by imitating Jesus’ example and going back to the Beginning (Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12).

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation AMORIS LAETITIA (The Joy of Love), Pope Francis says that the family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected. “The Church has always held it part of her mission to promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them.” (Ch.2.44)
This formation guide is for Catholics, thoughtful Christians and all people of goodwill who would like to tear through the confusion and rediscover God’s plan for the family which is rooted in the Word of God and elaborated on by the social teaching of the Church. Based on the preparatory catechism of the 8th World Meeting of Families of the same title Love is our Mission: the Family Fully Alive, it consists of a series of summaries of teachings based on the ten themes of the catechism, as well as reflections by Catholic New Zealanders who have a heart for marriage and family.

In the book of Nehemiah, God calls Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem after it has been destroyed. In the same way, Christians are called to rebuild society and the best place to start is in the most fundamental unit of society—the family. Like Nehemiah, the Lord will give us success if we all work together and put our trust in Him.

As we make this journey the Church invites us to return into the merciful embrace of the Lord who is always waiting and ready to receive us with His open arms. It is hoped that this resource for families will serve as a beacon to enlighten every Catholic and Christian family to become more of what they already are—communities of life and love for Love is our mission and it is only by discovering who we are in Jesus Christ that we can become fully alive.

Patricia Alfonso-Sison
Director
Centre for Marriage and Family
Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy Easter 2016
In the past 20 years, family life has changed dramatically to the point that the family unit seems threatened if not by the pressures of modern life, then by new social mores.

Some of the more obvious changes are:

- The extended family support we knew as young parents is, in many cases no longer ‘there’, as families become scattered throughout the country, and indeed the world.

- The rate of marriage breakdown has increased dramatically, leaving many children with one parent in the home, ‘blended families’, and ‘shared custody’. This can leave the ‘resident’ parent overcommitted yet needing to earn an income as well as perform parental duties usually shared by two parents.

- Employment now often ‘demands’ weekend work or long weekday hours which has severely impacted on family, community, and parish life.

It has been said that it ‘takes a village to raise a child’. What if we applied that practice and declared that ‘it takes a parish family to raise a Christian child?’ For that to happen we would need to make our parish community a ‘place’ where young families are nurtured, valued and supported.

A parish could be an ‘oasis’ where young families find extended family, celebration, ritual (so important in a family), worship, education and enrichment. In many parishes these elements already exist, but there is plenty of room for more of this to happen especially for those people who are inclined to be outsiders!

We must continue to believe that parents are the first educators, providers and carers of their family. They need support and encouragement, a sense of belonging, friendship and they need to be able to ask others for help. This can happen with people of a similar age, as well as with those who can provide a sense of ‘extended family support’ such as grandparent figures. We must continue to seek ways to achieve this, especially by asking the couples or young parents what they need.
Here in New Zealand, there is another anomaly that is new in terms of numbers. We have young couples arriving here with no extended family and we have older couples whose children live overseas. These situations create a ‘longing’ for extended family and could result in rich relationships being formed if these people could meet and become ‘connected’.

There are opportunities to provide for all of these ‘situations’ and this has happened successfully in over 100 parishes in Aotearoa over the past 27 years.

Lynn and Rob Hill have been involved in Passionist Family Groups since its beginnings in Aotearoa in 1988. They continue to be ‘passionate’ about family and about the PFGM. They are grateful for their Passionist life and how it has ‘shaped’ them and the many friends they have made on their faith and friendship journey. Visit www.passionistfamily.org.nz.
“The family which experiences the joy of faith communicates itself naturally. That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world: it is the leaven of society.”

Pope Francis, October 27, 2013
“Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings, a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love.”

– Pope Francis (Lumen Fidei), 52

“We are more than an accident of evolution. We are greater than the sum of our biology. God exists. He is good. He loves us. He made us in His image to share in his joy. He takes an active hand in our lives. He sent his only Son to restore our dignity and lead us home to him.” (1) “In man’s history, (the) revelation of love and mercy has taken a form and a name: that of Jesus Christ.” (2) “Jesus Christ is the basis of Christian faith.” (3)

“Jesus reveals who God is, including that God loves us and reaches out to us. But Jesus also reveals what it is to be human…Catholics believe that God so loves the world (John3:16) that… God took human flesh to disclose who God is and who we are.” (4)

Jesus reveals that he is the Son of the Father. With the Father, he sends his Spirit to be with his people. In this, we learn that God’s nature is an eternal communion of three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “Through baptism into his Church, Jesus invites everyone to be part of God’s covenant and to be part of the divine communion. The history of Israel, and later that of the Church is a history with universal significance, for it is a summons to live as God’s people and take part in the divine communion.” (5)
“It is love that makes the human person the authentic message of the Blessed Trinity, (the) image of God” (6). Being made in the image of God means that we cannot speak of humanity without reference to God. “If the nature of God is to be a Trinity of communion—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and if we are made in that image, then our nature is to be interdependent.” (7) This means that each one of us is called to exist ‘for’ others and to become a gift.

“God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, he called him at the same time for love. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribes in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being”. (8) “This love gives purpose and shape to all aspects of human life, including the family.” (9)

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the image of God?
2. What does Jesus reveal about who God is?
3. What is the primary vocation of a human being?

Created for Joy
Reflection by Michelle Kaufman

Marriage and family life are punctuated with times of great happiness and joy, such as the wedding day and the birth of a child. Also known to family life are times of great sadness as daily struggles, illness and death are contended with.

These times of joy and sadness help us to see the dignity of each person as we learn to really love by putting aside our selfish desires, and reaching out as gift and service to those around us.
In the book of Genesis, we learn that each person is made in the image of God. This means that we were created out of love, for love, and are therefore made for communion and to share in God’s joy.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI made this point at the 2012 World Meeting of Families when he said, “It is love that makes the human person the authentic image of the Blessed Trinity, [the] image of God.”

This love is different than what the world would have us believe love is. It does not seek to put the self first, but rather places the needs of others – both temporal and spiritual – above our own. Real love puts aside raw emotion, which can oftentimes distort our perception of reality, and focuses on the good of the other. Love wants what is best for the beloved. Through following God’s truth about marriage and family life, revealed through the Church, we are able to grow in authentic love for one another.

We are reminded by St Gianna Molla, a wife and mother who understood what sacrifice was all about, that “love must be total, full, complete, governed by God’s law, and it must carry over into eternity.”

True joy comes to us when we realise that this love and communion with God and others is what we were made for. When we embrace this calling and live it authentically we are able to communicate to the world the great joy of following Christ.

Michelle Kaufman is the Communications Director for Family Life International NZ, a pro-life, pro-family organisation dedicated to transforming the culture to one that embraces life through prayer, service and education. Michelle is married to Brendan; together they have seven children.
The Mission of Love

“By contemplating the pierced side of Christ, we can understand... God is love. It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation, the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.”

– Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, 12

“In history, God calls and forms a people. He makes a covenant with us, first through Israel and then through Christ and the Church. In this relationship, God teaches us to love as he loves.” (10) We are in the world for a purpose — to receive God’s love and to show God’s love to others.” (11) Thus, to love is our mission. “To live this way requires humility. It requires us to conform our hearts to God and see the world through His eyes.”(12)

“Indeed, biblical revelation is above all an expression of a love story, the story of God’s covenant with humankind. That is why the union of life and love between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage was used by God as a symbol of salvation history.” (13) “Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice-versa.” (14)

As in marriage, the covenant between God and his people — first Israel and then the Church — is not always easy, but human sin never has the last word. God’s fidelity reveals what true love and fidelity look like.”(15)

In Scripture, “God’s relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage.” (16) When God’s people sin and forget his commands, neglect the poor in their midst, seek security from alien powers, or turn to
false gods—then adultery and prostitution are exactly the right words for their infidelity.” (17) Yet, God remains steadfast. “Repentance and forgiveness are always possible. God’s mercy means that He seeks Israel’s good even as she flees from Him.” (18) “Pope Francis noted how God speaks words of love even when Israel is unfaithful.” (19)

“In like manner, Christian love involves much more than emotion. It includes the erotic and affective, but it is also a choice. Love is a mission that we receive, a disposition that we accept, a summons to which we submit. This kind of love has dimensions we discover as we yield to it. This kind of love seeks and follows God, whose covenant fidelity teaches what love is.” (20)

“St. Paul extends the marriage analogy to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21-33). Paul urges both husbands and wives to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, NRSV). Paul writes that “the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the Church” (Eph. 5, 23, NRSV) and enjoins husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her (Eph. 5, 25). This means that husbands are called to a self-giving love that mirrors Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Drawing on scripture, the Church speaks of marriage as a sacrament, and summons couples to this kind of cruciform self-sacrificial communion.”(21)

“Jesus embodies life-giving love because he is, literally, God’s word made flesh. He loves the Church as his bride, and this unselfish love—proven in blood on the cross—sets the model for the kind of mutual love and service needed within every Christian marriage and family.”(22)

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What does God teach us as he calls us into a covenant relationship with him?
2. What is the foremost metaphor used to characterize the relationship between God and his people in the Bible? Why do you think this is so?
3. How did God prove his love for us? What must our response be to the love given to us by God?
**Mission of Love Begins with Love of Jesus**
Reflection by Pol Nerona

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

– John 21:15 (New American Bible Revised)

The Gospel of John, Chapter 21, verses 15-17 present a remarkable dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Jesus gave a challenging mission to Peter, in spite of his weaknesses, to shepherd God's flock.

Before Peter could go on his mission, Jesus taught him to be humble. Jesus asked Peter three times of his love for Him which reminded him of the three times he denied Jesus. Peter had to realize his own weaknesses first before he could powerfully tend the flock.

Although all people are imperfect, God's grace and forgiveness can restore and empower Christians to serve him passionately like Peter. Failures should not dishearten a believer from serving Jesus but rather be opportunities to learn and be inspired to love even more. Parents have their own sins and shortcomings but they should not be discouraged from confidently teaching their children about holiness.

This Bible passage emphasized that to love Jesus is the first and most important need before tending His flock. Only after a believer begins by faithfully loving Jesus can he be ready to selflessly shepherd His flock - the Church.

Just as Jesus gave His life for us on the cross, parents should also be models of sacrificial love to each other and to their children. Children, on the other hand, are to humbly obey and trust their parents just like Peter followed Jesus.
Like Peter, Christians are called to feed His lambs, those who are young in age or in spiritual maturity. In the same way, parents are to nourish their children not only with bodily food but with spiritual food as well - the Word of God. The word “feed” means to nourish and to guide or protect repeatedly. It refers to a continuing action and not just a single instance. In the family, parents are to persistently teach and discipline their children to build them up in wisdom and faith until they grow to be adults who will continue to fulfil the mission of love.

Pol and his beloved wife Beth have been members of Couples for Christ (CFC) community since 1994. Pol became the Chapter Head for CFC Wellington in 2009 and a member of the CFC New Zealand National Council in 2013. They have three sons who also serve in the CFC Family Ministries.
The Meaning of Human Sexuality

“The body is, in truth, the temple of the soul, cooperating with the soul by means of the senses, as a mill wheel is turned by water.”

— St. Hildegard of Bingen

“God created the whole material world out of his love for us. The tangible, earthly, corporeal world is more than inert matter or modelling clay for the human will. Creation is sacred. It has a sacramental meaning. It reflects God’s glory.” (23)

When God made the world, He called it good and entered into human history. “Jesus Christ, God’s Son took flesh and became one of us. In the sacraments, material things are consecrated and are made visible signs of grace. Ordinary bread and wine, water, oil and the touch of human hands are all tangible ways in which God’s presence becomes effective and real.” (24)

If all creation is good and reflects the glory of God, so do our bodies. “Our bodies are not simply shells for the soul or sensory machines for the brain. Nor are they raw material we can freely abuse or reprogram. Each human being is a unity of body and soul.” (25) Body and spirit are profoundly integrated. “The body has innate dignity as part of God’s creation. It is an intimate part of our identity and our eternal destiny… We cannot debase or abuse the body without inflicting a cost on the spirit.” (26)
Our bodies also express our maleness or femaleness. “The two sexes literally enflesh God’s design for human interdependence, community, and openness to new life. (27) In marriage, “procreation and communion, biology and God’s covenant, nature and super-nature, together undergird what it means to be “human.” (28)

Speaking about the “nuptial or spousal meaning of the body” (29), St. John Paul II echoed the teaching of Vatican II that “the partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons.” (30) Marriage is God’s creation because we are God’s creatures, and because God created male and female for fellowship with him in his covenant.” (31) “This call to love, communion and life involves the entire being of man and woman, body and soul.“ (32) “At the centre of this call to love is God’s summons to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28, NRSV). A couple’s spousal union through the body is therefore, by its very nature, also a call to live as father and mother.” (33)

“Man and woman share an equal dignity that comes from God, their Creator. In God’s plan, both the similarity and otherness of man and woman coincide in their sexual complementarity as masculine and feminine. Created together (Genesis 1:26-27), man and woman are willed for each other. (34) Sexual difference is a primordial reminder that we are made to give ourselves always to others guided by virtue and God’s love.” (35)

There are two different vocations that do justice to the summons of being male and female in God’s plan: marriage and celibacy. “Both of these disciplines converge on the shared premise that sexual intimacy between a man and a woman belongs and flourishes in the context of a covenant. Celibacy is the way that unmarried people confirm the truth and beauty about marriage. Celibacy and marriage both abstain from sexual acts that use others in conditional or temporary ways.” (36) Each vocation is a call to live chaste lives.

“By living in the light of the covenant, married couples and celibate persons alike offer their sexuality to the community, to the creation of a society which is not premised on concupiscence and exploitation. Both ways of living look to God’s covenant and receive the fact of being created as male and female as occasions for joy. The discipline we impose on our love—- the discipline of the covenant—is sometimes felt as a burden. But precisely this discipline honors and reveals the true meaning of love created in the image of God.” (37)
Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the Christian view of the human body in God’s creation?
2. How does marriage celebrate the gift of the human body between the sexes?
3. What are the two vocations or disciplines which do justice to the summons of being male and female in God’s plan? How do these reflect God’s plan?

Human Sexuality
Reflection by Maximilian Fuhrer

“This is at last bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”…
And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed.

– Genesis 2:23-25

Human sexuality is such a powerful force. It always blesses me to consider the wildness of creation, mountains, canyons, and ferocious creatures. There is danger in the elements on the earth and even within us. Yet we have been commanded to be fruitful and multiply, subdue and have dominion. The Lord has held nothing back, making us in his very likeness and image breathing his very life into us. Our sexuality in its very essence is what is required to fulfil these commands. We cannot be fruitful on our own; neither can we subdue creation on our own. God gave us what we needed for the task, our sexuality, and male and female he has made us. (Ref Genesis 1:26 -28)

Ever since Eve was taken from the side of Adam, man and woman have ached for each other. They have been drawn to each other. Their physical and spiritual bond has formed a family. Children lead to domestication, domestication requires a domain, which therefore must be subdued. God’s command it would seem is embedded in us. Civilization has grown from this most primal drive.

However, civilization can only survive if the basic family unit is in harmony and this requires sacrifice. It is here that mankind must discover what the
God whose image he is made in is like. This is the only way he can discover the true meaning of his sexuality.

Jesus demonstrates this to us on the cross. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her…. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:25-32) The mystery is that our sexuality is to be sacrificial, liturgical. The sexual union of a man and a woman is mysteriously linked to Christ offering himself on the cross. It is a real action that brings grace and life; it is therefore sacramental, a covenant oath before God and a form of worship.

Mankind has always had an innate understanding of this, when you consider across all cultures the incredible pageantry celebrated at weddings, which clearly speaks of liturgy. Only if we protect this gift of male and female sexuality, of family, inside the sacrament of marriage will we ever subdue, and have peace.

Maximilian Fuhrer is married to the fantastic Susie James and is a father of five children. He has his own business employing 30 people. He has an active role in “Life Teen” a ministry whose aim is to lead teens closer to Christ and His Church.
“The Sacrament of Marriage...takes place in the simplicity and also the fragility of the human condition. We know the many trials and difficulties the lives of a married couple encounter... The important thing is to keep alive the link with God, which is the basis of the marital bond.”

– Pope Francis, General Audience “Marriage, the heart of God’s loving plan for humanity” (April 2, 2014)

“We are not made to be alone. Human beings need and complete each other. Friendship and community satisfy that longing with bonds of common interest and love. Marriage is a uniquely intimate form of friendship that calls a man and a woman to love each other in the manner of God’s covenant. Marriage is a Sacrament. Married love is fruitful and offered without reservation. This love is in the image of Jesus’ faithfulness to the Church.” (38)

“Marital love must be built on more than romance. Romance is wonderful, but alone, it can’t survive the cares and challenges that inevitably visit every married couple.” (39) “Real marital unity is based on God’s covenant which welcomes erotic desire, but which even more fundamentally commits men and women to each other in sickness and health, for richer or poorer.” (40)

“In the Sacrament of Marriage, Christ dwells with a couple, helping spouses to pick up their cross, ‘to rise again after they have fallen,’ to forgive and bear one another’s burdens.” (42) Pope Francis points out that living together is an “art... which can be summarized in (a few simple) words: please, thank you, and sorry.” (43) The practice of saying these words can often be hard to cultivate, but is especially important, particularly when the life of a couple is besieged and threatened by the storms of life.
St. John Paul II speaks of a certain “interior freedom” and “self-mastery” that couples need in order to truly make a gift of themselves to one another.” (44) This “interior freedom” and “self-mastery” enables them to live the sacramentality of marriage and to follow the way of the covenant. It is manifested when husbands and wives have the capacity to transcend resentment, lay aside entitlements and to be generous, being sensitive to each other’s needs. (45)

To build a marriage on rock, husbands and wives need to cultivate certain virtues. “All of the cardinal virtues (prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude) and theological virtues (faith, hope and love) are necessary and relevant for marriage to flourish. Chastity in particular is the seed from which strong marriages grow. To train our hearts for marriage, we need practice in interior freedom, the practice of seeing our sexuality in the context of communion and the holiness of each other’s personhood. Chastity forms the good habits of self-denial and self-control, which are prerequisites for treating others with mercy.” (45) “Mercy grows when we love as Christ showed us.” (45)

“Jesus offers us a vision of marriage based on his covenant with the church, a marriage based on abiding permanence, chastity and mercy. We can see how this sacramental marriage integrates with the whole of Christian life, for cultivating the virtues of love, interior freedom, fidelity, mercy and forgiveness is a lifelong project which builds upon habits of prayer, participation in the Sacraments, and familiarity with the story of God’s covenant. The Lord knows that no marriage displays all the virtues all the time, but in His mercy, He gives us Penance and the Eucharist so that we might grow in our capacity to love as Jesus does” (46). “The “grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ’s cross, the source of all Christian life.” (47)

Questions for Discussion:

1. How is marriage different from other kinds of friendships?
2. What necessary virtues must we cultivate to build a strong marriage?
3. What is the vision of God for marriage based on his covenant with the church?
Two Become One
Reflection by Neil and Francie Ivamy

*God did not create us to be alone – we were created to love our spouse in Marriage – ‘Love one another as I have loved you’ – John 15:12*

Marriage is different from other kinds of friendship in that it is a covenant, not a contract. As a covenant it is a lasting relationship without conditions – it is loving your spouse without expecting something in return, to love them for being themselves.

For marriage to flourish all virtues; prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, faith, hope and love are necessary. Pope Francis has said that living together is an “art... which can be summarized in (a few simple) words: please, thank you, and sorry.” This encapsulates the need for acceptance of your spouse’s needs and feelings within your marriage relationship.

“The man and his wife were both naked yet they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). This is a message of intimacy that calls us to be honest, open, tender and trusting with each other and experience no shame. Being naked here refers not only to the physical but also to the emotional level. Intimacy is living with confidence in the love of the other, from the physical level to the innermost part of our self.

Forgiveness and healing are part of living intimately and responsibly. Asking for forgiveness is only the first step towards healing – and healing does not always occur immediately. If often takes some time for complete healing to take place.

God’s desire for marriage is for us to be the best couple we can be. Unity is true happiness that comes from the intimacy God calls us to in our relationship. This unity comes from making the daily decision to love and to be loved.

Neil & Francie Ivamy are New Zealand leaders of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, along with Fr Ron Bennett. Marriage Encounter offers a weekend experience that allows couples to focus on themselves, communication and their relationship – helping to turn a good marriage into a great marriage.
Creating the Future

“From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries.”

– Lumen Gentium (1964), 11

“Sexual intimacy between men and women raises the possibility of children. No other relationship carries this basic, organic, biological possibility.” (49) Distinct from other relationships, “marriage is the covenant built on the procreative power of male and female.” (50) “Marriage is meant to be fertile and to welcome new life.” (51)

“When a man and a woman marry by taking the additional step of freely consenting to mutual promises of fidelity and permanence, (52) marriage places procreation in the context of human dignity and freedom. The marital vows are analogous to God's covenant with Israel and the Church. Raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized, marriage is “the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.” (53)

“The Sacrament of Marriage makes the power of God's covenant fidelity, as well as his triune communion as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, available to a husband and a wife. This spiritual foundation gives a new and deeper rationale for biological fecundity for welcoming children is an extension of divine generosity. (54) In this way, we can see how the classic Augustinian ‘three goods of marriage’ (children, fidelity and sacrament) are all rooted in God’s plan.” (55)
For Christians, having children is not only a matter of continuing the species and building up society, but also of forming the family for the communion of saints. “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care a vocation to a sacred state.” (57) To build the domestic church, parents need to foster important practices in the home, such as prayer, and cultivating a spiritual disposition. They will also need to be discerning about how their family engages with the wider culture. (58)

Parents will require support to meet the challenges of family life. They can seek help from godparents, grandparents, teachers, and clergy to help them fulfill their responsibilities. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the parish as a “family of families” which is “able to share with each other, not only the joys but the inevitable difficulties of initiating family life.” (59) Thus, to flourish, families need their parishes and their parishes need them. (60)

“The parish, the diocese and other Catholic institutions such as schools, movements, and associations, are also needed, especially for children who do not have two parents. Children may be without one or both parents for a variety of reasons, including death and illness, divorce, immigration, war... or itinerant working conditions due to poverty.” (61) Sadly, sometimes, husbands and wives and mothers and fathers separate, often for reasons demanding our compassion.” (62) In such situations, “hospitality to lonely children will naturally raise the question of adoption.” (63) John Paul II’s hope was that “Christian families will be able to show greater readiness to adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them.” (64) This hope is based on the love that animates a Christian marriage which is God’s covenant, a love which is eternally hospitable and filled with life. (65)

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the place of children in God’s plan for marriage?
2. How is parenting a spiritual vocation?
3. What is the interrelationship between families and parishes in the flourishing of family life?
Creating the Future
Reflection by Lynne Keane

“Truly, I tell you anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

– Mark 10:15

Ko Taitimu me Kurahaupo oku Waka
Ko Rangitumau toku Maunga
Ko Ruamahanga toku Awa
Ko Kahungunu ki Wairarapa me Rangitone oku Iwi
Ko Te Oreore toku Marae
Ko Ngati Hamua toku Hapu
Ko Robert Tomuri Te Awa toku Koroua
Ko Maata Hirini toku Kuia
Ko Andrew Olsen toku Matua
Ko Hoana Te Awa toku Whaea,
Ko Barry Keane taku tane

I was baptised into the Catholic Church at the age of 18 and later married a Catholic. It wasn’t until I joined the Plimmerton Prayer Group that I learned the teachings of Jesus Christ and His church. I didn’t think it was possible to live what the Bible taught until I saw the teachings exemplified by people in the Parish. It was then that I decided to live my faith. I began reading the lives of the Saints. Their views of how to live did not conflict with scripture, the teachings of the church or one another. Through God’s grace, the support of the Prayer Group and the Parish, our family was transformed.

I felt a sense of energy and hope when I discovered that God was also in my marriage through the sacrament of marriage. At this point, we had four children and we went on to have three more; our large family was indeed a blessing. We knew that marriage was for life and we committed to it. I discovered that marriage is not based on feelings but on reason and the will; feelings come and go but reason remains the same.
Our family is a community, a growing one, within the wider Church community. Others can see, as I did, how the Church can be a loving and caring community. The value of children is priceless! They are the arbiters of joy by their very presence, by the excitement they bring with every new discovery. The community of grandchildren provides a means by which the newest members of the family can learn how to love and be loved, as arbitrated by parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, godparents and the Church family.

Lynne Keane has raised seven children and finds great blessing with her 16 grandchildren and her whanau and extended whanau. Aside from her involvement with the 40 Days for Life vigil during Lent, she helps run a post-abortion recovery programme called Living in Colour.
“Family life is the vocation that God inscribed into the nature of man and woman, and there is another vocation which is complementary to marriage: the call to celibacy and virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. It is the vocation Jesus himself lived.”

— Pope Francis, Address, “Meeting with the Young People of Umbria,” Assisi (October 4, 2013)

“Not everyone is called to marriage. But every life is meant to be fertile. Every life has the power and the need to nurture new life — if not through bearing and raising children, then through other vital forms of self-giving, building and service.” (66)

“Two of the Church’s sacraments are unique in that they are both devoted “to the salvation of others.” Both Holy Orders and Marriage “confer a special grace for a particular mission in the Church to serve and build up the people of God.” (67)

Thus, men and women need not be biological parents to radiate God’s love or take part in the “family of families” we know as the Church. “The vocation to the priesthood, or vowed religious life, has its own integrity and glory. The Church always needs priests and religious, and parents must help their sons and daughters listen for the possibility that God might be calling them to offer their lives in this way.” (68)

Celibacy not only includes priests or vowed religious, but all those who are chaste outside of marriage. Young people who are not married need to know that “a romantic partner is not essential for human happiness” and that their life as a single
man or woman is better understood as a time of discernment and of cultivating friendships. The habits and skills of true friendship are basic to either life in marriage or celibate community.” (69)

“The Church fosters many distinct ways of practicing celibacy, but all of them are, one way or another, a call to serve the Church and foster communion in ways that are analogous to parenting.” (71) “Authentic celibacy—whether lay, ordained or vowed—is oriented toward social and community life. To be a “spiritual father” or “spiritual mother”—perhaps as a member of the clergy or religious, but also as a godparent, or an adopted relative, or a catechist or teacher, or simply as a mentor or friend—is an esteemed vocation, something essential for a healthy and flourishing Christian community.” (72)

“Celibates, couples without children, and even healthy elderly people (perhaps with grown children) enjoy a unique freedom and have gifts of time to be involved in activities such as “catechetical work, parish ministries, or apostolates, including those that witness in dangerous situations” which would be impossible for families with children. (73) The unmarried or otherwise childless also have more opportunities to devote time to prayer and contemplation, and are also often available to offer hospitality and friendship to those in need.

Celibacy and marriage are both complementary vocations since they operate from a similar rationale and spirituality of self-giving. Celibacy is patterned after Christ’s love who makes a total gift of himself “expressed in his desire to share all of himself with the disciples (Luke 22, 15), and to give himself to them fully in order to bring everyone back to the Father to share God’s own glory”(Cf. John 1:14, 17:24). “In the case of marriage, when husbands and wives give themselves to one another, with a love that imitates Jesus, their gift of self to each other is part of the work of Christ, joining in the same spirit of Jesus’ own gift of himself for the church.” (74) Where marital love is the covenants’ rationale shaping how we procreate, celibate love is the covenant’s rationale brought to life in the whole community.” (75) Both celibates and married couples need one another to sustain and grow the “family of families” that is called the Church.” (76)

“The Church is an extended family of different vocations, each distinct but each needing and supporting the others. Priesthood, religious life and the celibate lay
vocation enrich, and are enriched by, the witness of the married state. The different ways of being chaste and celibate outside of marriage are ways of donating one’s life to God’s service and the human community.” (77)

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are the two sacraments of the Church that are devoted “to the salvation of others”? How do you think this is so?
2. What does authentic celibacy mean and how is it called to be fruitful?
3. What is the importance of celibacy for marriage and in the life of the Church?

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**All Love Bears Fruit**
Reflection by Bro. Kieran Fenn, FMS

“…If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”…”

– 1 Corinthians 12:20

Every Religious, Sister or Brother, comes from a family; their life has no meaning without a relationship to, with and for families. A loving and open heart is blessed by an abundance of friends, including married couples. The very meaning of the terms “Sister” or “Brother” is a relationship term. Most religious orders have the element of community as part of their structure; in several vital ways, community is one area that supports celibate living when enduring friendships are made.

Every religious order came into being because the founding figure recognised a need lacking in the Church. In the case of St. Marcellin Champagnat, it was Brothers to teach in post-revolution France. “We need Brothers,” he told the original group of Marists. He gave us the name of Mary, both as our spiritual guide and support and our inspiration for the manner in which we minister. This is something I have come to value in a male religious order with the spirituality of a woman, Mary. It leads to a fuller personal and human integration on the journey of life.
While I initially believed that my apostolate would be in schools for all my active years, this lasted for only sixteen years, followed by Retreat work with secondary school students, then a decade in a Pastoral Centre that eventually led to tertiary Biblical teaching at the University of Auckland. This was followed by six years in formation and degree teaching in Manila of young religious in the field of Scripture, Mariology, Systematic Theology, and Sacraments. Since then my Biblical Apostolate has taken me to Rome, the Pacific Islands, throughout my own country, and back to the Philippines to help prepare Brothers entering Asia. My classes have crossed into many denominations as I have taught lay graduates in Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Pacific Island churches. We have more that unites us than divides us.

Having lived the life for so long I have become aware that I could have made a good father of children and a good husband. “Why me and the life I am living?” The mystery of God’s choice is the gospel paradox: “You have not chosen me; I have chosen you.” In place of the bond between a loving wife and husband is the intensification of the bond between me and God in Jesus Christ.

**Bro. Kieran** has been a Marist teaching Brother for over 50 years and almost 40 of those have been devoted to the Scriptures. The words of St. Irenaeus, “The presence of the Lord in his Word is as real as his presence in the Eucharist” have been the driving force of his Scripture presentations. The legacy he wishes to leave is people inflamed with a passion for the Scriptures.
“The family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the very foundation of society.”

– Gaudium et Spes, 52

“At its best, the family is a school of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, mutual respect, patience and humility in the midst of a world darkened by selfishness and conflict. ..However, all of us are fallen. Many temptations arise which try to coax us into forgetting that male and female are created for covenant and communion.”

(78)

The communion for which we were created is threatened by our disordered desires, economic situations, contraception, divorce, and intellectual and philosophical mistakes that create contexts that challenge or threaten the life of the family. However, because love is our mission,”the Church resists these things for the sake of protecting the family.” (79)

The Preparatory Document for the 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization” mentions a vast number of global issues affecting the family:
The many new situations requiring the church’s attention and pastoral care include: mixed or interreligious marriages; the single-parent family; polygamy; marriages with consequent problem of a dowry, sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman; the caste system; a culture of non-commitment and a presumption that the marriage bond can be temporary; forms of feminism hostile to the Church; migration and the reformulation of the very concept of the family; relativist pluralism in the conception of marriage; the influence of the media on popular culture in its understanding of marriage and family life; underlying trends of thought in legislative proposals which devalue the idea of permanence and faithfulness in the marriage covenant; an increase in the practice of surrogate motherhood (wombs for hire); and new interpretations of what is considered a human right.” (80)

In addition, “poverty and economic hardship undermine marriage and family life around the world.” (81) “Today’s global hyper-capitalist economy damages the middle classes and affluent. For example, mass culture commodifies sex. Corporate marketing creates an endless appetite for new experiences, a climate of perpetually roaming and unsatisfied desire…” (82) which fuels many spiritual and material problems in our world today.“Pornography – often linked to and fed by the cruelty of human trafficking (and increasingly is a culprit behind many broken marriages) —is now pandemic, not just among men but increasingly among women.”(83) Moreover, “today, the state purports more and more to invent marriage and redefine it at will. Allegedly, the family no longer builds society and the state; rather, the state now presumes to supervise and license the family.” (84)

In all these, “the Church seeks an alternative social life, a community premised on Jesus’ mercy, generosity, freedom, and fidelity. The church’s many ministries further the culture of life, such as aid to the poor, support for natural family planning, or articulating a more coherent philosophy for law” (85) to protect and strengthen the family.

It is only “when the family is strong—when the family creates space for husbands, wives and their children to practice the art of self-giving after the pattern of God’s covenant—then light enters a dark world. In this light, the true nature of humanity can be seen.” (86)
Questions for Discussion:

1. What are threats or the things that hinder families from being at their best?
2. What is the Church’s response to these threats to the family?
3. What are the ways in which families and the Church can become light in a dark world?

Light in a Dark World
Reflection by Ewen Laurenson

In Matthew’s gospel Jesus said; “You are the light of the world,” and then he adds, “Let your light shine before everyone.” (1) It is important to note that Jesus stresses that in him we are light.

A man I know had a barren childhood. He grew up in an orphanage. Twice prior to his adolescence he spent summer holidays with a Christian family. He remembers this experience with deep gratitude. He says it was like an oasis in a desert for him. Through this experience he experienced love; the love of family and through them the love of God. This family brought light into his dark world.

John in his first letter says that, “God is love and whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.” (2)

This is a profound truth most evident in a Christian family where love for God and for each other abounds. In such a family God dwells by his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes his home within each member and within the family home itself. (3) The family is alight with God’s love and his indwelling presence.

This does not happen by chance. It occurs when a husband and wife are bound to each other in a covenant of love made in God’s presence. This covenant is deepened every day through shared prayer and giving of self to each other. It is further deepened through the unconditional love they give their children.
Such a family through their love of God and each other becomes a light of God. He is dwelling in their love. This light goes out from them and gives light to others. This happens whenever a family reaches out in love and offers a home to a needy child or family (4) or hospitality to others. (5) It happens further when members go out into the community and through their paid or voluntary work and leisure activities are instruments of God’s presence and love. (6)

In the words of Jesus, “Their light shines before everyone.” This light shines regardless of the darkness that may be around. It is so easy to feel overpowered by all the dark and sinful activities that abound in our community. This is not to be our focus. Jesus is our focus. In and through Him we are light and therefore our light shines before everyone.

In this light of Jesus we offer hope. For through us His light shines on others and shows them a way out of darkness. They in their turn come into the light and become light to others.

Ref: 1-Matthew 5:14,16; 2-I John 4:16; 3-John 14:23; 4-James 1:27; 5-I Peter 4:8,9; 6- Mark 12:29-31

Ewen Laurenson is a co-founder with his wife Gillian, of the Open Home Foundation. The Open Home Foundation has Jesus as its head. It works to ensure that every child belongs to, and is safe and loved, within a family and community. This is achieved through building strong, committed and loving families who offer unconditional love to their children.
“Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

– Deus Caritas Est, 1

“Many people, especially today, face painful situations resulting from poverty, disability, illness and addictions, unemployment, and the loneliness of advanced age. But divorce and same-sex attraction impact the life of the family in especially intimate ways.” (87) In the gospels, “some of Christ’s hardest sayings deal with marriage, sexual desire, and the family.”

Such is Jesus’ teaching about the indissolubility of marriage which not only shocks the Pharisees but his own followers. (88) “If that is the case...it is better not to marry,” murmur the disciples (Matthew 19:10, NAB). In the Sermon on the Mount, this teaching of the Decalogue is further deepened, where Christ as the New Moses, calls his followers to a radical transformation of their hearts: “You have heard it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman in lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28, NAB).

As the new messianic family born of the water of Baptism (89), “the Church continues the mission of Jesus in the world.” (90) Jesus tells the disciples whom he sends out in his name: “Whoever listens to you, listens to me” (Luke 10:16). “The bishops, in communion with the Holy Father, succeed the apostles in their ministry.”
(91) Being so, “it should surprise no one that some Church teachings are also perceived as ‘hard sayings,’ out of step with current culture, especially on marriage, sexual expression and the family.” (90)

For Pope Francis, the Church’s “hard sayings” must be seen as words for our healing. (92) He likens the Church to “a field hospital after battle.” According to him, it is necessary to heal the wounds first and “to start from the ground up.” (93). We also need to engage in a kind of triage, treating the wounds according to their severity.

In the gospels, we have numerous accounts of Jesus’ healings. St. Augustine also makes frequent use of the image of Christ the physician in his works. (94) “It is the first priority of the Church to bring people to an encounter with the Divine Physician. Any encounter with Christ brings healing to fallen humanity, and the Holy Spirit can always be invited into our hearts to enable repentance and conversion.” (95)

Within the Church, it is the Holy Spirit that communicates the grace of healing. “The Holy Spirit makes Jesus present in the Church’s liturgical worship, in her prayerful reading of Scripture in light of sacred tradition, and in her teaching office which is at the service of the Word of God. (96) Christ the Physician is particularly manifest in the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick, which are the two Sacraments of Healing.” (97)

“The New Evangelization can be understood as bringing the wounded in from the battlefield of the world to encounter the Divine Physician and the healing that he offers within the community of the Church.” (98) “Life in the Body of Christ is meant to be lived as interdependent members, who build one another up in love. The Church’s teaching, sacraments, and community all exist to help us on the journey. With patience, forgiveness, and trust, in the Body of Christ, together we can heal and live in ways that might otherwise seem impossible.” (99)
Questions for Discussion:

1. How did Jesus provide a home for people who are hurting?
2. In what ways does the Church continue the mission of Jesus in the world today?
3. As the Church seeks to imitate Jesus, the Divine Physician, how can she bring healing to a hurting world?

A Home for the Wounded Heart

Reflection by Sr. Sosefina Mafi

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those that are broken.” – Luke 4:18

Suzanne Mary Joseph Aubert, a Frenchwoman and nurse by profession, heard Jesus’ pledge to “heal the wounds” (Luke 4:18) and responded. She founded a Congregation called the “Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion”, with a mission “to follow Jesus … through compassion and integrity” and to reach out to the aged, homeless and the poor.

One of the ministries Suzanne founded is the Soup Kitchen. This started in 1901 with the same mission “to support ‘all people’ in need to live with dignity in society.” “All People” come in the form of mental illnesses, addictions, homelessness and poverty”. These are the people (wounded) coming through the Soup Kitchen doors daily.

The wounded are called ‘guests’ and are served as guests in a restaurant. The respect given to them reveals to them a status they do not know they have. Most guests are non-believers who have either lost their faith during the turmoils occurring in their journey or had no faith to begin with. The love and care given them at the Soup Kitchen is an inspiration, even in their situation of unbelief.
These wounded are also mostly from broken families. Some old guests still coming were in their teens when they first entered the Soup Kitchen. One guest exclaimed, “It is a peaceful place”. Gay and lesbian guests are treated as normal. One expressed, ‘It is home!”

Food is very comforting, particularly for a street sleeper, hungry and cold during winter who is looking forward to ease his hunger and quench his thirst — like a sacrament in which a believer receives divine energy. Staff and other co-workers go on outreach to check on guests, especially the most vulnerable. Reports are collated and guests are referred to the appropriate agencies that will help/support them either pastorally or professionally.

The wounded when they first enter the Soup Kitchen are at bottom level with unpleasant behaviour and appearance. After receiving tender loving care they become very pleasant and presentable. The greatest joy a guest can experience is securing a job, a flat or accommodation. At last, a real Home for the Wounded Heart!

So sing a song for Jesus’ pledge and command, “Heal the wounds! Heal the wounds!” Let it never, never cease.

Sr Sosefina Mafi is from the Kingdom of Tonga and is a member of the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion. She has been working at the Suzanne Aubert Compassion Centre since 2012. Prior to this she taught at a catering school for young adults established for the most vulnerable youth of Tonga.
“The Church is born primarily of Christ’s total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the cross...
As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam’s side, so the church was born from the pierced heart of Christ hanging dead on the cross.”

– Catechism of the Catholic Church, 766

“The Church is the heavenly Jerusalem, “that Jerusalem which is from above...our Mother” (100) (Galatians 4:26). The Church is the “mother of our new birth.” (101) The Church, as Christ’s Virgin Bride, gives birth to sons and daughters who are born from above...born of water and Spirit” (John 3:3, 5) “for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1Corinthians 12:13).

This means “that as sons and daughters of the Church we have a new identity that does not destroy, but transcends, all of the ways in which human beings naturally construct their identities” (102), including culture, gender and race.

The Church is immaculate.“Her holiness is the holiness of Christ her spouse. It is the love of Christ, the Bridegroom that creates the Church in the first place... (103)
“…The “constitution” of the Church is not any virtue, holiness or achievement we may have attained, but the self-giving love of Christ. When we are born of the Church as of our Mother; we are born of this love of Christ. This love gives the Church her identity, not as one nation or grouping or club humanly constituted among others, but as the “Bride,” the “Spouse,” who is “one flesh” with Christ, and so one Body.” (104)

“The Church’s basis in Christ means that sin in the Church, even sin in her ordained ministers, cannot invalidate the identity of the Church or her holiness, because the identity of the Church does not come from any of us. It comes from Christ. In the Old Testament, the people of God, Israel, were defined by their covenant with God, and no amount of sin on their part could invalidate that “choseness” or the identity it gave them as the people of God.” (105) God’s covenant fidelity applies also to the Church. The miracle of the Church is that the love of Christ that defines her cannot be erased by any sin of her members. She is a visible society in the world, but one that is not defined by anything that is “of” the world. (106)

“The Church, as our Mother, imparting to us a new identity in the love and holiness in which she herself was formed, also has the responsibility of teaching us, of forming us ever more perfectly in the new identity we have received, not from the world, but “from above.”” (107) “The pastoral duty of the Magisterium,” or “teaching authority of the Church,” is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates’. (108) This entails “preserving the truth of the Gospel intact, together with all the moral teachings revealed, explicitly and implicitly, which nurture human freedom. This includes such truths as the “dignity of human persons, the goodness of creation, the nobility of the married state and its intrinsic orientation toward a life-giving communion of love.” (109) “Despite her many failures, the Church cannot shirk the responsibility to preach the Gospel, and so…carry forward her mission of love.” (110)

Christian spouses have the key role in proclaiming the truth of Christ “in lives that are continually transformed by the love that is imparted to couples in the Sacrament of Marriage and defines their communion as husband and wife.” (111) Pope Francis says that today’s world is in need of “Christian spouses to be the kind of teachers that contemporary people listen to, teachers who teach by their witness, and thereby uphold the truth and display its persuasiveness in
their openness to new life, in the warmth of their mutual love and in the readiness of their hospitality, as oases of love and mercy in a culture so often marked by cynicism, hardheartedness and discouragement.” (112)

“The witness of Christian spouses can bring light into a world that has come to value efficiency over persons, and ‘having’ over ‘being’—and thus has forgotten the value of ‘persons’ and of ‘being’ altogether. (113) May those married in Christ become teachers of the truth through their faithful witness to His love.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. **What are the various ways in which the church is depicted and what do these say about the Church?**
2. **Where does the Church’s identity come from? How does her identity impact her calling?**
3. **In what ways are the role of the church and Christian couples similar to each other?**

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**Mother, Teacher, Family: The Nature and Role of the Church**
Reflection by Wayne Mulqueen

As a new Catholic (having been a protestant for past 20+ years), reflecting on the topic “Mother, Teacher, Family: the Nature of the Church” is both exciting and fulfilling. My wife once said to me, just days after our confirmation, “Now that I have met and gotten to know my Mother Mary, I feel like I was being raised by a solo parent all those years, What a thrill!”

I’m taken by the “being” focus of the Catholic Church, focusing on the person. I was so used to thinking of myself and everyone else as “doing” people. I felt driven to become an efficient Christian and always conflicted by it. Constant questions about our ideals compared to our behaviour
and I would ask friends who were ministers “why are we seeing all of this opposing behavior.” The answer most of the time was shrugged shoulders. So over time, I became aware that I was never going to be able to answer the questions I had about being human and Christian at the same time. How could I reconcile this condition which I found myself in?

Fast forward two years, a year through RCIA and another post confirmation and the resounding response of my reflection lies in the other half of my family–Mother Mary. Meeting Mary has added a humanity to me that never could have existed before. She has filled the gap between my maleness and the femaleness of my wife and the world we live in; she is the feminine half of my very male worldview.

Every Sunday is a treat for our family! We adore the Lord at mass, we ask Mary to pray for us, we say the apostles creed and pray the Lord’s prayer; it feels so round and whole, It feels like family, a family moving together. Coming from where I was to being here now, the Catholic Church is a jewel and beautiful. We need to share her beauty to a world which is hurting badly.

As a family advocate in New Zealand, I would highly recommend our men seek their Mother Mary as a way to understand their wives, to see their wives morwe fully and to care for the families around them, to care more fully for the world with a more balanced view. Mary brings a softness that all boys need and all girls cherish, Take courage and be courageous...your Mother loves you.

Wayne Mulqueen is married to Carly and they have two children. He works for Focus on the Family New Zealand as the National Director. The “Six Pillars” of Focus on the Family are The Pre-eminence of Evangelism, The Permanence of Marriage, The Value of Children, The Sanctity of Human Life, The Importance of Social Responsibility and The Value of Male and Female.
Choosing Life

“The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific by placing itself in what it is and what it does as an ‘intimate community of life and love’ at the service of the Church and of society.”

– Familiaris Consortio, 50

“God made us for a reason. His love is our life mission. This mission enables us to find our true identity. If we choose to embrace this mission, we will have a new perspective on many issues, not just the family.” (114)

“As Pope Francis says, ‘Preaching the Gospel, in fact, is done first inside the family, and then in the different spheres of everyday life.’ (115) “If we have learned to think of our families as domestic churches, if we have learned why moral individualism is not the right context for receiving Catholic teaching, then we have adopted a view that will reorient our whole identity.” (116)

“Family, become what you are” (117) is St. John Paul II’s exhortation to families. “His words have lost nothing of their vibrancy; their urgency has only intensified in the face of the many challenges families experience today.” (118) St. John Paul II linked the mission of the family as flowing from its identity in God’s plan. “And since in God’s plan it has been established as an “intimate community of life and love, the family has the mission to become more and more of what it is, that is to say a community of life and love in an effort that will find fulfillment...in the kingdom of God.” (119) The fundamental mission of the family is “to guard, reveal and communicate love,” a mission that is “a living reflection of and a real sharing in
God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church, his Bride.” (120) It is only by embracing its identity that the family becomes what it was always meant to become.

To become an intimate community of life and love is not some impossible task, nor is it reserved “only for a few or for the extraordinary.” (121) For the Christian family, it is an invitation “to deepen, reflect upon and witness to the love and life that are already basic to being a family.” (122)

Founded upon the gift of self, the two-in-one-flesh “communion of husband and wife sets the stage for the entire family as a true community of persons.” (123) The family is where children learn to receive love and to give it back to be shared with others. And so the family also becomes “the place where the value of community is learned, forming the basis for communion in society.” (124)

As the domestic church, the Christian family also plays a key role within the Church and the world. Since the sacrament of Marriage, along with that of Holy Orders, is “at the service of communion and mission,” (125) “marriage and the family serve and build the communion of the Church and contribute to and advance her mission to proclaim the Gospel and to love as Christ loved.” (126)

More often than not, the family is the object of the ministry of the Church and of its pastoral outreach, in particular one’s diocese and parish. However, “just as important, and perhaps even more urgent, is to think of how the Christian family loves and serves the parish, the diocese, the universal Church, and the world.” (127) For this reason, “ministry aimed to assist families should help them in turn become missionaries themselves.” (128)

“Family become what you are! Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, obeying His commandments and holding fast to Him. This mission will sometimes mark you as different from others in society. To live the mission of the domestic church means that Catholic families will sometimes live as minorities, with different values than their surrounding culture. Our mission of love will require courage and fortitude. To live your witness of love will require spiritual commitment and discipline, but do not fear. The Church is with you. The Lord is with you. The Lord has made a covenant with you. The Lord is calling. He will be faithful, and your covenant will bear fruit. Love is
Questions for Discussion:

1. How is the identity and mission of the family linked with each other?
2. What does it mean when we say the family is a domestic church?
3. As families, what does it mean to “choose life” and what implications does this have for our own lives?

Choosing life
Reflection by Fr. Alliston Fernandes

I asked almighty God to send me sufficient sufferings to purchase your soul. On the day that I die, the price will have been paid. Greater love than this no woman has than she who lay down her life for her husband. This note was left in the diary of a 20th century French woman, Elisabeth Leseur who used her sufferings with cancer to pray and offer it for the gift of faith for her husband Felix, a lapsed Catholic himself, who after his wife’s death and subsequent conversion would become a Dominican priest.

The inspiring story of Elizabeth – her life and her sufferings, her restraint for her spouse to attain eternal life in a way models Christ’s dying for our sins so that we too may have eternal life. The letter to the Romans in no uncertain terms tells us: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). Elizabeth became a witness of God’s love to her spouse Felix. It is what the Church invites us to when we are to follow love to the foot of the cross and through the sufferings that make us human, we also experience the resurrection.

If here was a love greater than life itself, we are reminded of our Lord’s words: Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. (John 15:13) It is Christ’s love for you and me that saves us prompting us in turn to love our spouses, children, family members, associates and even the
stranger and enemy because of the fact that: he first loved us (1 John 4:19)
Doing so we experience the resurrection; experience life.

St. John Paul II in calling families to “to guard, reveal, and communicate love,” is calling us precisely to choose the well-being of the other. M. Scott Peck would say, ‘Love is the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth’.

Choosing life can be heroic and take different shapes. From sharing the good news of Jesus in a secular world, to bringing to birth the young life being formed in the womb into a world hostile in its welcome, for life is sacred either in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5 – Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you) or speaking and caring for the elderly who may have passed being useful to society, we as disciples are constantly reminded of following a God who has come to bring life, “life in its fullness”.

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Lord God, from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Father, you are Love and Life.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life forever and ever. Amen.
End Notes

• Love is our Mission The Family Fully Alive (LM)-8th World Meeting of Families 2015): #s 1, p. 15; 4, 12; 5,11; 9, 20; 10, 21; 11, p.25; 12, 23; 15, 36; 18, 30; 20,31; 21,32; 22,33; 23, p.33; 24,37; 25-27, 39; 28, 41;31,41; 35,44; 36,47; 37,48; 38,41; 39,55; 40,58; ; 43,61. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1642; 44,56; 45,62; 46,64; 47,67; 49, 90; 50, 68; 51,49; 54,71; 56,76; 58,90; 60,90; 61,87 & Cf. FC, 71,77 ; 62,87; 63,89; 64,89 & Familiaris Consortio (FC), 41; 65, 89; 66, p.63; 68,92; 69, 107; 71,93; 72,94; 73, 103; 74,105; 75, 106; 76, 112; 77, p.63; 78, p.75; 79, p.75 &146; 81, 116; 82, 120; 83, 121; 84, 140, Cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 66; 86,145; 87, p.89; 88,149; 89,150; 91, 150; 92,153; 94, 154; 95, 155; 96, 158 & Dei Verbum, 10; 98, 157; 99,173; 102, 175; 104,178; 105, 181; 106, 182; 107, 183; 109, 184; 110, 188; 111, 185; 112, 186; 113, 187; 114, 109; 116, 191; 118, 197; 121, 198; 122, 198; 123, 199. FC, 18-27; 124, 199; 126, 202; 127, 203; 128, 203; 129, 205

• Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Redemptor Hominis (RH), Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Man, March 1979), 9 - #2

• Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 426 - #3; 2331- # 7; 1642 - #43; 1615 - #48; 1421-#97; Cf. CCC, 757 - #100; 169- #101; 766 - #103; 890 -#108

• Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration: Homily, 7th World Meeting of Families, June 2, 2012 - # 6

• Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio (FC) (1981), 11. Cf. Gen 1:26-27, 1 Jn 4:8, and Gaudium et Spes, 12, #8

• Pope Benedict XVI, Address... to participants in the forum of family associations,” Rome (May 16, 2008) #13

• Deus Caritas Est (DCE), 11 - # 14; 9 - #16

• Cf. Ex. 34:16, Judges 2:17, Num. 15:39, and Deut. 31:16 #17

• Pope Francis, Homily, “The Pope’s Mass at Santa Marta- When a love fails,” L’Osservatore Romano (February 28, 2014) - #19

• Cf., Theology of the Body (January 2, 1980) - #29
• Gaudium et Spes, 12 - #30

• LM, 43; Pope Paul VI Encyclical Humanae Vitae (1968), 12 - #33

• Pope Francis Address “Dialogue with Engaged Couples, Vatican City (Feb. 14, 2014) - #42

• Cf. Theology of the Body, January 16, 1980 - #43

Code of Canon Law (CIC), 1056-1057 - #52; #1055 - #53

• St. Augustine, De bono Conjugali 32; De Genesi ad Litteram 9.7.12; De nuptis et concupiscentia, 1.10.11, 17.19, 21.23) #55

• Ecclesia domestica, Lumen Gentium, 11, Cf. CCC, 1655-1658 - #57

• Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCCC) (2005), 321. #67; 321- #125

• Pope Benedict XVI, Address “Make Parish a Family of families” (March 21, 2011); LM, 86 - #59

• Synod of Bishops, Extraordinary General Assembly, Preparatory Document “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” Vatican City (2013) #80

• 89. LM, 150; Cf. CCC, 77, 85. Cf. Dei Verbum (DV), 7) #90

• Pope Francis, Interview Article “A Big Heart Open to God,” America (Sept. 30, 2013) - #93

• Pope Francis, Angelus “Talk about the Holy Family as refugees” (December 29, 2013) - #115

• FC 17- #117 & #120; Cf. Gaudium et Spes, 48 - #119