



FAMILY ENERGY

HOW TO RELEASE IT

GUIDE BOOK

BY
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PREFACE

This is not one more book “about family”. There are already many such books that are certainly quite helpful. It is rather a guide to help ordinary families, and especially those searching for a new way of life whereby they can discover that they already have within themselves the potential to actually live the kind of life that they aspire to; that they have a hidden, untapped energy that is within the grasp of each and every family. Ever since the day that I discovered that there is within every family this special FIRE just waiting to be released, I have felt it to be my mission to dedicate my entire priestly life to the ministry of couples and Families.

Now, in the autumn of my life, after writing “Face to Face - a book meant as a guide for married couples - I’ve felt a deep longing to, in some way, knock on the door of as many homes as possible and, as it were, blow on the ashes of their hearts to help them discover the tremendous energy of love already in their hearts, but lying dormant beneath those “ashes”. Therefore, the purpose of this book is precisely to enable families to discover and release their family energy, and afterwards put it into the service of a society so desperately in need of making that same discovery. With this book I am knocking on your door. Will you let me in?

Fr. Gabriel Calvo

INTRODUCTION

This is Father Calvo's second book in English, a synthesis of his working for decades in Marriage and Family Ministry. It distills the wisdom, love and hope he has gained during those years. His first book, "Face to Face," is for couples. This book, as the name implies, is for families.

Father Calvo, who founded Marriage Encounter in 1961, recognized that building couple relationships, while very important, was just the beginning. In 1976, therefore, he devised an overall plan to assist people in various walks of life to aspire to becoming "families in the Lord". This was to be not a movement, but rather a service to families in their journey to become the kind of family that in their heart of hearts they longed to be. He termed this "Service" FIRES, an acronym for Families - Intercommunication - Relationships - Experiences - Services. The significance is that where there are Families that Intercommunicate, the members of those families will have deep Relationships with one another, which in turn bring about good Experiences. They will then be able and desire to be of Service to others. Evolving from that inspiration there are now more than 20 different FIRES programs, ranging from sons and daughters, individuals, engaged couples, married couples, families, priests, sisters, those desiring to discern their own proper vocation, parishes, and others.

Father Calvo would like this book to reach all families. He has struggled to make this book applicable to all. The nature of families has changed drastically in recent years. The large increase in the number of single parent families is an example. He has tried prayerfully to discern the essentials that make up any authentic family, in the true sense of the word (as opposed to some structures currently dubbed families, but which are not by any stretch of the imagination), with a fervent hope that this book will be a help to each one. From the very start of his ministry he has known many families intimately. It is through those friendships that he developed his deep insights about marriage and family relationships. We are blessed to be one of those families.

In 1980 we learned that Father Calvo was living in nearby D.C., not too far from our own home. We invited him and Jose Hernandez, his assistant, to join our family for dinner. That was the beginning of a very deep and cherished relationship with those two godly people that has continued to grow over the years. As a result of that meeting, we experienced a FIRES "Family Encounter At Home" weekend in August 1982, with Father Calvo, Jose and our 5 sons. One of them, 23 at the time and just back from the Army, told us during that weekend that he had never felt that we really loved him. What a shock! But it was heartwarming to see how, not only we, but each one of his brothers reached out to him. The growth and fulfillment, peace, joy and love in that young man today is wonderful. It's obvious he now knows that he is loved.

Father Calvo has the ability to help people sort through the externals and incidentals and get to the heart of their family relationship. We know you'll agree, after experiencing FAMILY ENERGY.

Since this book is written for people in relationship with each other, it is important that each person in the family reflects on and answers the questions. Part of that “Family Energy” is contained in each member. In order to reach “critical mass” it is necessary for each individual to stir up the Fire inside themselves. In this way they will have something to offer to one another when they come together to share as a family. We have found that, when each of us first puts down on paper who and where we are and then honestly shares that, great things happen. It never ceases to amaze us how our respective inputs dovetail. However, it is important to realize that this release of energy cannot be forced. Like all creative pursuits, it always happens best in an atmosphere of loving concern and acceptance. As we grow older we realize that all we have to do is love and accept the other members of the family. The Lord will handle any changing that needs to be done inside us or them.

We have been married 36 years. Four of our 5 sons are married. We have 10 grandchildren. The early years of our marriage were very rocky. We even separated for a period of 4 months after our fourth child was born. It was a tough, uphill climb from there. However, through our Marriage Encounter experience in 1971 we found a unity in our love for God and for each other that we previously could not have imagined.

We’re grateful to God for each member of our family for different reasons:

Tom, is sensitive, gentle and warm. When he hugs you, you know you’re loved. His wife, Cindy, is a beautiful, growing, godly helpmate for him. They have four girls.

Mike is open, loving and so eager to change and grow. His soft-spoken wife, Nancy, has a very giving nature; her creativity is admirable. They have two daughters.

Rick is thoughtful, energetic, dependable and generous. He’s a wonderful listener which is why everybody loves him.

Terry is so constant with his phone calls to us to keep in touch. He combines his father’s conservatism with his mother’s willingness to stick her neck out. His wife, Maria, is open and honest. She is wonderfully refreshing. They have a foster son, a daughter, and two of their own sons.

Kevin is most instrumental in keeping our family together. He has a great sense of humor as well as being a doer and a go-getter. His wife, Susan, is a gifted, sweet, sincere and very lovable child of God.

As a family today, we strive to become more accepting of each other, to reach out again and again to create deeper bonds with one another.

One time one of our sons wrote this very touching and unforgettable note to us: “Thank you so much

for reaching out to others. In so many ways and so many times I am brought to tears by my love and thankfulness for both of you. You're wonderful and, like salvation, I'm not worthy. But I'm surely glad I'm blessed."

And this is the spirit of FIRES. Reach out in love, pat the other guy on the back; help the one who is estranged; turn the other cheek to the one whose nose is out of joint; see the suffering in the one who is different from the rest. Through this we experience the tremendous energy God has put inside us to become more united.

In-laws are a very important part of God's Plan for our growth as a family. Our boys married girls very different from them. Our job is to see the beauty in that difference. Each son married a girl who was meant to bring him and us closer to the Lord. What a blessing! But we have to broaden our world and affirm our in-laws for their positive qualities, encourage them to be themselves, and reach out in love to them, especially when it's hardest to do.

This book is for everyone, whatever the nature of your family happens to be. Each page contains wisdom for all. Father Calvo deals with the individual and shares how important knowledge of self is for family unity.

"Family Energy" can be an instrument of growth for families or groups of families. An individual, too, can change and grow as a result of this book. While reading it, we realized one of our family members didn't seem as close to us as the others. An impromptu phone call just to say, "Hi; you're important to me" brought an immediate closeness, a deeper bond.

Reaching out always pays big dividends.

Little things mean a lot.

Distance and busyness are present problems with our togetherness.

We are determined to initiate an annual family reunion. Time together is a must if we plan to grow as a unit. Our foundation is family, and we thank the good Lord for Father Calvo's affirmation and guidance in drawing us ever closer to our Jesus of Nazareth and to each other. We pray for each of you as you open the door to a deeper, fuller family life, in releasing your family energy.

We know it is going to happen!

The TOM & TRUDY RYAN Family

PART I.

BECOMING A HAPPIER FAMILY

It is a fact.

Every day millions of people leave their homes unsatisfied and unhappy,

Trying to find outside in the streets

What they do not find within their homes.

Is this your case?

If your answer is "Yes", you should go ahead; this book may help you.

If your answer is "No",

Then...

Please keep reading

so that you will be able to share more fully with other people

The secret of a happy home.

Then...

You will be even further enriched

Are you ready?

THE FAMILY

There is a story of an artist who had become dissatisfied with his work, and said to his wife: "I am going out to search for the most important, the most beautiful thing in the world. That is the picture I want to paint."

His travel took him to many countries. He saw many things that were beautiful, but he felt dissatisfied, since he did not find what he was looking for. One day he stopped a bride on her wedding day. "Tell me," he asked the radiant young girl, "what is the most beautiful thing in the world?" "Love!" she answered without hesitation.

The artist went on his way disappointed. He couldn't paint love. Sometime later he met a soldier returning from war. "Soldier," he asked, "what is the most beautiful thing in the world?" "Peace!" the soldier answered as he hurried home. Again the artist looked disappointed. He couldn't paint peace. Continuing his search he stopped a rabbi on his way to the synagogue. Surely, he thought, the holy man could be able to help him. But the rabbi answered simply, "Faith is the most beautiful thing in the world!" How could one paint a picture of Faith?

The artist felt his search was hopeless and returned home, weary in body and in soul. Then, when his wife warmly greeted him, he found the love of which the bride had spoken. All about his home was the feeling of security, the tranquil peace that the soldier thought so beautiful. And in the eyes of his young children was the faith described by the rabbi. Here was the subject for his painting - his family and his home! - This would be his Masterpiece.

Actually, one of the most important treasures any person can have is to belong to a family which can be characterized by a sense of faith, love and peace.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A TRUE FAMILY

There are many qualities that constitute true and authentic families. The following are some of the most significant ones:

Some traits of a truly authentic family:

- * The fundamental cell of society. The natural and most original community.
- * The oldest, most firmly grounded human institution. Extremely adaptable but traditional at the same time.
- * The space where each person learns who he is and who he may become.
- * The basic biological unit which the human race has had since the beginning of civilization.
- * The heart of the world and the soul of society.
- * God's Idea. His first Institution. His Masterpiece.
- * The first agent of socialization of future generations and the supporting institution for the aged.
- * The primary and most powerful source of energy life and love.
- * The basic life-supporting system.
- * The framework best equipped to handle individuals of. more than one generation, individuals of different age levels, with different needs from those around them.
- * The cradle of humankind.
- * The social group characterized by a common residence, economic collaboration, reproduction and growth.
- * The small group of persons usually related by blood or by law who have emotional bonds of a particular kind with one another. They care for each other and are mutually committed.
- * A primary relationship in which we may have a sense of intimacy, belonging, and feeling at home.

Show me a person who enjoys a dynamic family life and I will show you a basically happy person.

Some qualities of a true family:

- * Basic groups of ordinary people.
- * Fundamental forms of community of persons.
- * Everyone's roots.
- * The main resources of the energy God creates in the universe.
- * Schools of faith and hope.
- * Schools of love, service and self-giving.
- * Schools of person-to-person-communication.
- * Schools of direct and intimate relationships.
- * Schools of humanity.
- * Schools of personal identity and growth.
- * Points of interaction between generations.

- * Bridges between past and future.
- * Seeds for and foundation of new civilizations.
- * The most important reality of the history of humankind.
- * Our number one need. If families did not exist we would invent them.
- * Spirals of justice.
- * Spirals of love.
- * Spirals of unity.
- * Spheres of security and tranquility.
- * Spheres of joy.
- * Spheres of peace.
- * The key of God's plan of salvation, made known through the Scriptures.
- * The "little churches."
- * **The seed and the hope of the future!**

WHAT CONSTITUTES A REAL HOME

Some traits of a real home:

- * A loving-happy-great feeling within ourselves that we can hardly express by words, even though deeply experienced.
- * A shelter in the time of storm.
- * A place where people are loved not for what they do or have, but simply for who they are.
- * A safe place where a person is taken seriously and counts.
- * A place for reconciliation and peace.
- * A living organism of people that needs to communicate and share with each other as a top priority.
- * A stable-one-on-one caring relationship, sometimes with one parent or parental figure, sometimes with the other, through a complex series of psychological mechanisms that allows one to become whole as a person and to grow away from the primary family.
- * A unit that has evolved to meet the physical and emotional needs of its members. These needs include:

Some needs of people in any home:

- * To be loved and valued and to learn to love, value and trust others.
- * To be controlled and to learn to control oneself.
- * To accept the pleasure and potential of one's identity as a person - as male or female - and finally to turn to the people outside the family.
- * To nourish one another in peace and joy.
- * To be able to count on the other members.
- * To learn creativity. Definitely, what you are at home is who you really are.
- * To learn the meaning of loving and being loved unconditionally.
- * To be convinced that the home is where your heart really is.
- * To be oneself without fear of being rejected.
- * To discover that Divine Energy of God's Love waiting to be released.
- * To learn that the home is where the mystery of God can be found.

THE MANY FACES OF THE FAMILY

It is easy to identify “Family” with one’s own personal experience. But the reality is that there is a wide variety of family forms. Families vary at different places and in different times. They reflect changing individual needs, changing societies and changing times. Consequently, there are many types of families: and we have seen the face of families change many times throughout history, although its role of being the fundamental unit of society endures. Families have changed from yesterday’s traditional-unique-model to today’s kaleidoscopic condition consisting of all varieties: large; nuclear; extended; two parents; single parent; bachelor; separated; divorced; widow or widower; step parent and child; blended; etc. - throughout many different transitions, religions, countries, races, cultures and civilizations. Families have gone from the patriarchal - matriarchal -agriculture era to the industrial-electronic- technologic era, which now is facing the impact of the electronic media explosion. And it looks like on the horizon we can catch a glimpse of the new families, which I would like to name the “thermonuclear families” of the civilization of truth and love. Despite myriad variations, there can be no true family if it is not consistent with the natural law.

Everywhere, all over the world, there is a growing awareness that “the home” is the place, and the space, where intimacy and emotional maturity can be learned and developed. Therefore, the very important question is not what is “The family” all about, but what is the reality of our concrete and specific families? What is really happening in our present day families? Are they essentially authentic families? What are their faces like?

Just as we often do not really know ourselves, so too are we faced with the reality that we do not know our families either. We need to be aware of our families. Every event that affects us is mediated through our families. We should have every reason to be proud of our families.

Finally, it is interesting to note that every family really encompasses three “generations”:

- 1.- The two families from which parents come.
- 2.- The present generation of father, mother and children.
- 3.- The future generation that will be the offspring of this family’s children.

TODAY'S CHANGING FAMILIES

Some people fear that the traditional family is dying, but despite some reasons that trigger that fear, the family always has survived. It is irreplaceable as the original unit of society. The family is, of course, neither dead nor dying. It is evolving, as is almost every other arena of human effort.

We are living in a world of constant change. It is a characteristic of our time. The changes in the world are continuous, rapid, very often harmful and even contradictory. Some can help us to grow, while others are an obstacle to growth. What is clear is that everyone is affected by them: and if we are not to be inhibited by those changes that are promoted by unprincipled people, we have to discern the difference between those changes that are harmful and those that are helpful. We cannot complacently think that things will always go on as they always have, because the family is very much affected by what is happening in the fluctuating world around it. As the most universal and basic of all human institutions, the family is bound to be intimately affected by all the changes that affect its members: economic, social, religious, political, military, racial conflicts, tensions, pressures and insecurities. As is the case with other basic experiences in human life, families too, as well as the world in which they live, experience crises. This does not at all signify the destruction of the family. On the contrary, as the very meaning of the word crisis suggests, wherever there is a "danger" there is an "opportunity". God has often used a crises to bring about conversions in the lives of people.

In fact there is much dissatisfaction in our present day society, and it is especially apparent in married and family life: so that people are slowly becoming aware of the need to re-evaluate the quality of life in these two fundamental areas of life. Families must discover who they really are, and become the model for a new system of values. Families may change, but they will never be destroyed by harmful ideologies. Families are here to stay.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN TODAY'S FAMILIES

Most people recognize that today's families are changing, but few really understand the nature of this change. If we really reflect on the actual situation of the ordinary families, we will discover that the reality does not reflect the idealistic and romantic image that we would like to entertain.

While on the one hand today's families are in a period of transition and of radical transformation towards a new civilization, it is a fact that most contemporary families are losing their traditional values and struggling to find new ones more in accord with the emerging needs and challenges of a new society - one that is not always conducive to a bright future. They face a legion of overwhelming challenges: illegitimacy, abortion, restricted opportunities to marry, infidelity, avoidance of parenthood, neglect of children, divorce, contraception, broken homes, families being raised by single parents, violence in the homes, isolation of the elderly, alcohol and drug addiction, spouse and child abuse, runaways and throwaways, juvenile delinquency, suicide, media pressure etc. The list grows longer daily.

This negative picture, however, is not the whole story. As has been the case throughout history, there are always those who not only have a perspective of married and family life that is very positive and hopeful, but they in fact make every effort to live out those ideals themselves. For instance, between husband and wife there is the recognition of equality, self-determination and self-expression, companionship and friendship, trust and confidence, interdependence, communion and mutual consent. In many of today's homes there is an awareness on part of the parents that their children are persons too. Consequently, there is a spontaneity and openness, friendship, freedom and responsibility, and understanding and cooperation between parents and sons and daughters. Rather than an autocratic and authoritative child-rearing style, such couples opt for a democratic style based on equality, respect, dialogue and service: and they acknowledge that not only the children need to be educated, but they too need to continue their education along with their sons and daughters. The whole family, as a unit has to grow together if they want to survive, to serve society and consequently, become truly happier. So, what is the situation in your family

TOMORROW'S FAMILIES

There are indeed many good willed individuals, couples and families out there who, hopefully, will be the basis for a society bent on spiritual growth, and not on deterioration. Therefore, it would be a mistake to look back at families of the past, or the present, find much to be wanting, and leave us with little hope. As we look at the global situation with the family at the present time, there is much to discourage us. Despite dire predictions of catastrophe current in their time, famous experts in family life of the past decades had voiced their hopes for healthy and thriving families in the future. Those predictions have yet to be fulfilled. Indeed conditions of family life may be worse now than in their time. But we still have the future, and we still have those people of good-will - like you who are reading this. We still have not the "clever ones", as Jesus said, but the "merest children" to whom the truth has been revealed. And there is indeed hope for the future. It will be decided in millions of individual homes, in millions of individual ways. It will be decided by people who believe in it as a sound, basic, necessary part of life and growth. John Paul II, in 1981 wrote in his great and wise letter on the family: "The future of humanity passes by the family."

Therefore, now is the time for those who believe in marriage and family to be realistic. If the family is going to have a future - and certainly it will - we are going to have to build that future. If a family survives, it is because all of its members - especially parents but not parents alone -- put their family at the highest level of priority, and dedicate some of their time, effort and energy to become a more genuine family. The future is the result of our present choices.

There is simply no viable substitute for what the family does. No culture has ever survived without family structure, and it is inconceivable that man in the future could function without the family.

As long as men die, people will need to replace every generation. No machine, no computer will ever be able to replace people. Family cannot die. Families are the future. **The families of the future are in our hands!**

HAPPY FAMILIES

As we have observed, Families are continually changing.

Do they have something in common?

Absolutely.

All, without exception, have an irresistible and profound aspiration:

To be happy and to have a happy home.

But are all of them reaching their common dream?

The harsh reality is that, from our own experience and knowledge,

The dream comes true only for a relatively few isolated families.

For most families happiness at home is an “impossible dream.”

Why?

Observing the happy families we know, we come to a clear conclusion:

Happy families don't just happen. They are the result of a lifelong effort:

By the parents first, and then by the parents and children together.

Now,

The next obvious questions are:

- * **What are the happy families like?**
- * **Do we want to become one?**
- * **How can we have a happy family?**

WHAT ARE HAPPY FAMILIES LIKE

The concept of happiness is extremely complex. Therefore, to find the right answers for the three previous questions we have to deal with today's ordinary families by:

1. *Knocking* on the door of the homes of those ordinary families we believe are really happy and ready to share with us the secret of their marriage and family happiness.
2. *Entering* with gratitude and reverence in their intimacy and observe them, not for what they "have" or "say," but for what they *are*; what they *do*; and *how they relate* to one another.
3. *Reflecting* about all of them and find out what their common traits and their differences are.

That is precisely what I've done during my 35 years of priestly ministry.

I've been in continuous, direct and close touch with hundreds of families throughout the world, who have shared with me the secret of their homes. They have been my best school and I've learned a lot from each one of them. I've discovered that:

When families try to become:

Healthy strong and successful

They discover happiness.

Do you want to discover how to become one of those families?

Just keep reading.

BECOMING A HEALTHY FAMILY

WELLNESS in its holistic approach is the first condition for happiness in families.

What are healthy families like?

1. They are rooted and founded by a healthy married couple who is loving, united and open.
2. They feel mutual respect and admiration for each other.
3. They relate to each other with trust and confidence.
4. They have direct and active lines of communication among all their members.
5. They encourage, affirm and support the self-esteem and the autonomy of each family member.
6. They practice interdependence rather than dependence or independence.
7. They create a positive and joyful environment with a sense of play and good humor.
8. They develop a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation.
9. They cultivate a sense of family and belonging, prize their traditions, rituals and home celebrations.
10. They teach one another - by deeds more than by words - about conscientiousness, honesty, loyalty, trust, goodness and beauty.
11. They are open and hospitable and educate their members to serve people, especially the needy, in very concrete ways.
12. They pray together to the same God, not just asking Him but mainly thanking Him for His presence and wonderful gifts.

* * * * *

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Do I consider my family to be healthy?
2. Do I recognize any of the above 12 traits to be in my family?
3. Do I feel that I have a role in developing those traits in order to be a happy family?

BECOMING A STRONG FAMILY

Happy families need not only to be healthy but strong.

Some traits of a strong family:

1. Self awareness. Private time and space.
2. Mutual respect and encouragement.
3. Listening to each other with the mind and the heart.
4. Having mutual trust and confidence in each other.
5. Accepting each other as each one really is and wants to be.
6. Putting oneself in each other's shoes for better understanding
7. Loving each other through everyday little services and deeds
8. Dialoguing periodically in "twos" and together.
9. Planning together the important moments of family life.
10. Spending time together, just having fun and enjoyment.
11. Doing things together.
12. Creating clear and flexible rules.
13. Practicing frequent marriage and family reconciliation.
14. Coping together with problems and crises positively.
15. Looking for what unites rather than for what separates.
16. Seeking help and support as it is needed.
17. Being an open and hospitable.
18. Living by God's Law and fulfilling His Will.
19. Worshipping God together at home and everywhere.
20. Celebrating the great moments of family life.

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Do I see my family as being strong?
2. Do I perceive some weaknesses in my family? What are they?
3. Do I recognize real signs of strength? What are they?

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY

Healthy and strong families are successful due to something deeper than techniques

Some traits of a successful family:

1. Growing as individuals and bringing more to the family.
2. Being deeply committed to each other; staying together; affirming and supporting each other and the family group with loyalty and courage.
3. Strengthening family relationships; experiencing intense and deep communication and periodic dialogue; making themselves available to each other; doing things together; serving each other in a spirit of self-giving and joy.
4. Sharing about oneself with each other; having a holistic interchange of convictions, beliefs, feelings, strengths and weaknesses, attitudes, values, needs, choices, goals, priorities, fears, concerns, wishes, dreams.
5. Reading together the Word of God; discovering and understanding the true meaning of success according to God's Vision and Will.
6. Coming to the family and home with realistic expectations; acknowledging the likelihood of disputes; when disagreements do arise, working them out positively and intelligently.
7. Experiencing frequently the spirit of forgiveness; recognizing and accepting one's own imperfections, weaknesses and limitations.
8. Being consistent in the treatment of each other; seeing each individual as a person; respecting the rights of all; developing reasonable family rules and having everyone do his or her share in the family.
9. Developing outside interests; avoiding the vicious circle of a family clan; trying to be bridges everywhere and anytime.
10. Looking outward to the needs of other families; volunteering reach out to the needy; providing homemaker services for the house; working for equitable family policies; engaging in church and community programs.

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Which do I feel is the quality of relationships in my family? (Very good; Good; Fair; Poor)?
2. Which among the 10 steps to become a successful family do I judge are in my family?
3. Which could be the key for my family to become more truly successful?

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS IN FAMILY

Going through the previous pages and reflecting for a while upon them,
we will be able to realize
that even though the traits of the Happy Families are numerous and different,
we can find some major keys, common to Healthy, Strong and Successful Families,
Namely:

Persons
Relationships
Communications
Love Faith Openness Peace

Let us develop each one of these seven
Important keys to happiness in today's families.

BECOMING GROWING PERSONS

A family is made up of persons. A person is not an isolated being who exists individually by him or herself on an island like Robinson Crusoe. In other words, a person in and of himself alone would be an incomplete human being. An essential dimension of any human being is to relate to others. A person is an individual in relationship, and in a family, for each member to be truly human, each person needs to develop and to become mature through the respective relationships within that family.

This is an essential element of any true family. For a family to become happy there has to be a community of persons, with great self-esteem and openness to others. Without this, it is not possible to have a healthy, strong and successful relationship in or out of the family. We must come to understand the importance of a family being a school of persons.

Self Awareness

The FIRST Step to become a healthy person is to become aware of the precious value of one's personal being, having been created in the image of God.

Reflect and share as a family:

- | | |
|--|--|
| * "Who am I?" | * "What kind of a person am I?" |
| * "What are some of my weaknesses and my limitations?" | * "What are some of my strong points?" |
| * "What is my self-image?" | * "Where are my main goals?" |

Self Esteem

The SECOND Step to become a strong and mature person is to develop a fair, just and balanced self-esteem, rooted in:

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| * Self-Respect. | * Self-Honesty. | * Self-Acceptance. | * Self-Confidence. |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|

Self Openness

The THIRD Step to become a healthy, strong and successful person is to be open, not just to oneself but to God and to others; starting, of course, with the members of one's own family by sharing:

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| *What I sense and feel | * What I think and want | * What I have and do |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Do I consider myself to be an alive and mature person? (Positive and negative indications) |
2. Do I accept myself as I am? (Positive and negative indications)
3. Do I recognize what step I need to take to become more myself?

DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS

What the world needs is meaningful relationships and being in loving touch with each other.

The real crisis of today is not the future of technology, or the supply of raw materials, or deciding economic policies. All these and all other crises could be resolved effectively and quickly if we would find an answer to the deeper underlying problem - the central dilemma of human relationships, finding ways in which people can live together in understanding, harmony, cooperation and peace.

This basic problem, as we are increasingly coming to realize, can never be solved from the top down. It must be solved from the bottom up. Before people can relate socially in the wider levels, they must learn to relate interpersonally in the nuclear groups we call families and homes.

All human estrangement, distrust and alienation come ultimately from failure of individuals to learn effectively the art of close relationships.

The distortions and hurts that result from these failures then spread out in ever-widening levels and circles to ravage communities, nations, and the world society. Relationships, as reality, are very important to each of us. Relationships are the heart, the intimate and sacred part of families.

As a matter of fact, God is at the bottom of each relationship. God created man and woman "in His image and likeness." Christians believe that God Himself is a mysterious, loving and eternal relationship - one that has existed from eternity among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That is why we cannot exist in peace without being in loving relationship to each other and to God.

Eric Fromm has described this reality in a very authoritative way:

"The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. The absolute failure to achieve this aim means insanity."

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most important factors of happiness in a family is the quality of relationships among its members; that is, one on one loving relationships, which include God as an important member of the family; but also extends to others. It is precisely within the environment of the family, the original and fundamental school of relationships, that relationships begin and grow. Consequently, the way we relate to each other within our own family influences the way we relate with other people outside the family and most importantly with God.

Divorces, abortions, runaways and throwaways, broken marriages and homes, alcohol and drug addiction, sexual abuses, delinquency and many other of today's evils are symptoms and consequences of fractured and frozen relationships within families and homes. Loving family relationships are what make the difference between a "house" and a "home."

A teacher once asked her class what happiness was. One child replied. "Happiness is when I go walk on the dunes with dad - nobody else, just he and I." A great definition!

Loving relationships are

- * The heart of what the family is all about.
- * The key to releasing the tremendous divine energy of love that is hidden within each married couple, each family and each home.
- * The essence of the mystery of God, as He Himself reveals through the Bible.
- * The quintessence of the Sacrament of Marriage.
- * The spirit of a genuine community
- * The only way to solve human crises, conflicts, problems and wars.

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Are loving relationships important in my family? Positive and negative signs.
2. How well do I relate to each of the members of my family?
3. Am I conscious of a personal relationship with God, and do I strive to deepen it?
4. What can I do to become a more loving person?

TOWARD NEW FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

If there were an authentic revolution in the way husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters relate to each other in today's families, the relationships among its members would inevitably improve, and we would have not only families, but society itself that would be:

- * More democratic and open.
- * More interested not just in the present but in the future.
- * More conscious of the family and its relational potential.

Consequently, relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters would become:

- * More meaningfully interpersonal.
- * More spontaneous and frank.
- * More honest and true.
- * More mature and deeper.
- * More dynamic and responsible.
- * More reaching in and reaching out.
- * More democratic and free.
- * More inclined to search together.
- * More God-centered.
- * More supporting and effective.
- * More satisfying.
- * More enriching.
- * More peaceful and joyful.

The key to this transformation is that families discover the need and urgency to be less concerned with having and doing (the main cause of their decline and disintegration) and more dedicated to becoming true families.

DEEPENING COMMUNICATION

Now, let us go back to the reality and face with honesty the big questions about family relationships:

- * How many of the families that I know, including my own family, clearly have harmonious relationships?
- * Can families achieve loving relationships automatically overnight?
- * What is my impression of most of today's ordinary families?
- * Do I judge that most modern day families continually experience crises, conflicts, problems and frequent-stress?
- * There is a generation gap between parents and their children. How can it be bridged?
- * What do I judge to be the major reason for the growing violence in homes, spouse and children abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, unwanted pregnancy among teenagers, runaways, juvenile delinquency, crime and suicide-tendencies and behavior?
- * What is the key for those troubled and unhappy families to rebuild their relationships?
- * How can these dramatic traumas be prevented in the families?
- * How can families be cured and healed?

We can get the answers from the experience and testimony of the families who have passed through these painful situations and have overcome them. Yes, there is a key to prevent and to cure. It is creative and effective interpersonal communication among all members of the family.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Ideally it is

- * The essence of a healthy, strong and successful relationship.
- * The most important and urgent need in most of today's families.
- * The cornerstone of marriage and family life.
- * The top priority for a family, in terms of money, time and energy.
- * The most clear expression of love.
- * The Lord's commandment for His disciples.
- * A person-to-person communication, that is, a direct communication with each member of the family.
- * A creative way to relate effectively and to help each other to become what each one wants to be.
- * A two way street between two persons or two groups for giving and receiving.
- * A family time together.
- * A way to share one's own lived experiences: Thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, sentiments and emotions, fears and hopes, expectations and desires, disappointments and frustrations, pains and joys, choices, goals and priorities, intentions, successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, possibilities and limitations, doubts and temptations, needs and values, talents and gifts.

Without interpersonal communication we cannot become mature persons. Instead we become selfish individuals, robots, things. We end up isolated and lonely. Without deep and frequent person-to-person communication there is neither family, nor community. The lack of creative and effective communication in the families is the main cause of broken relationships, marriage breakdowns, family disintegration and social evils.

MAJOR KEYS TO CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication in the family can be described as

All behavior that occurs among its members.

There is no such, therefore, as a family not communicating or not interacting with each other.

The circuits of communication are open from the beginning of life.

Therefore,

The first step towards strengthening communication in the family is to remember that

All interaction among its members is communication.

But this is not enough if we want family communication to be creative and effective.

For that, other active and positive steps have to be taken, namely

Dialogue,

Reconciliation and mutual confiding.

DIALOGUE

There are many ways to communicate: verbal, non-verbal, eye contact, touching, gestures, facial expressions, signs, writing, music, etc. One of the most creative and effective ways to communicate is through verbal expression from the heart, called “dialogue”, which presupposes oneself as the subject, as opposed to “conversation” wherein the subject can be unlimited things outside of oneself and has no depth.

Dialogue is:

An inter-personal exchange between two or more people wherein they *listen* attentively to one another with respect and love. By listening we receive information about others, and by talking we give information about ourselves.

- * *Listening*: This is the secret key to creative and effective dialogue. The single Chinese ideograph that denotes “listening” is made of up several separate ideograms that express respectively the ears, the eyes, the heart, and finally totality. In this sense, truly listening is not easy. It is an art that requires personal honesty, effort and practice. It is more than just hearing. Incidentally the Chinese ideograph that denotes “hearing” is made up of an ideograph that depicts the ears alone, implying that it means nothing more than that a sound has reached the eardrums.
- * *Verbally expressing*: In other words, verbally sharing one’s opinions and beliefs, feelings, attitudes, judgments, choices, concerns, expectations etc.
- * *Respectfully*: by not interrupting when you listen, and by sharing with finesse and delicacy.
- * *Lovingly*. By listening and sharing not just with the head (hearing) but mainly with the heart. And by trying to put oneself “in the shoes of the person” sharing.
- * *On a regular basis*:. Once or twice a week?

Quality Time and Commitment

According to the testimony of experienced families, for a creative and effective dialogue, quality time is needed - an enjoyable time spent together. If there is not a willingness and a personal commitment on the part of each family member, any attempt at dialogue will end up a failure. Family dialogue has to be a top priority on everyone’s agenda.

Keep in mind

- Where you put your time, you put your life.
- Where you put your life, you put your love.
- Where you put your love, you find happiness.
- Family time together engenders happiness!

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Do I really appreciate family time together? Why?
2. What is the quality of dialogue in my family? Very good; Good; Fair; Poor.
3. Do I communicate with each member of my family? Explain.

FREQUENT TIMES OF RECONCILIATION

There is ample proof that practicing frequent reconciliation gives rise to healthy families. It is the key to solving all family crises and the basic first step to solve all family problems. Also it is the most powerful medicine for all kinds of hurts and wounds. Mother Theresa was wont to say: "There is no peace in society, because there is no peace in the home." But reconciliation is the only way to maintain peace in the home - peace with oneself, with God, with each other. Reconciliation involves both giving and receiving forgiveness, a constant challenge for most of today's couples and families. True forgiveness is not easy to grant, but sometimes it is even more difficult to receive. The main difficulty in granting forgiveness is selfishness or lack of genuine love. The main obstacle in receiving forgiveness is pride or lack of honesty.

Forgiveness:

- * Forgiveness is the very soul of reconciliation.
- * Forgiveness is a uniquely human virtue.
- * Forgiveness is the test of true love.
- * Forgiveness is divine in origin.
- * Forgiveness is a gift from God to humble people
- * Forgiveness is a fruit of faithful prayer.
- * Forgiveness is the quintessence of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. He not only taught it, he also lived it as nobody did before or after.
- * Forgiveness is one of the prime characteristics of his true disciples.

Keys to Family Reconciliation

How can spouses, parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, relatives dispose themselves to become ready to give and to receive forgiveness? Following are some of the keys:

- * *Personal honesty and humility*, awareness of one's own mistakes, faults, weaknesses, limitations and imperfections.
- * *Self-Acceptance*, being able to forgive ourselves first.
- * True love, no hidden selfish interests.
- * *Personal relationship with God*, He is the ultimate source of genuine forgiveness.
Without His Grace it is impossible to truly forgive.

Reflect and share as a family:

Do we need to pay more attention to reconciliation in our family?

MUTUAL CONFIDING

This is another secret key to family happiness, revealed by those who dare to become a united and open family. Most families fail in this. Many relate and communicate with each other with a fearful or superficial attitude. Without question, there can be no deep communication nor true dialogue without mutual trust and confidence.

Mutual Confiding:

- * The essence of profound communication, because it presumes a total giving of self.
- * The necessary climate for a real encounter.
- * Entrusting oneself to the other.
- * A basic element of an authentic friendship.
- * An attitude of mutual opening to each other.
- * A sharing of one's own personal lived experiences.
- * Faith in oneself, in the other person and in their relationship.

Activating mutual confidence:

Mutual confiding is the result of a step-by-step process of communication that starts by sharing small, insignificant things, and grows from there to being willing to reveal one's most intimate and personal secrets. This state of mind and heart does not happen overnight!

It cannot be demanded, but has to be won. Recognizing this, if one wants the confidence of another - and in our hearts we all do - then one begins to confide intimately. And then, the intimacy will quickly and easily be returned. Should a person hold back opening his/her heart so as not to worry the other? This can become a habit of lying. Usually it is only an excuse for not telling the truth because of fear and/or *lack* of confidence and trust.

But even though some may feel that they are open to listen to the little, insignificant things, not everyone is at the point of being ready to receive personal secrets that can touch on relationships. If they are shared too soon, before that level of confidence is reached, they can possibly hurt the relationship. We have to condition ourselves both to *receive* them, and to be willing to *share* them with complete candor at the right time. Reciprocating is an art which is acquired with good will and only gradually.

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Which of my personal experiences do I find it difficult to share with the members of my family?
Why?
2. What can and must I do to improve my personal attitude?

RELEASING THE ENERGY OF LOVE

Within each family there is a mysterious energy of love.
If it can be kindled it can bring about a true revolution of love over the whole world.
But in order for this energy
To produce a human thermonuclear explosion,
It has to be released
With the full cooperation
Of all the members of the family
Through
A personal and loving self-giving to each other.

LOVE

Attempts to define love have been made by philosophers, scientists and poets. However, it is not easy to define. In general, we could say that love is:

That which gives meaning to human life

We all are born to love and to be loved so that it is the most meaningful experience in life, the very purpose of life. Our whole being is geared to love because it is geared to happiness, and *true happiness can only be found where there is real love*. People can spend their entire life seeking satisfaction in money, possessions and power without knowing that what they really are looking for is love. That is why life without love is meaningless.

The Essence of the Mystery of the Person

When we look at another person with wonderment and excitement, when we respect someone enough to know that we cannot really predict their thoughts or actions, and when we feel awe at the beauty we see in another human being, then we are in the realm of love. For when we sense the mystery in a person, we are acknowledging that their potential is unlimited, and that there is something more going on inside than what we see on the surface.

The truth is what we are sensing in that person is the presence of God, Who is an “ineffable mystery”, totally beyond our purely human thoughts and opinions. Holy Scripture reveals to us that “God is Love”, and that He has made man and woman “in His own “image and likeness”. That implies then that there is hidden within each of us a mysterious *energy of love*, a “divine fire” just waiting to be released; and it is this love that can transform the world.

Thinking and dreaming about the new families of the new civilization of truth and love that is around the corner, I want to quote the prophetic words of the genius Teilhard de Chardin:

“Some day, after we have mastered
The winds, the waves, the tides,
and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love:

And then

For the second time in the history of the world man will have discovered fire!”

THE MEANING OF LOVE

One of the most common distortions about the real nature of love is the contemporary tendency to identify love with sexual instinct or attraction. But true love, which presupposes freedom as an essential element, cannot at all be identified with instincts, feelings or emotions that occur without out willing them, even though we do have the freedom to suppress them. Neither can imagination be identified with the essence of love, because it can misconstrue reality. It is only the intellect that gives us the capacity to grasp and know reality, so that imagination must be guided by the intellect.

This does not, however, make the intellect the essence of love. It is clear that to love someone you have to know the person, but knowing the person does not necessarily mean you love him or her. It depends on one's free will. Therefore, even though knowledge is an essential element of love, love does not essentially happen in the intellect. The core of love resides in the will - the capacity we possess to accept and to reject the reality discovered by our intellect. The capacity to accept or reject shows that freedom is a quality of the will. We accept something freely; we are not forced. Human love has to be free. Consequently the heart of love is a decision of the will that we might call acceptance. That is, acceptance of the person as he/she really is?

Of course, any degree of acceptance is preceded by and guides knowledge and discoveries, and is accompanied by all kinds of sensations, sentiments and feelings.

But when a person says “I love you” he should mean:

I made a decision;
I accept you as you really are
And I feel happy to serve you!”

DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

Love has many faces but there are three that are basic, each requiring a free decision and acceptance.

1. Love of Self:

Since men and women are made in the image of God, by that very nature they cannot but be accepted by God, for they reflect the divine light which makes God Himself luminous and invaluable. And if I am, therefore, for that very reason of inestimable value, I cannot but accept and affirm myself. This is a love of self that has nothing to do with selfishness, which is false and constitutes a too low or too high regard for self. Jesus pointed out that the first most important commandment is to love God; but He went on to say that the second most important commandment is to love one's neighbor as oneself. In point of fact, if we do not love ourselves in this Gospel sense, we cannot truly love our neighbor (be that husband, wife, children, parents, or whomever); and if we do not love our neighbor, we cannot fulfill the first commandment to love God.

2.- Love of Neighbor:

In love for self, we accept ourselves because that self is valuable in the eyes of God our Creator. In the love of neighbor, we accept a fellow human being with the same valuable attributes that we have, because he/she too is an image of God.

Thus, to love our neighbor ultimately consists in recognizing and accepting the value God has imparted to others, and in wanting for others the same kind of good that we desire for ourselves. So, if we desire our own integrity and affirm it, we should desire also the others integrity and affirm it.

Actually, the word "love" is used to characterize a number of dimensions ranging from a completely animal instinct to the very highest form which defines God Himself, the source of all love. The Greeks of old had separate words to distinguish those various dimensions for which the one word "love" is used; so we too must be conscious of what kinds of love we are referring to:

Stegos: Instinctive love that is on the level of animals.

Eros: Carnal... love that is based upon external beauty, etc.

Charis: Charitable love that is altruistic.

Philos: Filial... love that arises unconditionally from the heart.

Agape: Total..... love that pre-supposes a total giving of self - found completely only in God

Who is Love.

Wholesome love that can be found in marriages, families, relationships, communities, etc. are all a reflection of "Agape", the essence of God Himself; and therefore there is no limit to the degree to which it can be deepened. All these kinds of love must be seen as rooted in God's love, the common source of

all true love. That is, all human beings are accepted and loved by God, and thanks to this love, we exist and are able love and to be loved.

3. Love of God

According to the scriptures, God created us not because we are valuable in and of ourselves, but because He, being love, made us lovable. As St. Augustine comments, "*God does not love us because we are good; but we are good because He loves us.*" God has loved us first and from this original love all other human love is derived.

To discover this magnificent fact and to accept it, is the *First Step* on our journey to become able to love Him. The *Second Step* is to accept Him, as our personal Creator and Savior. The *Third Step* is receiving His Grace to fulfill His Will. That summarizes the love of man and woman for God. There is no higher love than this.

FAMILY LOVE (embracing our *nearest* neighbors)

To discern the quality of love in a family it is necessary to pay attention to the mystery of the family by:

1. Concentrating on its main subjects - God, spouses, parents, sons and daughters and brothers and sisters.
2. Discerning the quality of their interaction.
3. Finding out what is happening to the seed of the energy of love that is dormant within each member of the family, realizing that the experience of love is, very often, the measure of the quality of a relationship.
4. Discovering what place God occupies in the family.
5. Determining the level of openness in the family.

To help in this adventure it would be helpful to reflect on and deepen the following dimensions of family love:

1. Conjugal love - Love between husbands and wives. It is the foundation of family love. Its essence is rooted, according to the scriptures, in God. Its specific elements are attraction, respect, knowledge, caring, tenderness, intimacy, sexuality, acceptance, communication, understanding, confiding, friendship, truthfulness, fidelity, no conditions, commitment to unity, communion and openness to children, to God, and to other people. Conjugal love is a Trinitarian mystery of love, in that it is a loving relationship among God, husband and wife.
2. Parental love. Conjugal love lays the foundation for the love to their sons and daughters. As a matter of fact, children are supposed to be the fruit of married love. The main elements of parents' love are respect, knowledge, acceptance, understanding, responsibility, caring, dedication, affirmation, trust, justice, freedom, giving and asking forgiveness, mercy, compassion, listening, learning from everyone, patience, endurance, commitment and having the door always open.
3. Filial love. Sons' and daughters - love for their parents is characterized by: respect, openness, truthfulness, honesty, active listening, trust, faithfulness, obedience, responsibility, interdependent recognition, gratitude, asking and granting forgiveness, cooperation, caring for parents when needed.
4. Fraternal and brotherly love. Love between brothers and sister is expressed by respect, solidarity, defense, support, caring friendship, trust, affirmation, sharing, exchange, and by the practice of the golden rule: "love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Family love can be improved in the way Jesus taught us: "Love one another as I loved you!"

DISCOVERING GOD AT HOME

Families are God's invention. He creates them and wants them to become happy.

He lives in each family, even in families who don't care about him.

Who really believes this?

We are living

In a materialistic, hedonistic and technological society where material things - food, clothing, house, car, machines, money and physical pleasure - are the "promised land."

Actually, even though we do not advert to it, material things have become gods in our lives.

Millions of men and women leave their homes dissatisfied and unhappy,

Searching outside of themselves for what they do not find within. But they do not find it.

And why do they not find it?

Saint Augustine gives us the real answer in his book of "confessions":

"Lord, you made us for you, and our hearts remain restless until they rest in you!"

God is not a luxury.

Because "God is Love", He is our innermost and most urgent need.

There can be no true happiness without Him.

Happy are those families

Who are searching together for God.

The Lord said: "Seek and you shall find".

SEARCHING FOR GOD TOGETHER

If you realize that your sincere efforts to improve your family life and to become a happier family are inefficient and ineffective, what can you do? Invite God into it!

If you acknowledge that God is not important in your marriage and family, and consequently, does not occupy the center of your home life what should you do about it? Make Him the Center!

What do you do when you lose someone or some precious thing? You search thoroughly"

Therefore, if you feel unhappy personally, as a couple or as a family, why not try to search for God together?

How to do it:

Among the different ways to search for God as a family many families have recommended what had been meaningful in their experience. They discovered that they had to bridge the gap between Faith and family life by creating a "family spirituality" by:

- 1.- Giving top priority to personal relationship of each member of the family with God. Because *the closer we come to God, the closer we come to each other.*
- 2.- Deepening faith, by developing different ways of finding meaning in life, and understanding our existence in God's plan.
- 3.- Keeping God's commandments, written in our hearts.
- 4.- Experiencing reconciliation with each other and with God.
5. Praying together - briefly, but daily.
- 6.- Listening together to the Word of God. Sharing it periodically.
- 7.- Reviewing family events in the light of God's Word in order to discern what He is saying through each particular event.
- 8.- Participating as a family, in the weekly Parish, Church or Temple worship, religious education and apostolic activities.
- 9.- Being open and hospitable. Faith and deeds have to go together.
- 10.- Celebrating God's love at home as much as possible, especially thanking Him for all His wonderful attributes and gifts.

Reflect and share as a family:

1. How important is God in our family and home?
2. Are we searching for God together, as a family? Positive or negative signs.

THE BIBLE, THE LIVING WORD OF GOD

God speaks to us in many different ways: through our minds; our hearts; our conscience; nature; lived experiences; circumstances; events; the poor and need; and most especially through the Bible, which is His "Living Word". The world is desperately in need of His Word. It is the only encouraging and hopeful "Good News" in a world constantly filled with bad news; which is one reason why it is so appealing; another reason is that we can find ourselves on virtually every page, almost as if we were looking at as mirror.

The inspiration and authority of the Bible, in its entirety, is the foundation on which you can build a healthy, strong and happy marriage and family life.

The quality of family life is dependent to a great extent on whether or not its members listen to the Word of God within their hearts. If God's Word has priority in our listening, living, loving and giving, our lives will inevitably be centered on Him, and everything else will fall into place.

Many families have told me that reading the Bible at home is well worth the effort. It keeps the family going; it is calming and gives everybody light, strength and peace.

Five minutes in the morning and at night isn't that long, and it is a nice way to start and to end the day. We can fittingly praise God as a start by setting aside just give five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the evening; and then, let the spirit take it from there.

The future of family life depends upon the outcome of a dramatic confrontation between two opposing words: the strident "word of this world," with its strong influence through radio, television, movies, and press; and the "Word of God"," with the powerful energy of God's love.

In this struggle in our family, which "word" will be heard and prevail? It is our choice; but as Jesus said: "We cannot serve both God *and* mammon."

Reflect and share as a family:

- 1.- Is the bible important in my family? Explain.
- 2.- To which "word" do we pay the most heed as a family?
- 3.- What are some obstacles to our listening to the "Word of God" together and then putting it into practice?

BECOMING A PRAYING FAMILY

Praying requires Faith, which is a gift from God granted to child-like people who seek Him with a humble and sincere heart. The All-Powerful and Ever Present God can communicate simultaneously with each and every human being. For Him there is no past, present or future. He is the ultimate object of the continuous searching of every human being - the Mystery of Mysteries.

Jesus revealed to us that the One and True God is Triune, and as such is Himself *the perfect Family*. And having been made in His Image, as family, He wants to communicate with us.

He knocks at the door of every home. He wants to relate to every family because He loves each particular family with unconditional love. That is what family prayer is all about. A communication between God and each one of His families. He speaks and He listens. Families too must listen to Him and respond to Him in their daily lives.

In this overly busy world, finding time when the entire family is together is always a problem. There are any number of obstacles, such as work, baseball practice, school work, personal appointments, dates, TV, surfing the internet) some of which are inescapable, and others non-essential. But making time for prayer is most essential, and must be given priority. Life is short! Prayer time does not have to be long. A few minutes a day would be plenty of time for starting. Soon it would become a special part of your family life.

**“If two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever,
It shall be granted you by my father in heaven.**

Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst!”

(Matthew 18, 19-20)

Reflect and share as a family:

Are we a praying family?

SPIRALING OUT

Another common trait of happy families is that they are not a closed system.

They have

Plenty of openings to the world so they can see out and others can see in.

They know that

Intimacy is the first law of love but they don't think of home solely as a fireplace where they gather at the same time.

Often they think of home more

As a kind of landing strip from which they can come and go,

Knowing all the while where their roots are.

BECOMING OPEN AND REACHING OUT

Families cannot live fully happy lives unless they live and think beyond themselves, and share with other people around.

Openness is the test of a healthy, strong, successful and happy family. Openness is an attitude of permanent welcome in living and loving. It is very difficult to think of families independently from society. While on the one hand the quality of conditions in society finally depends on the quality of the conditions within families, because it is precisely families that make up society; on the other hand, perhaps because so many families throughout the world have lost their way, society has been adversely affected, and now we have the anomaly of society having an adverse effect on families. For example, in a society where money is the Number 1 value, it is very difficult to educate the children to their social responsibilities. How can they be educated for cooperation in a competitive society?

Families alone are incomplete communities. They are immersed in the large community we call society. They have to structure activities outside the family to be in touch with society. They need to promote honesty, loyalty, responsibility, dialogue, respect, solidarity and justice, all of which have their origin in the homes. In this way it is families that will have a favorable influence on society, rather than being subject to the negative influences of society.

It is interesting to observe that God's creation is not accomplished by circles but by spirals, as is observable concretely when we look at the galaxies. God Himself, who is not a closed circle but a living spiral of life and love. He creates families in His image and likeness, as communities of life and love, not for themselves but for serving and transforming the world. Whether living within a family or living alone, we all have the same needs that can be found in the heart of every person:

the need for relationship, the need for affirmation, acceptance, esteem and support, the need for intimacy, brotherhood, sisterhood, fatherhood and motherhood.

All people need ways in which, as human beings, they can be in familial relationship with others. The thought and the concept of family is much richer than a simple, single form of structure.

The familial structure is something that we must think about and be concerned about. We must always return to the concrete reality that there is a familial dynamic within everyone of us. How can this be enriched and expressed? There is a **practical way to become an open and reaching out family by:**

Serving others through hospitality:

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word hospitable in these words: "Welcoming guests with warmth and generosity, being well disposed towards strangers, and having an open, charitable mind."

Family hospitality is a sharing of all that we have and are - our time, our home, each other. Henri Nouwen in his inspiring book "The Wounded Healer" writes: "Like the osmotic nomads, we live in a desert with many lonely travelers who are looking for a moment of peace, for a fresh drink and for a sign of encouragement so that they can continue their mysterious search for freedom."

Hospitality is a ready made virtue at the fingertips of all families. It is a family affair. Something that the whole family can practice on a daily basis.

SUGGESTED CONDITIONS TO BE HOSPITABLE

a) Have a spirit of simplicity and humility. Do not be concerned about making an impression. The compulsion to have everything right can kill the spirit of spontaneity and make you feel that it would be easier just not to have company at all.

b) Have an open-minded attitude, and avoid prejudgments. To think that everybody, in spite of his/her past or present appearances, needs the opportunity to be themselves in your home. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his or her own uniqueness. If you reach out and share yourselves with them, you may begin to see them in a different light, and they may even gain a new perspective of themselves. An open and loving mind is the key.

c) While requiring that the children listen to "boring" conversation, require also that adults listen to the "small talk" of children. While they may not always express it, children are proud of their families, and their parents' attempts to make their friends welcome.

This means that parents do what they can to make their children's friends comfortable, and that the children be attentive and courteous toward the guests of their parents.

When people visit the home, regardless of their age or who invited them, everyone should consider them the guests of the family. In homes where real hospitality is practiced, people feel accepted by the whole family. This is characteristic of healthy, strong, successful and happy families.

PEACEMAKING

Peacemaking is a serious commitment of those families who are united and open. It is their special charisma. They know from their own experience that true peace is the fruit of true justice; and consequently they decide to be involved in the promotion of justice and peace around them. In fact, the basic reason why there is no peace in society is because there is no justice and peace in most of today's families and homes. And there is no peace in many families and homes because there is no peace in the hearts of the members of those families. Why? Because within the members of those families there is a lack of a personal relationship with God Who is the Author of Justice and Peace.

Therefore, the first exercise in peacemaking is to look inward at one's self. That inward look entails a willingness to respect and accept yourself as you are. We are neither angels nor devils, but half achieved, half unstable creatures. Our personal relationship with God and with each other is the key to be in peace with oneself, and to become a family of peacemakers.

There is a wonderful prayer attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, that could help us find the key to become a family of peacemakers:

“Lord,
Make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
And where there is sadness, joy.
O divine master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand, to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

PART II

AROUND THE TABLE

As we have seen
In the previous pages,
You cannot be truly happy without family love.
Your family love is essentially your family sharing.
Therefore,
The first step to become a happier family is
Strengthening communication and dialogue in the family.
The purpose of the second part of this book
Is precisely:
To give you and your family
Wonderful opportunities to gather together around the table
So that your house will
Become a happy home.

How to go about this:

Make a serious commitment as a family to be involved in gatherings “around the table” by:

1. *Dedicating personal time* - before each family gathering to reflect on the suggested “topic” and write your personal answers to the questions in your personal notebook.
2. *Participate actively* in each “around the table” session by listening attentively and sharing.
3. *Collaborate* with each other, each one according to his/her gifts, making “Around the Table” gathering a loving, joyful and peaceful celebration.

The members of the family, who are not living at home can participate in each “Around the Table” by sending an email etc., with a loving note, along with the personal reflection and answers to the questions. This presents a wonderful opportunity for someone in the family to respond with him or her with a loving report about each “Around the Table.”

FAMILY PICTURES

The purpose of these preliminary steps of "Around the Table"

Is that all the family members

Look at themselves,

As a group, and think and share

About the following key-questions:

Are we a true family?

How would I describe my family?

Are we a happy family?

Are we an open and hospitable family?

Is God important in our family?

How can we become a happier family?

Many families have done this with wonderful results. Here are some positive testimonies:

ARE WE A TRUE FAMILY?

FATHERS

- * "Yes, we like to be together as much as possible. We find joy in each other's successes, and pain in each other's sorrows. We respect one another."
- * "In my mind we are without a doubt a true family, because we are aware of our relationships and anxious to keep lines of communication open. We like to be with each other, to care for and help one another. We tend to share deeply and openly."
- * "Yes, our values, beliefs and goals are similar while at the same time being diverse. When anyone of the family calls for help, the rest are always ready to assist, even though those calls, at times, are silent."

MOTHERS

- * "Yes, God called us to be one!"
- * "I think we are a family as much as anyone I have ever known. We love one another. We are best friends. We hurt for each other. We can disagree, argue, fight and forgive each other. We can be jealous, envious and annoyed with each other, but we can also openly express those feelings without permanent hurt or damage to the relationships. We care about the family."
- * "Yes, because we live together in Christ's love."
- * "Yes, we are a family because we love each other and put ourselves out for each other. We try to affirm the other and change and grow because of our differences. I see God's call in bringing us together. I see God creating unique families with our sons and their wives and children."

Sons

- * "We are a family because we care about each other and we desire to be together and we help each other when one of us needs it."
- * "My family is my base. They are my best friends and they always love me. If that is what being a family is then, yes!"

DAUGHTERS

- * Yes, definitely, because we love one another as family members do. I mean some exasperation, some tenderness, some frustration. some deep love."
- * Yes, because we care for each other and support one another."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. What do I think about the above testimonies?
2. Do I believe that we are a true family? Why?

HOW WOULD I DESCRIBE MY FAMILY?

FATHERS

- * "My family is like a garden, with different flowers, plants and trees. A garden that needs tending, watering, pruning, cultivating and harvesting. A garden that changes with the seasons - constantly bringing forth new and exciting fruits, to see, to touch, smell, taste and be thankful for. The best part is, that I too am a part of that garden and I see myself being nurtured and pruned and allowed to grow by my family of gardeners."
- * "My family is growing. The number of people is growing. Everyone is struggling to grow. There is a lot of love and openness amongst us. We laugh a lot. We affirm one another. We support one another."

MOTHERS

- * "Close. Family oriented. We share our love, our joy, our tears, our happiness and peace."
- * "Each member is very different. They all have individual traits very unlike each other. Some are very generous, others not as much. They all are very talented in their own ways, but they all are very public-spirited. They are all involved in local activities in some way or another. They give many hours to their churches, city, schools and organizations as well as taking care of their families."
- * "Definitely we are an outgoing, challenging, caring, gregarious, competitive, involved, giving, loving family. I like to think we are special."
- * "My family is changing and growing, and a pretty happy one. There are straight relationships between some members, but I know they are trying to be open enough to reach out and heal the hurts."

SONS

- * "My family is like no other. I enjoy them but I can't explain them. I work with them. I play with them. I am a part of them and they are a part of me. "
- * "We are a loving family who support each other even in disagreements. We are fun, silly, caring and considerate."

DAUGHTERS

- * "We are all a little afraid to share our feelings so it is sometimes hard to get close to each other. But I feel lucky that in general we get along so well."
- * "It's accepting, safe, warm and sheltered. Sometimes it is a bit overbearing; sometimes expectations are too high."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. What do I like most about the above testimonies? Why?
2. What do I like most about my own family?

ARE WE A HAPPY FAMILY?

FATHERS

- * "This is tough to answer but I believe we are a happy family because we are open, loving, affirming and close."
- * "Yes, we are a happy family. We thank the Lord daily for His blessings. We really enjoy each other's company and we like what the Lord is helping us to become."
 - *Yes, we are aware of our family roots and we feel proud o them. We enjoy being together. We like to have family celebrations at home, and invite people to share our love and happiness along with us."

MOTHERS

- * "Yes, because we care for one another with love, and do many things together as a family."
- * "We must be happy because no one has as much fun together as we do. I think we are happy because we have the free choice of spending our time together or with our friends. We enjoy each other's company and each other's friends."
- * "Yes, because we have open communication. I think the biggest reason is because I've learned my only job with my children is to love and affirm them - unless they ask for advice from me. This frees them up to be themselves and enjoy their relationships with because they feel accepted where they are."

SONS

- * "I believe as the years go on and we all become older I am happier with my family and they are happier also. It has become hard for me to understand other families who may be broken or unhappy."
- * "Yes, we are a happy family. Meshing 17 personalities is never easy, but over all we are happy."

DAUGHTERS

- * "Basically we are happy, but because we don't always share our feelings, we don't let other members know what is important to us. Therefore, we have misunderstandings and hurt feelings. When get beyond these misunderstandings, we are happy because we are sure of each other's love."
- * "Our family is happy for the most part because we all make an effort to be a real family. There are some definite underlying feelings that aren't allowed to surface though."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Judging by the previous testimonies, what do *I* think happy families are like?
2. So, is my family a happy one? Why do I think so? Or think not?

A. Are we open and hospitable?

FATHERS

- * "We certainly are a reaching out people. About hospitality, I don't know if it is a negative but we sure need our space - friendly yes, but to protect our intimacy, not too close to people".
- * "We are a hospitable family. We try to keep the circle open and expanding, which is sometimes scary - not for us, but for those on the outside hesitating to come in. Somewhat like a giant ferris wheel - looks like fun, and yet, you're afraid to get involved."
- * "Yes we are open. We are hospitable, when we have to be. We live in a small apartment."

MOTHERS

- * "We are like Grand Central Station. I do feel however, that it must be hard for an outsider to jump into this crazy circle. Some find the lack of privacy hard to cope with. Some don't like the spontaneity of the family. They are used to a more structured atmosphere. Some cannot understand how each brother or sister or parent seems to have an opinion on each other's lives, but even so, they seem to be attracted to the light of our family. I do not know how we would change it, even if we could."
- * "We are open and hospitable for the most part, but I see hurts in the in-law's families that need to be dealt with, and I pray our boys will be instrumental in their healing."
- * "Yes, friends are always welcome. We often reach out to others in their struggling situations."

SONS

- * I find we are generally more open to other people who come from a family similar to ours. Outsiders with a different family background have a harder time blending in."
- * "Yes, we are open and hospitable. We share and help others. We are very active in our Churches."

DAUGHTERS

- "Yes, we are open to each other and every one who comes to our door."
- * "Definitely hospitable, almost to the point of overdoing it."
 - * "My family is a giving family and willing to help others. But we are not open with our feelings. So I think we are hospitable but lacking in openness."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. What does it mean to me to be an open and hospitable family?
2. Are we one of those families? (Positive or negative signs)

B. Is God important in our family?

FATHERS

- * "If it wasn't for God and His love, we wouldn't be a family worth having today. God is part of our marriage. Our love for one another is His love for us. We believe that mutual forgiveness is an important first step in building a family relationship. What better example do we have than God's forgiveness through His son Jesus?"
- * "God is important in our family. We all are seeking the Lord. Sad to say, none of our boys is active as a Catholic. Yet it is more important that they are truly seeking the Lord. We are all churchgoers and it seems because we want to, not because it is a rule. We pray particularly at family meals."

MOTHERS

- * "Definitely, God is Number One in our family. We are very involved in Church. We consider weekly Mass very important and strongly stress the rules of the Church."
- * "My husband and I feel God is the center of our family. He has bestowed so many blessings upon us and our family. I am quite pleased with the spiritual lives of our two oldest daughters. The three young sons and a daughter are still searching for their own Faith, but I am confident that the seeds have been sown, and some day will bear fruit. They all have their own relationship with Jesus."

SONS

- * "I think traditional God and Church has a less important rule in the family as we are starting to live our own ways. We all love and worship God but it is in our own ways. We do not worship together."
- * "Yes, God is very important to our family. The key is for God to be important to each individual and then He will be important to the family."

DAUGHTERS

- * "No, God is important to me, and somewhat to my parents. They think being a good person is what God wants. But God is not important to my brother and sister. This is one of our biggest needs."
- * "God plays a large role in the lives of my parents, my brother's and mine. Apparently, however, God doesn't play an important part in the lives of my other brother's and sister's."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Do the honest testimonies of these families sound familiar?
2. What place does God occupy in my life and in my family?

C. How can we become a happier family?

FATHERS

- * "We can become a happier family by planning time together. By the fun times as well as deep sharing times. By growing as duals and family units, I can contribute by ministering to, by seeking to be a Godly person, striving to do God's will, doing the godly thing and sharing openly, honestly and lovingly."
- * "I believe we can become even happier by trusting even more in the Lord. I know He has his arms wrapped around us as a family and it wouldn't hurt us a bit to let go, and express our Faith to others, in our daily lives, through word and deed."
- * "By working together on problems and difficulties, and always smiling."

MOTHERS

- * "By trusting in the Lord for our future. By really valuing and appreciating time together. By using opportunities to affirm each other, and keeping our priorities in order."
- * "I guess our biggest problem is not only accepting in-laws into our family structure, but having them accept us, as a family. At this time, we all have separate spiritual lives, and I think we should work at bringing our family together to the Lord."
- * "By using God's unconditional love for each other. By seeing the hurt in the other that causes him or her to act that way. By being more forgiving and forgetting."

SONS

- * "As time goes on we will become a happier family if we keep enjoying each other's company. Seeing each other makes us happier. I believe that if are able to live and work the lines of communication with each other, we will surely be happier."
- * "Spending more time together, and keeping expectations for others in the family low. We need to let each one be themselves and be flexible when we all get together."

DAUGHTERS

- * "Loving each other more. By treating one another equally. By communicating honestly and scrupulously."
- * "To become happier we need more and deeper communication. By sharing our feelings even when it is hard and by accepting each other's differences."

Reflect and share as a family:

1. Have I learned something from these testimonies? What?
2. What could we do to become a happier family?

SELF PORTRAITS

A happy self is
The departing point for happiness in families.
It is a must.

The First Step to Become
A happy person,
Is
Being in touch with one's inner self
To discover the real person each one is.

The following two pages can help in this exciting adventure
All that is needed is personal honesty and willingness
To
Reflect and work on them by writing down in the notebook
the answers to the questions.
Then,
Being ready to share during the "around the table."

SELF ENCOUNTERING

The purpose of this personal reflection is that each member the family look at himself or herself as a person, to develop a healthy and strong self-image.

To be able to touch and be touched by the members one's own family we must first be in touch with ourselves. For this we need self honesty, self awareness, self respect, self knowledge, self acceptance, self understanding, self control, self confidence and self esteem.

A lack of self-awareness is the main cause of families failing in their communication and dialogue and consequently there is a feeling of emptiness, loneliness and unhappiness in personal lives. When this happens, a person is in danger of falling into the trap of succumbing to all kinds of "escapes" and "addictions," and even suicide. The answer is to experience an honest encounter with one's inner self.

Questionnaire:

1. What are the two or three words that best describe me?
2. What do I like or dislike most about myself? Why?
3. What makes me happy or unhappy? Why?
4. What are the three most important things in my life?
5. What is my most urgent need? Why?
6. What is my main problem? Do I face it?
7. Do I feel loved by my family? Explain.
8. What are the clear signs that I am selfish with my family?
9. Who is my best friend? Why?
10. Why do I want to go on living?
11. What are my goals in life?
12. Do I really believe in God.? Why, or who not?

Along these 12 points, which ones would I like to share with my family in our next "Around the Table?"

WRITING LOVE LETTERS

The purpose of this step is for the members of the family to write a couple of letters to prepare oneself - mind, heart, will and spirit to give and to receive forgiveness, and to have an experience of reconciliation Around the Table.

To myself:

You never have never written a letter to yourself, so here is that opportunity. The purpose is to face yourself in an interior mirror in order to realize discover who you really are; and then to write down whatever you see and feel about yourself - good, bad, appealing, ugly, sad, joyful, sinful, holy. Finish your letter by congratulating yourself for the good, and forgiving yourself for the bad.

Remember that without a reconciliation with yourself, you will never really be able to receive forgiveness from, or to forgive others. • This letter is personal, so you do not have to share it.

To God:

Whether or not you are accustomed to talk to God, you now have an opportunity to write a “love letter to Him. You could write in this letter what you think and feel about Him, and what you need and expect from Him. After all, He *is* your Creator and loves you unconditionally. He forgives you, no matter what you may have done. You can share this letter with your family if you want to.

To each member of my family:

Now you are more ready to write a “love letter” to each member of your family. The three major points of this letter could be:

1. Point out the good qualities you admire in each of them. you see in him or her.
- 2.- Giving thanks for something he/she did for you.
- 3.- Ask forgiveness for something inconsiderate you did to him or her. This is shared only with the person to whom it is addressed.

To my family, as a unit:

Perhaps including the following points:

1. Expressing what you appreciate the most in your family.
2. Thanking them for all you gain from your family.
3. Apologizing for something you have done against your family.

This letter could be shared in your next Around the Table.

GROWING TOGETHER

Your family is still under construction.
Deepening relationships require work that is never finished.

Your family is not yet finished,
Life is an opportunity for growing.
Growing is a law of life.
Growing is the key to a rich family life.

In fact,
Family is a system of belonging,
A space where people can grow positively together.

Today,
More and more families are “growing” in negative ways.
They are growing apart.
They are growing discouraged. They are growing frustrated.
Your family is your best chance to grow and grow together in positive ways

There are many types of growth that take place in a family:

Physical:

Children *grow physically*. The family grows as new members are added. Family members *grow older*. As new needs arise, *expenses grow*, too.

Mental:

Family members learn and make wise decisions and choices. They develop talents and skills and try new activities together.

Emotional:

They show love, respect and concern for each other. They mutually challenge, encourage and support. They share each other's innermost feelings and dreams.

Social:

They maintain strong friendships outside the home, reach out and serve neighbors and others. They are spiritually creative. They search for God and pray together. Happy families need to grow in all these ways. A growing family is a gift to our society.

BEING A NURTURING FAMILY

Orientation

A growing family is a nurturing one. When the members of a family don't care about each other's growth, the whole family is in trouble. Nurturing families develop individuals who have a sense of self-worth. Troubled families develop individuals who lack this sense of self-worth.

How to Become a Nurturing Family?

This will be the contents of the rest of the steps of this second part. But before we go ahead, it would be helpful to:

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Are we a growing family? In positive or negative ways?
2. Are we being nurtured within the family and also trying to nurture others?
3. In what ways do I personally feel that my family is helping me to grow and mature?
4. Who among the members of my family encourages me the most?
5. What kind of help and support do I need to grow spiritually?
6. What are the main difficulties we have to grow together?
7. What would I suggest to overcome those difficulties?

FACING OUR FAMILY REALITY

What is happening in our family?

This is a very important step toward a happier family, but not an easy one. The difficulty is rooted in the fear we all have in facing our real crises, conflicts and problems; because if we do, then we know that we will have to change. We are so frightened by the prospect of change that we would rather cling to our actual situation. But it is encouraging to realize that although crises, conflicts and problems can push us away from each other, they can also pull us into a closer and improved relationship.

Facing the reality of our family pre-supposes:

1. Personal honesty.
2. Willingness to cope with our real crises and conflicts.
3. Courage to confront our serious problems.
4. Truthfulness to find the deep causes.
5. Wisdom to choose creative ways to change.
 - a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
 - b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
 - c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Am I really honest with my family? How would I explain my answer?
2. What do I do when my family is in a crisis or in conflict?
3. Do we have a serious problem? If yes, what are its causes?
4. What can or should we do, together, to solve our problem?
5. What can I do personally?

RELEASING OUR FAMILY ENERGY

Orientation

We all know there is an “energy crisis” in the world. But much more devastating than the physical energy crisis is the ignorance of the presence of the “energy of love” that is within each individual, couple and family. This energy is a human potential, dormant within each man and woman. This energy is divine in its origin because it is continually created by God, who himself *is* Love. And this energy is in fact released any time one man and one woman experience a face to face according to the plan of God. This is precisely the sacred origin of the families.

The big question is: What are today’s men and women doing with the divine energy of love in their marriages and in their families? The true and honest answer to this transcendental question is the key to start passing from our materialistic, hedonistic and selfish society to a new society and new civilization a civilization of justice and love.

After reading pages **18-21** of this book, answer the following Questionnaire.

Questionnaire

1. Can I accept that there is indeed a special “energy of love” within the heart of each person?
2. Have I experienced that sincere communication is the secret to releasing that love?
3. What attempts have I made to release that energy of love?
4. Can I think of a specific instance when I have especially experienced that special energy?
5. What could we do concretely to become a true community of love?
 - a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
 - b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
 - c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

ENHANCING OUR FAMILY RELATIOSHIPS

To review:

1. A true family is a system of healthy and strong relationships.
2. Family relationships do not happen overnight.
3. Happy families are those which develop loving relationships.

Therefore,

To enhance your family relationships you are invited:

- a) To evaluate them in their actual state, by realizing that a relationship is an emotional connection between two people, and that each pair of relationships is a special and unique sharing of selves.
- b) To know how many pairs of relationships there are in your family. Multiply the number of the members of your family in relation to yourself (including God as a Member) by two (suggesting both giving and receiving), but then adding the same number to each individual of the family apart from yourself, plus each individual's relationship to the entire family as a unit and each one individually to God, plus the entire family's relationship to God , and you could end up with dozens of relationships. Then slowly re-read pages 13-14 Among all those lines of communication in the family, if only one line is broken, the entire family is affected. For example if only the father, or one of the sons, ignores his relationship with God, that affects the entire family....Now you will be more ready to reflect and write in your notebook your personal answers to the questionnaire. Subsequently you can join the other members of your family for your next "Around the Table". This is a very important step because the release of your family energy is in direct proportion to the growing quality of your family relationships.

Questionnaire

1. What is the quality of my personal relationship with each member of my family? (Very good; Good; Fair; Poor)
2. What is the quality of my personal relationship with God? (Very good; Good; Fair; Poor)
3. With whom do I have the closest relationship within my family? Why?
- 4.- What is my most difficult relationship in my family? Why?
- 5.- What are my expectations about each family member?
- 6.- What do I think the members of my family expect from me?
- 7.- What can or should we do to improve our relationships with each other, and with God?

STRENGTHENING OUR FAMILY COMMUNICATION

What is the best way to nurture and to improve family relationships?

As you have learned by your own experience (pages 24-29 of this book) creative and effective communication in the home is the secret to healthy, strong, successful and loving family relationships. Therefore, The next pages of this second part are dedicated to encourage you to better the quality of your family communication. To start this important family adventure:

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I communicate with each family member on a regular basis?
2. Do I respect all my family members? If not, why not?
3. Do I listen to all my family members? If not, why not?
4. Do I accept all my family members? If not, why not?
5. Do I understand all my family members? If not, who not?
6. Do I trust all my family members? If not, why not?
7. Do I help all my family members? If not, why not?
8. Do I feel at peace with all members of my family?
9. Do I love all the members of my family? If not, why not?
10. Do I have a good communication with God? If not, why not?

HAVING FAMILY DIALOGUES

While “dialogue” and “inter-communication” can be and are used interchangeably, one way to distinguish the two is to look upon “*dialogue*” as an interchange the main purpose of which is to avoid or to overcome problems; whereas with “*i*” the goal is to deepen relationships. Obviously both types of interchange are important within a family, whether between two members, or among all of the members. In any case, it is very important to remember how personal reflection and writing can be helpful before any kind of interchange - this along with faithfulness and commitment, giving high priority in terms of time, money and energy

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

- 1.- Am I really open to family dialogue?
- 2.- What kind of difficulties do I have in practicing it?
- 3.- What do I expect from our family dialogues?
- 4.- What are the most frequent issues in our family dialogues?
- 5.- Do we have any “taboo” issues in our family? Which ones?
- 6.- Do I share my feelings, concerns and disappointments?
- 7.- Do I usually emphasize the positive or the negative? Why?
- 8.- Do I like to share what unites or what divides us? Why?
- 9.- Do I commit myself in each family dialogue?
- 10.- What do I gain from our family dialogues?

SETTING ASIDE QUALITY FAMILY TIME

As was pointed out in the beginning, families everywhere have experienced tremendous changes in the past three decades. Family members have been increasingly drawn out of the home.

This movement away from the home has decreased the amount of time available for family time. Most families have been fragmented as individual members by becoming over-involved in work, activities, volunteerism and leisure pursuits. The result of more opportunities for involvement is that less time is spent in a family. Ordinary day-to-day activities, which once were shared by family members, have been eliminated or replaced by individual pursuits. Many families find it nearly impossible to gather together even once a day for the evening meal.

The experience and testimony of the happy families is that putting a high priority on family life, gives space and time - prime time, not leftover time - for being together. You may have to juggle schedules and limit your individual, social or even religious involvement, but you do not let work or activities routinely infringe on your couple and family time. And when you do spend time together, you will develop a strong sense of family and home.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I allocate time for myself and God in my daily life?
2. Who or what gets prime time in my life? Who or what gets leftover time?
3. Would I consider our time together as a family quality time or leftover time?
4. How would I like to spend some time with another family member? Who?
5. How can we balance having family harmony while each pursues his/her own thing?
6. In what ways can we enrich our time together?
7. What is my most treasured family activity? Why?
8. What am I willing to delete from the family calendar? Why?
9. What would I like to add to the family calendar? Why?
10. Would a simpler life-style benefit our family? Explain.

Sharing Our Everyday Little Things

Just as birds were born to fly and fish to swim, so we humans are meant to share with each other. If we do not, we suffer, get sick and die within. It is not necessary to share always on deeply significant events; rather it is the little things that happen to everybody in an ordinary day that make up the greater portion of our lives. And it is in sharing the little things regularly that families will be more inclined to share big and serious matters when they arise.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

What are the Three Things:

1. I like to see?
2. I don't like to see?
3. I like to hear?
4. I don't like to hear?
5. I like to smell?
6. I don't like to smell?
7. I like to taste?
8. I don't like to taste?
9. I like to touch or hold?
10. I don't like to touch or hold?"
11. What is my favorite day of the week? Why?
12. What do I like best to do on a regular weekend? Why?

EXPERIENCING RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

Peace vs. injustice, violence, war and death.

This is the challenge all over the world. This is the challenge in everybody's home.

Where to start a spiral of justice, peace and life? The answer is in our homes!

There is no justice in our society because there is no justice in our homes.

There is no peace in the streets of towns and cities because there is no peace within our families.

There is no reconciliation among the countries and continents because there is no reconciliation between husbands and wives, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters.

Do you want to be a peacemaker in our tortured society? Try to be a peacemaker in your own family.

Do you want to experience reconciliation in your family? Find the peace within your innermost self.

Read again pages **17-20** and **26-29** and write a love letter to each of the members of your family or:

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. In what ways do I think I have failed in my relationship with each member of my family by not asking or granting forgiveness?
2. In what ways do I believe I have failed against the whole family?
3. To improve my relationship with each member of my family I want to commit myself to... (something concrete)
4. To improve my behavior in relationship with my entire family I want to commit myself to... (something feasible, realizable)
5. To be faithful to my commitment, I honestly need...

ACCEPTING EACH FAMILY MEMBER AS THEY ARE

We determined that acceptance is the quintessence of true love. Like it or not, we are what we are. Even though we are equal in dignity, we are different in many ways: sex, personal qualities, education, culture, likes and dislikes. Differences are not obstacles to a peaceful togetherness unless we reject them. Just as it is not easy to accept others as they are, so also is it not easy to accept ourselves as we are. And the corollary is true; if we do not accept others, we will not first accept ourselves. Acceptance would be a good topic for the next "Around the Table" gathering.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I in fact accept myself as I am, with all my personal characteristics, character, temperament, imperfections, weaknesses, inclinations, limitations, desires, hobbies etc.? (List positive or negative signs)
2. What do I find most difficult to accept about myself? Why?
3. Have I come to accept each member of my family as he or she is? (List positive and negative signs)
4. Do I feel accepted by each member of my family? (List positive and negative signs)
5. Do I accept my family just as it is? (List positive and negative signs)
6. Do I feel accepted by my family just as I am?
7. In my innermost self, do I feel accepted by God?

UNDERSTANDING EACH OTHER WITH THE HEART

This Around the Table is, as always, for every kind of family, but especially for families where there are teenagers and young adults. The generation gap, the challenging phenomenon of all times, is dramatically present and active in many of today's families. Every year millions of family members of all ages - fathers, mothers, children, teenagers, young adults and even grandparents - run away from their homes, searching for understanding and love.

Why do people run away?

There are many reasons but the main reason is lack of understanding and acceptance from some of the members of one's own family. Fortunately there are people who are dedicated to taking care of, healing and serving "runaways", but the real solution is within the homes. *"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"*

If there were more dialogues between generations in the homes, there would be more mutual understanding in the whole world.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Are there signs of a generation gap in our family?
2. Do I sometimes feel lonely and misunderstood?
3. Do I understand myself? Positive or negative signs.
4. Who among the members of my family understand me best?
5. Whom would I like to understand me better?
6. Who in my family seems to me to feel lonely and misunderstood?
7. Whom do I understand best?
8. Whom do I find it hardest to understand?
9. What are the major issues of disagreement between us?
10. Where do I feel least understood by my family but that I would like them to understand?

MEETING OUR UNFULFILLED NEEDS

One more goal of this Around the Table is to identify our real - personal and familial - needs, as we become able to share them with our family members, and consequently, help and support each other. **The unfulfilled needs** are the main cause of unhappiness in so many families. The problems of alcohol, drugs, delinquency and suicide are a social phenomenon which have their roots in the inability of people to understand one's self and to trust each other, thereby preventing them from sharing their innermost needs with their families. **A Home** should be a privileged space for confidences and for the most friendly relationship between husband and wife, parents and children and brothers and sisters. It is possible, and rewarding.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I consider myself a happy person? Why? Or why not?
2. Have I ever thought about leaving home? Why? Or why not?
3. What do I think are my real needs? (Make a list)
4. What do I consider to be my most important need?
5. What do I consider my most my most urgent need?
6. How am I fulfilling my personal needs at the present time?
7. Do I have unfulfilled needs? Which ones?
8. Am I addicted to any kind of drugs? Which ones?
9. What do I need from my family to fulfill my needs?
10. In my opinion, what do I consider to be my family's basic need?
11. What is our most important and actual family need?
12. How am I cooperating to fulfill our family needs?

DISCOVERING AND SHARING OUR VALUES

The root of unhappiness in many families is the scarcity or loss of good values. My “values” are those things to which I give priority in my life; consequently they can be positive or negative. Among the most positive values that a person can possess is his family. Obviously there are many kinds of values in a family: Personal and common, material and spiritual, moral and religious natural and supernatural. Values in a family develop and change and in the process of changing very often become conflicting. Therefore it is very important that you discover your family values, not with the intention of imposing them on each other, but to find the good values you have in common.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. What do I consider to be my most positive value?
2. What do I consider to be the greatest value - objectively?
3. What do I consider to be the most positive value for each member of my family?
4. What do I consider to be the most positive values of my family as a whole?
5. What do I consider to be the most positive values of my friends? Do they stand out?
6. What do I consider to be the most deficient good values in society?
7. What do I consider that society in general thinks about God and Religion as ultimate values?

MAKING OUR HOUSE A HOME

A “house” is a building, even if no one lives in it. A “home” is a place where people who love one another dwell, even if it is not a building. As the saying goes: “A house is made of brick, but a home is made of love.” A happy home is one of the greatest values of life. But a happy family that lives in a “home”, and not just a “house”, does not just happen. It is something that every family member, from the oldest to the youngest has to work at.

To make a happy home requires:

- a) *Identifying yourself with your family.* Knowing that you are an essential part of your family and your family is an essential part of you. There is an interaction between you and your family.
- b) *Sharing Responsibility:* A family is a mysterious kind of body. Consequently, each member of this living body is responsible for nourishing the whole body according to their gifts and capabilities. In a healthy family there is no authoritarian boss or manipulative martyr. All are expected to become whole human beings and to share responsibility.
- c) *Reviewing Family Chores Frequently:* Everyone has to do his/her share, according to his/her abilities. Family responsibility is the ability to respond to everybody’s needs, and to the job of home-making. It is not “his” or “her” problem, but the family’s problem. It is not “mom’s dishes” or “dad’s garbage” but the family’s.
 - a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
 - b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
 - c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I consider myself to be a responsible person? Why do I think so?
2. Do I share responsibility in my family? Positive or negative signs.
3. In what sense do I need to improve in this area?
4. Do I need someone to control me?
5. Who is generally in charge of the discipline in my family?
6. Is there active participation and cooperation in my family?
7. Are the members of my family expected to take the consequences for their irresponsibility?
8. What do I think is the best way to go about dividing chores in our family?

PLANNING AND ACHIEVING OUR GOALS

One of the best ways to make a house a home is to set goals together - a characteristic of those who believe in family. Another is to dare to dream about becoming a healthy and strong family.

Whatever be your family situation, one thing is sure - *a happy family life doesn't "just happen."*

To set family goals it is important to:

- a) *Believe* that within each family member there are seeds of greatness and dreams that need to be stimulated.
- b) *Realize* that in a family there are different kinds of goals: individual; improve job performance or grades; conjugal; deeper marriage spirituality; common inter-family relations; etc. And to realize too, that frequently conflicts arise.
- c) *Get together* to evaluate and realize what goals are in conflict and balance them, by moving from "my dreams and goals" to "our dreams and goals." In fact, the personal commitment to the dreams and goals of the family, is the key to accomplish one's personal goals and dreams.
 - a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
 - b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
 - c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

- 1 Do I know what I want in life? What are my dreams?
2. Do I set my goals to achieve my dreams? What are my goals?
3. What is my driving force to accomplish my goals?
4. How is my family helping me move myself toward my goals?
5. Does my family know where it is going? Where?
6. What are our the goals of my family? Are we achieving them?
7. Do we get together once or twice a year, to write out and to share what we would like to accomplish in the next six months or year? If answer is yes, how is this helping me? If no, what would I suggest?
8. What is my suggested list of family goals?

MAKING OUR FAMILY GROUND RULES

A family is a group of people who live and grow together within certain boundaries. Mothers and fathers grow as they, in turn, nurture the growth of their children. During this “process of strengthening family the members often know what they want - their goals - but aren’t too sure of how to go forward. They need some kind of rules.

Rules are sometimes developed as a disciplinary measure -- “be at home by 11 PM!” --

But the best rules are those developed to ensure values, behavior and routine *before* there is a problem; to improve interpersonal communication and relationships, like “rules for handling disagreements” etc. Healthy families stress rules rather than discipline. Discipline is used when rules and behavior break down. It is a corrective rather than a preventive action.

In order for the rules to be effective

They should be reasonable, positive, clear, short, flexible and specific about the behavior we expect and about the good consequences that will result; also, easy to remember.

Inevitably rules get broken. Therefore, they have to be reinforced and reviewed. And if the positive reinforcement is not effective, penalties are needed.

Rules must be created with the involvement of all family members and according to their possibilities. They are for the members of the family, not the members of the family for the rules.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I agree that we need rules to become a happy family? Why?
2. What are the operative rules in our family? Who made them?
3. Which of those rules are effective and which are ineffective? Explain.
4. Do I break our family rules? Why?
5. Are our family rules enforced? Explain how or how not?
6. What are my concrete suggestions about rules in our family?
7. How can we plan to work on our rules as a family?

HAVING FUN TOGETHER

Happy Families have fun together. Many things have been suggested as ways to become healthy and strong as a family, but an important additional element is the ability to enjoy yourselves. Leisure time shared by the family strengthens and provides opportunities for communication.

Leisure time activities provide lifelong memories, that will continue to create your family in years to come. Family leisure time is a free time to enjoy each other. Most of today's families do not have the time any more just to enjoy each other. Consequently, the stress destroys them. It is easy to get so caught up in work and other activities in the frantic pace of life, that leisure at home is considered an looks like an unobtainable luxury. A concerted effort is necessary to make free time for family leisure activities a priority. We could say that, the family that plays (as well as prays) together stays together.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I agree that leisure time as a family can make us happier?
2. Does our family schedule leisure time activities? Explain.
3. What are my favorite family leisure activities? Why?
4. What is the "best time" I have ever had with my family?
5. Does my whole family participate in our leisure activities? If some family members do not participate, why don't they?
6. What is my level of involvement in these activities?
7. How can we vary our leisure time activities so that everyone has a choice?
8. Do I feel that having fun together is influencing our family life positively? Write about your personal experience.

CELEBRATING AT HOME

A way of strengthening family life is to focus on the positive, unique aspects. Celebrating the positive can give your family the energy and courage to work on the less than positive things. Too often families get so wrapped up in their problems and shortcomings that they either forget, or lack the energy, to celebrate. Gathering together as a family to commemorate important events and traditions is a prerequisite for strong and healthy families.

What and how to celebrate:

First of all celebrate God, the Creator of your family, by worshiping and thanking Him together on His Holidays and Liturgical Feasts.

Secondly, celebrate your family roots by expressing your traditions and rituals, expressions of your family spirituality as well as a celebration of the uniqueness of *your family*. This way, your traditions and rituals become folk customs that can be shared from generation to generation.

Thirdly, celebrate the ordinary events of your family life - Christmas; Easter; Name days; Birthdays; Baptisms; Weddings; Pregnancies; Anniversaries: Physical and Spiritual Healings; Graduations; Homecomings; Farewells: Father's Day: Mother's Day: Grandparents' Day: Etc.

- a) Reflect on the questionnaire provided.
- b) Write your personal answers in your notebook.
- c) Celebrate another Around the Table.

Questionnaire

1. Do I like family celebrations? Why?
2. What is my favorite family celebration? Why?
3. What are our family traditions and rituals?
4. What special traditions and rituals do our friends have?
5. Could I suggest a new family tradition or ritual? Which one?
6. How can we celebrate the ordinary events in our family life?
7. How do we celebrate God on his holidays (Sundays etc.) and liturgical feasts?
8. Do we need to improve? What? How?

PART III

Around The Bible

Happy families are God centered.

They search together for God.

They listen together to his living Word.

They pray together.

That is why they stay together.

God is the secret of their happy home.

If you want to become a happy family,

Honestly ask yourselves:

* Is God important in my family?

* What place does God occupy in my home?

* If we are not a God-centered family, what could we do?

The purpose of the third part of this book is

To guide you in your wonderful adventure of searching and following God together.

To experience for yourself that

The closer you come to God the closer you will come together.

THE BIBLE

I am sure your experience Around the Table 1 has been meaningful, but at the same time deep questions have emerged both from your personal reflections and from your family sharing.

Who has the right answers? Only God! How to encounter God? God is a Mystery of Faith. And Faith is a gift from God to humble and honest people. This is precisely the testimony of millions of believers throughout the history of salvation. They have searched for God, And at a given time, God has spoken to them. They listened to Him in their hearts and they found the answers to the meaning of their lives lie within themselves. They become new persons, new families, new people. God speaks in many ways to everybody.

The Bible

The Bible is one of the best opportunities we have to listen to Him in our hearts through His written words, to understand His living voice: In our conscience, in the events of our everyday lives, in our crises, pains and sufferings, and in the needy and the poor around us. The following pages are written just to guide you and your family in your "Around the Bible" sessions at home.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The word Bible comes from the Greek “Biblia,” meaning books. It is a collection of ancient writings about God, in two parts, Old Testament and New Testament. Testament means mutual commitment or covenant between God and people.

The Old Testament or Jewish Scriptures: A collection of religious books in Hebrew, written during a period of over 900 years, including: histories of heroes and events, codes of laws, prophets, orations, reflective literature and poetry, looking forward to a mission for Israel on earth. A total of 46 Books in Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican Bibles; and 39 books in Protestant Bibles.

The New Testament or Christian Scriptures. A collection of 27 books:

- * The 4 Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The story of Jesus of Nazareth: his birth, infancy, teaching, death and resurrection.
- * The Acts of the Apostles - Peter and Paul. The story of the first Christian Communities.
- * 21 Epistles (letters) from Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude to churches and people. Written before the Gospels, 20 to 30 years after Jesus’ death. So they are the earliest Christian writings.
- * The Book of Revelation or Vision of John. Struggle of Christ and his followers against Satan and his cohorts. Defeat of Satan and ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God.

The New Testament is a missionary handbook that proclaims the birth, growth and teachings of the Christian Church.

The Bible is the best selling and most distributed book of all time. The American Bible Society estimates it has distributed more than 3,000,000,000 Bibles since its founding in 1816. The Bible has been translated into about 1,850 languages since the invention of printing. Today, virtually every person on earth has available at-least portions of Scripture in his or her native tongue.

Recommended Bibles There are a number of choices:

The New English Bible.	Fine literary style.
The new American Bible.	Catholic - contains Introductions and notes.
The Living Bible.	A paraphrase rather than a translation.
Today’s English version.	Also called The Good News For Modern Man.
The Jerusalem Bible.	Catholic - contains Introductions and footnotes.
The new American standard Bible.	Literal faithfulness.
Revised standard version.	Based on modern studies and discoveries.

WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

Terry Hall. in his book "How We Got Our Old Testament" page 32, writes: "No editor or publishing house was responsible to oversee 40 independent authors, representing 20 occupations, living in 10 countries during a 1,500 year span, working in three languages, with a cast of 2,930 characters in 1,551 places. The authors of this incredible Book included kings, statesmen, fishermen, priests, seers, a physician, a tax collector, a farmer, a general and a tent-making rabbi. Four books detail the life of a carpenter-turned-teacher, who the Bible claims was actually God in human form.

Who really wrote the Bible and why was it put together? How did the Bible manage to survive for thousands of years? Is this Book we call the Bible without error and infallible? If you answered "yes" to these questions you obviously believe that God directed the writing of this book. If you answered "no," then you believe it is a compilation of human hands and minds.

Who is right? Is the Bible God's mind in print? Is God speaking to us through its pages? How can we mere mortals possibly know whether God is the real Author of the Bible - through His human servants? How can each of us know whether the Bible is the inspired Word of God? The answer to all these questions is in the Book itself. The Bible itself holds the key. One Bible researcher counted more than 3,800 times when the writers of Scripture stated with clear authority that God (the Lord) had actually communicated His message personally to them. Let us have some examples:

(Jeremiah 1:4): "The Word of the Lord came to me"

(Isaiah 1:10): "Hear the Word of the Lord, Princes of Sodom"

(Ezekiel 6:1): "Thus the Word of the Lord came to me"

(Hosea 1:1): "The Word of the Lord that came to Hosea"

(Revelation 1:8): "The Lord God says"

(Hebrews 1:1-2): "In Times Past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our Fathers through the Prophets; in this, the final age, He has spoken to us through His Son, Whom He has made Heir of all things and through Whom He first created the universe."

The biblical formula for proving the truth of the Bible is simply to do what God says. As we see in Acts 17: "They welcomed the message (of Paul and Silas) with great enthusiasm. Each day they studied the Scriptures to see whether these things were so."

Therefore, the answer to the question, "Who really wrote the Bible?" is that God is its real author. But we cannot prove it to ourselves unless we test out its claims by obeying the commands from God contained in its pages. Then we will discover that the Bible really is the word of God

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

I hope that after realizing what the Bible is all about, you do not need too many reasons to read it; but just in case, I would like to offer you several considerations that come from the millions of people who treasure the Bible in their lives.

- * The Bible is a living document and not just a book gathering dust with the encyclopedia on the shelf.
- * The Bible is more than a book of good ideas and stories. It is a form of the Presence and Power of God.
- * The Bible is the living Word of God. That is why many people, all through history, believe that in it and through it God speaks.
- * The experience of true believers is that the Bible is really a portrait of ourselves. Reading the Bible is more profitable when we can find ourselves in it and relate it to our lives.
- * Paul writes in *2 Timothy. 3:16-17*: "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, correction, and training in holiness, so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work."
- * Certainly, God did not directly reveal the laws of physics in the Bible. He equipped man with the powers and abilities to discover these laws for himself.
- * The Bible is rather God's Revelation of knowledge that humans are unable to discover for themselves. For example, man has not been able to discover what he is, and why he was put here on earth --- whether there is a real purpose for human life and what that purpose is. Man has not been able to discover the true way to peace, happiness, abundance, well-being and real success. The Bible reveals this knowledge. The Bible is the foundation of true knowledge.
- * Pope John Paul II taught: "From the word of Jesus we learn, first and foremost, the very nature of God, Who is Life, Light, Love, Trinity. No philosopher or theologian can penetrate the essence of God; only Jesus, the word Incarnate, can reveal and guarantee this fundamental truth. And because of this, we are certain that there is a relationship of love between God the Creator and man: every human being is an eternal heartbeat of God's Love. "From the Word of Jesus we know our eternal destiny: only Jesus, with his divine word, can assure us absolutely concerning the immortality of the soul and the final resurrection of the body, as a result of which being born, living, and projecting our existence beyond time towards happiness.. all have incomparable meaning. "
- * If none of these reasons has convinced you, read the Bible with your heart. You will know it is the Word of God.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE?

It is a fact. Millions have the Bible but they do not read it because they say, "I don't understand it." Actually, the Bible is not an ordinary book. While it is the Word of God for all times, the human authors were not writing to men and women of the 20th century. They were writing to people of 2,000 or 3,000 years ago and addressing issues of those times.

Thus there are complications for the modern reader. And that is why it is helpful to have an edition of the Bible that has an introduction, glossary, cross reference and other helpful features and reference materials. Because we are not the first people to ask how to understand the Bible, we can profit from others engaged in the same search. Here are some ideas that may be useful:

- * *Choose your Bible* among those that have introductions and footnotes, helping readers to understand the issues involved.
- * *Read selectively.* At first, instead of attempting to read the Bible through from cover to cover, select those pages that are easier or more interesting, for example, the Psalms, the Gospels.
- * *Follow The Church Year.* The choice of passages for reflection might be suggested by correlation with the passages being read in your church on Sundays. The sermon and liturgy will give you a complementary inspiration and aid.
- * *Set aside time* for Bible reading - quality time.
- * *Pray with humility before opening* the Bible that God will purify and open your spirit, mind, heart and will.
- * *Read Twice,* first read the text with your mind, and afterwards, listen to the Word of God in your heart. God speaks to our hearts.
- * *Ask yourself:* "What is God telling me?" God's Words are not empty words as most of our words. His Words are the foundation of all reality.

The main purpose of the next pages is: to offer you opportunities to approach the Bible together. So you will be able to listen to the Living Word of God, as a family.

Why Together as a Family?

Because the Bible tells us that God created the family in His Image and Likeness (Genesis 1:26) and that God's Love (I John 3:8) Therefore to be His image is to live in loving relationships.

FASCINATING FAMILY STORIES

Family is:

God's design, His invention, His creation.

God

Holds the pattern on it as the master architect of family.

The Lord

Is the most qualified authority on marriage and family.

Only God knows what and how each family can do to become happy and happier.

Let us hear what God has to say about his invention and his dream.

Let us listen to God through

The story of the first family.

Let us try to discover how your own family has been chosen by God,

In his merciful and loving plan of salvation.

THE FIRST FAMILY OF HISTORY

(Genesis 1:1, 27-28 and 2:24) :The creation

“In the beginning...God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created him. God blessed them, saying: be fertile and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it... That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one body”

(Genesis, 2:16-17; 3:4-6 and 23): **Temptation and Fall:**

“The Lord God gave man this order: ‘You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat. The moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die’... But the serpent said to the woman: ‘You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad’...”so she took some of its fruits and ate it and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it... The Lord God therefore banished him from the Garden of Eden...”

(Genesis 4:1-6; 8-10; 12; 16): **Family Crisis:**

“The man had relations with his wife eve, and she conceived and bore Cain...next she bore his brother Abel... In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil, while Abel brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not. Cain greatly resented this and was crestfallen...”

“Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let us go out in the field.’ when they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord asked Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He answered ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ The Lord then said: ‘What have you done!

Listen: your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil!... Therefore... You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth... The Cain left the Lord’s presence and settled in the land of nod, east of Eden.”

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Reflect and share as a family

1. What is the Lord telling me in these passages?
2. What is he telling us as a family?
3. How are we going to answer him personally and as a family?

THE ONLY SAVED FAMILY

(Genesis 6:5-7): Perversion of humankind:

“When the Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on earth was, and how no desire that His heart conceived was ever anything but evil, He regretted that He had made man on earth, and His heart was grieved. So the Lord said: ‘I will wipe out from the earth the men whom I have created... I am sorry that I made them.

(Genesis 6:8, 13-14; 22; 7:1): Noah, The Just One

“But Noah found favor with the Lord. He said to Noah...make yourself an ark of Gopherwood, put various compartments in it, and cover it inside and out with pith. This is how you shall build it... This Noah did; he carried out all the commands that God gave him. Then the Lord said to Noah: Go into the ark, you and all your household, for you alone in this age have I found to be truly just.”

(Genesis 7:7; 23; 8:14-20): One family is saved

“Together with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, Noah went into the ark because of the waters of the flood... The Lord wiped out every living thing on earth... Only Noah and those with him in the ark were left... In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month the earth was dry. Then God said to Noah: ‘go out of the ark, Together with your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives...’ so Noah came out together with his wife and his sons and his sons’ wives; and all the animals...” Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered holocausts on the altar...”

(Genesis 9:1:8-17): Covenant and blessings:

God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: “Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth...” God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “see, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you...”

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Reflect and share as a Family

1. How does this story fit my family’s personal experience?
2. Did I learn something to improve my personal life?
3. Any discovery about our family life?

THE CHOSEN ONE

(Genesis 12:1-5; 15:1-6): **God's call:**

"The Lord said to Abram go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you... All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you.' Abram went as the Lord directed him..." Some time after these events...the word of the Lord came to him. He went outside and said, 'Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so' he added, 'shall your descendants be.' Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness."

(Genesis 21:1-8) **The birth of Isaac:**

Sarah became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time that God had stated. Abraham gave the name Isaac to this son of his whom Sarah bore him".

(Gen. 22:1-19): **The sacrifice of Abraham and the promise of God**

"Some time after these events God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, 'Abraham!' 'Ready!' He replied. Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." Early the next morning Abraham saddled his donkey, took with him his son Isaac, and two of his servants as well, and with the wood that he had cut for the holocaust, set out for the place of which God had told him... When they came to the place of which God had told him Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Next he tied up his son Isaac and put him on the top of the wood on the altar. Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham!' 'Yes Lord' he answered. 'Do not lay your hand on the boy,' said the messenger. Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son... 'Again the Lord's messenger called Abraham from heaven and said: 'I swear by myself... That because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore.'

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Reflect and sharing as a family

1. What do I think the Lord is telling us through these Bible Passages?

THE HOLY FAMILY

(Luke, 1:26-38): Joseph and Mary:

“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary... The angel went on to say to her: ‘You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus...’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be since I do not know man?’ The angel answered her: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Power of the most high will overshadow you; Hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God...’ Mary said: ‘I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say.’”

(Luke2:1-21): Birth of Jesus:

“While Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem the days of her confinement were completed. She gave birth to her first son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged... When the eighth day arrived for His circumcision, the name Jesus was given the child...”

(Luke2:22-40): Presentation in the temple

“The couple brought Jesus up to Jerusalem so that he could be presented to the Lord...”

(Luke2:41-52): The family crisis

“When Jesus was twelve they went up to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. As they were returning at the end of the feast, the child Jesus remained behind, unknown to his parents. Thinking He was in the party, they continued their journey for a day looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. Not finding Him, they returned to Jerusalem in search of Him. On the third day they came upon Him in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions... When their parents saw Him they were astonished, and his mother said to Him: ‘Son, why have you done this to us? He said to them: ‘Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my father’s house?’ But they did not grasp what He said to them. He went down with them then, and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother meanwhile kept all these things in memory. Jesus, for His part, progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men.”

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Reflect and share as a family

1. What can we learn from the Holy Family of Nazareth?

OTHER GREAT FAMILIES

(Genesis 25:19-34 and 27:1-45) Isaac and Rebekah

“Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah... Isaac entreated the Lord on behalf of his wife since she was sterile. The Lord heard his entreaty, and Rebekah became pregnant. But the children in her womb jostled each other so much that she exclaimed, ‘If this is to be so, what good will it do to me!’ She went to consult the Lord, and he answered her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples are quarreling while still within you. But one shall surpass the other and the older shall serve the younger.’ when the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb.

The first to emerge was reddish, And his whole body was like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. His brother came out next, gripping Esau’s heel; So they named him Jacob.”

(Genesis 35:1-29 and exodus, 1:1-7): **Jacob’s extended family:**

“God said to Jacob: ‘go up to Bethel. Settle there and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you while you were fleeing from your brother Esau.’ So Jacob told his family and all the others who were with him: ‘Get rid of the foreign gods that you have among you;

Then purify yourselves and put on fresh clothes. We are now to go up to Bethel, and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me in my hour of distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.’

They therefore handed over to Jacob all the foreign Gods in their possession and also the rings they had in their ears... God appeared to him again and blessed him: ‘You whose name is Jacob shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name... I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply.

A nation, indeed an assembly of nations, shall stem from you, and kings shall issue from your loins...’

“The total number of the direct descendants of Israel was seventy... The Israelites were fruitful and prolific. They become so numerous and strong that the land was filled with them.”

Two Heroic Single Parent Families:

(I Maccabees 2:1-70): Mattathias and His Sons

(II Macabees 7:1-42): Martyrdom of a Mother and Her Seven Brothers

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Reflect and sharing as a family

1. Which of those four families is closest to my family? Why?

DIVINE COMMANDMENTS

God's Plan

- a) Has he revealed it to us?
- b) What is God's Plan?
- c) Did God give us his commandments?
- d) What are they?
- e) Are God's commandments being kept in today's families?
- f) Are God's commandments being kept in our home?
- g) What is the greatest commandment?
- h) How can we live the greatest commandment of the Lord within the home?
- i) How can we proclaim the Lord's commandment beyond our family?

To become a truly happy family we need to get our instructions from God through the Bible.

FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

"The ten commandments

Exodus 19:16-25; 20:1-26 & Deuteronomy 5:1-33

"Mount Sinai was all enveloped in smoke, for the Lord came down upon it in fire. Then God gave the people these commandments:

- 1.- I am the Lord your God. You shall not have other gods besides me.
- 2.- You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
- 3.- Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
- 4.- Honor your father and your mother.
- 5.- You shall not kill.
- 6.- You shall not commit adultery.
- 7.- You shall not steal.
- 8.- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 9.- You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
- 10.- You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest..."

Jeremiah, 31:31-37 (a New Covenant promised)

"The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers... for they broke my covenant... But this is the covenant which I will make... I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people... All, from least to greatest shall know me, says the Lord."

Reflect and share as a family

1. Are God's commandments being kept today? Explain.
2. Why is it that most people don't care about God's Commandments?
3. Are we, as a family, faithful to God's commandments? Explain.

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

* **Jesus fulfills the Law:** (Matthew, 5:17-48)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come, not to abolish them, but to fulfill them...”

* **Seeking perfection:**(Matthew, 19:16-30)

Another time a man came up to Jesus and said, ‘teacher, what good must I do to possess everlasting life?’ Jesus answered. ‘If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ ‘Which ones?’ He asked. Jesus replied, ‘You shall not kill; “You shall not commit adultery;’ ‘You shall not steal; “You shall not bear false witness;’ ‘Honor your father and your mother;’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ the young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; What do I need to do further?’ Jesus told him, ‘If you seek perfection, go, and sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven. , afterward, come back and follow me.’”

* **The Greatest and First Commandment:** (Matthew, 22:34-40)

“A lawyer, in an attempt to Trip Jesus up, asked him, ‘teacher, which commandment of the law is the greatest?’ Jesus said to him: ‘You shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.’ this is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well.”

* **The New Commandment:** (John, 15:9-17)

“As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Live in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments... This is my commandment: Love one another as I loved you. There is no greater love than this: To lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

* **The golden Rule:** (Matthew, 7:12-23)

“Treat others the way you would have them treat you: this sums up the law and the prophets.”

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Reflect and share as a family

1. In what specific way are we, as a family, living the first and greatest commandment?
2. Are we living the new commandment at home? Explain.
3. What should we do to become more faithful to God’s Commandments?

WORDS OF WISDOM

To know and to do what God really wants from each one of us and from each one of our families, is not easy. Everyone is always faced with the difficulty of discerning and then fulfilling Gods will. In other words, many times in our lifetime we all need a profound motivation within ourselves to discover and to do just what God wants. To open the bible and to listen to the Word of God with a humble and clean heart is the key. Only he has the words of wisdom. Let us experience it!

1. RELATED TO ONESELF

* **Searching For Wisdom** (Proverbs 2:1-22)

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands, turning your ear to wisdom, inclining your heart to understanding... Then will you understand the fear of the Lord; the knowledge of God You will find, from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”

* **Discerning the good and the evil way** (Proverbs 4:10-27)

“The way of the wicked is like darkness; they know not on what they stumble. But the path of the just is like shining light that grows in brilliance till the perfect day... Let your eyes look straight ahead and your glance be directly forward...-turn neither to right nor to left, keep your foot far from evil.”

* **Wisdom. Fear Of God and Honesty** (Sirach 1:23-29)

“If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord will bestow her upon you; for fear of the Lord is wisdom and culture;
Loyal humility is his delight. Be not faithless to the fear of the Lord nor approach it with duplicity of heart. Play not the hypocrite before men; over your lips keep watch...for then the Lord will reveal your secrets and publicly cast you down...”

* **Sincerity and Justice** (Sirach 4:20-31)

“Use your time well; guard yourself from evil, and bring upon yourself no shame...even to the death, fight for truth, and the Lord your God will battle for you...be not a lion at home, nor sly and suspicious at work. Let not your hand be open to receive and blenched when it is time to give.”

* **(Sirach 10:6-18 & 27) Avoiding Violence**

“No matter the wrong, do no violence to your neighbor...obvious to the Lord and to men is arrogance, and the sin of oppression they both hate. Dominion is transferred from one people to another because of the violence of the arrogant. Why are dust and ashes proud? Even during life, man’s body decays. The beginning of pride is man’s stubbornness in withdrawing his heart from his maker; because pride is the reservoir of sin, a source which runs over with vice...my son, with humility has self-esteem; prize yourself as you deserve.”

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Reflect and share as a family

Which is your favorite word of Wisdom? Why?

2. RELATED TO GOD

*** (Proverbs 1:7) Having the fear of the Lord**

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and instruction fools despise.”

*** (Proverbs 3:1-12) Relying on the Lord**

“My Son...let not kindness and fidelity leave you; bind them around your neck. Then will you win favor and good esteem before God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. On your intelligence rely not; in all your ways be mindful of Him, and He will make straight your path.”

*** (Proverbs 8:32-36) Obeying The Lord**

“So now, O children, listen to me; instruction and wisdom do not reject! Happy the man who obeys me, and happy those who keep my ways. Happy the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts... But he who misses me hurts himself; all who hate me love death.”

*** (Sirach 2:1-18) Trusting God**

“My Son, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart and steadfast... For in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation... You who fear the Lord, wait for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Has anyone who hoped in the Lord ever been disappointed?”

*** (Sirach 5:1-10) Being Humble**

“Rely not on your wealth; say not: ‘I have the power. Rely not on your strength in following the desires of your heart...say not: ‘I sinned, yet what has befallen me?’ For the Lord bides his time... Delay not your conversion to the Lord, put it not off from day to day.

*** (Sirach 6:18-38) Blessings of Wisdom**

“My son, from your youth embrace discipline... reflect on the precept of the Lord, let His commandments be your constant meditation; then He will enlighten your mind...”

*** (Sirach 17:19-21) Returning to God**

“Return to God and give up sin.”

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Reflect and share as a family

1. Which of These words of wisdom do we need most? Why?

3. RELATED TO OTHERS

*** (Sirach 7:28-36) Being Respectful**

“Remember, of these parents you were born; what can you give them for all they gave you?... With all your soul, fear God, revere his priests... to the poor man also extend your hand...

Be generous to all the living and withhold not your kindness from the dead. Avoid not those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. Neglect not to visit the sick - for these things you will be loved. In whatever you do, remember your last days, and you will never sin.

*** (Proverbs 3:25-34) Giving from the heart**

• Refuse no one the good on which he has a claim when it is in your power to do it for him. Say not to your neighbor, ‘go, and come again, tomorrow I will give,’ when you can give at once.”

*** (Proverbs 1:8-19) Listening to our parents**

“Hear, my Son, your father’s instruction, and reject not your mother’s teaching; a graceful diadem will they be for your head; a torque for your neck...”

*** (Sirach 8:1-9) Honoring old people**

“Insult no man when he is old, for some of us, too, will grow old... Spurn not the discourse of the wise, but acquaint yourself with their proverbs; from them you will acquire the training to serve in the presence of princes. Reject not the tradition of old men which they have learned from their fathers; from it you will obtain the knowledge of how to answer in time of need.”

*** (Sirach 9:10-16) Choosing our friends**

Discard not an old friend, for the new one cannot equal him. A new friend is like new wine which you drink with pleasure only when it has aged. Envy not a sinner’s fame, for you know not what disaster awaits him...have just men for your table companions; in the fear of God be your glory.”

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Reflect and share as a family

1. Do we really intend to change now that we have listened to the Word of God through His words of Wisdom? Explain.

MEANINGFUL PARABLES

PARABLE

Parable is a word that comes from Hebrew "Mashal" which signifies both a meaningful short story and an Enigma. It is a case of comparison taken from the realities of daily life to express the mystery of the reign of God. The only thing to be retained is the main idea of a parable, without the necessity of pausing over all the details.

Jesus of Nazareth made extensive use of this mode of speaking. "He spoke to them in parables to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables I will announce what has lain hidden since the creation of the world" (Matthew 13:35). More than 30 parables are recorded in the Gospels.

Sharing the following parables as a family will help you discover something about the mystery of the Kingdom of God and how it relates to your family.

* (Matthew 13:13): I use parables... Because they look but do not see, they listen but do not hear or understand..."

* (Matthew 13:16-17) "Blessed are your eyes because they see, and blessed are your ears because they hear. I assure you, many a prophet and many a saint longed to see what you see but did not see it, to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

* (Mark 4:9) "Let him who has ears to hear me, hear!"

*Matthew 25:14-30: Parable of the silver pieces

"The case of a man who was going on a journey is similar. He called in his servants and handed his funds over to them according to each man's abilities. To one he disbursed five thousand silver pieces, to a second two thousand, and to a third a thousand. Then he went away. "Immediately the man who received the five thousand went to invest it and made another five. In the same way, the man who received the two thousand doubled his figure. The man who received the thousand went off instead and dug a hole in the ground, where he buried his master's money.

"After a long absence, the master of those servants came home and settled accounts with them. "The man who had received the five thousand came forward bringing the additional five. 'My Lord,' he said, "You let me have five thousand. See, I have made five thousand more.' His master said to him, 'Well done! You are an industrious and reliable servant. Since you were dependable in a small matter I will put you in charge of larger affairs. Come, share your master's joy!'

"The man who had received the two thousand then stepped forward. 'My Lord', he said, 'You entrusted me with two thousand and I have made two thousand more.' His master said to him, 'Cleverly done! You too are an industrious and reliable servant. Since you were dependable in a small matter I will put you in a charge of larger affairs. Come, share your master's joy!'

“Finally the man who had received the thousand stepped forward. ‘My Lord!’ he said, ‘I knew you were a hard man. You reap where you did not sow and gather where you did not scatter, so out of fear I went off and buried your thousand silver pieces in the ground. Here is your money back.’

His master exclaimed: ‘You worthless, lazy lout! You know I reap where I did not sow... All the more reason to deposit my money with the bankers, so on my return I could have had it back with interest. You there! Take the thousand away from him and give it to the man with the ten thousand. Those who have, will get more until they get rich, while those who have not, will lose even the little they have...

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Reflect and share as a family.

1. What is the Lord teaching here?
2. How can we apply it to our personal and family life?

(Luke15:1-31): Parable of the Prodigal Son

“Jesus said to them:

“A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the estate that is coming to me.’ So the father divided up the property.

“Some days later this younger son collected all his belongings and went off to a distant land, where he squandered his money on dissolute living. After he had spent everything, a great famine broke out in that country and he was in dire need. So he attached himself to one of the propertied class of the place, who sent him to his farm to take care of the pigs. He longed to fill his belly with the husks that were fodder for the pigs, but no one made a move to give him anything. Coming to his senses at last, he said: ‘How many hired hands at my father’s place have more than enough to eat, while here I am starving! I will break away and return to my father’...with that he set off for his father’s house.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was deeply moved. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. “The son said to his father, ‘Father. I have sinned against God and against you: I no longer deserve to be called your son.’

The father said to his servants:“... Let us eat and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life...then the celebration began.” “Meanwhile the elder son was out on the land. As he neared the house on his way home. He called one of the servants and asked him the reason for the dancing and music. The servant answered, ‘Your brother is home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back in good health.’ the son grew angry at this and would not go in; but his father came out and began to plead with him.

He said to his father in reply: 'For years now I have slaved for you. I never disobeyed one of your orders, yet you never gave me so much as a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. Then, when this son of yours returns after having gone through your property with loose women, you kill the fatted calf for him.' "My son' replied the father, 'You are with me always, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice! This brother of yours was dead, and has come back of life. He was lost. And is founded.'"

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Reflect and share as a family

1. What do I think Jesus is teaching us through this parable?
2. Have I learned something concerning our family? What?

(John15:1-17): The vine and the branches

"I am the true vine **and my father is the vine grower**. He prunes away every barren branch, but the fruitful ones he trims clean to increase their yield. "You are clean already, thanks to the word that I have spoken to you. "Live on in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing. A man who does not live in me is like a withered, rejected branch, picked up to be thrown in the fire and burnt.

"If you live in me, and my words stay part of you must ask what you will - it will be done for you... "As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments, even as I have kept my father's commandments and I live in his love. "All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete.

*"This is my commandment: Love one another as I loved you.
"There is no greater love than this: To lay down one's life for one's friends.
"You are my friends if you do what I command you... I call you friends,
since I have made known to you all that I heard from my father.
"It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you, to go forth and bear fruit..."*

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Reflect and share as a family:

1. What strikes me the most in this passage? Why?
2. What is the Lord telling us, as a family?

MIRACULOUS HEALINGS

a) “Miracles”:

This expression corresponds to biblical words: Signs, wonders; or “Dynamis” - a Greek word that means “power”. In other words: Miracles are unaccustomed and unexpected events which serve as a motive for credibility by manifesting the power of Jesus of Nazareth, and leads people to believe in his person.

b) Modern theology:

Defines miracles as phenomena in nature which transcend the capacity of natural causes to such a degree that they must be attributed to the direct intervention of God.

c) Experts:

Concur by affirming that the concept of “miracle, as a function of God’s power, is vital in the New Testament conception of Jesus and the church. The Lord, after all, is always the same: yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let us believe in the loving Power of God and call Him with confidence, trust and hope. The question is, however:

- * Do we believe in miracles?
- * Do we accept that God does directly intervene in our ordinary family lives?
- * Do we need the Lord to come to our families and homes to heal and save us?

THE SICK

(Mark 6:53-56; 7:37): All who touched Jesus were healed.

The crowds scurried about the adjacent area and began to bring in the sick on bedrolls to the place where they heard he was. Wherever Jesus put in an appearance - in villages, in towns, or at crossroads - they laid the sick in the market places and begged Him to let them touch just the tassel of his cloak. All who touched Him were well”. ‘Jesus has done everything well! He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak!’”

(Matthew 9:20-22): Health restored through Faith

“As they were going, a woman who had suffered from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the tassel on His cloak. ‘If only I can touch His cloak,’ she thought, ‘I shall get well’ Jesus turned around and saw her and said: ‘Courage, daughter! Your faith has restored you to health.’ that very moment the woman got well.”

(Matthew 9:1-7) Healing proves Jesus’ authority to forgive sins.

“Then Jesus reentered the boat, made crossing, and came back to his own town. There the people at once brought to him a paralyzed man lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the

paralytic, 'Have courage, son, your sins are forgiven.' at that some of the scribes said to themselves, 'the man blasphemes,' Jesus was aware of what they were thinking and said: 'Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is less trouble to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Stand up and walk' to help you to realize that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' - He then said to the paralyzed man - 'Stand up, roll up your mat, and go home.' the man stood up and went toward his home. At the sight, a feeling of awe came over the crowd, and they praised God for giving such authority to men."

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Reflect and share as a family

- 1.- Do I believe in miracles and expect them ? Why or why not?
- 2.- Does our family need the intervention of God's power? Why?

THE BLIND

(Mark10:46-52) "What do you want me to do for you?"

"As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a sizable crowd, there was a blind beggar Bartimaeus sitting by the roadside. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to call out, 'Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!' Many people were scolding him to make him keep quiet, but he shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me!'

Then Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him over.' so they called the blind man over... 'You have nothing to fear from Him! Get up! He is calling you!' He threw aside his cloak, jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Rabboni,' the blind man said, 'I want to see. Jesus said in reply, 'Be on your way! Your faith has healed you.' immediately he received his sight and started to follow him up the road."

(Matthew20:29-34) "Lord, have pity on us!"

"As they were leaving Jerico suddenly two blind men sitting by the roadside, who heard that Jesus was passing by, began to shout, "Lord, son of David, have pity on us! The crowd began to scold them...but they only shouted the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have pity on us! Jesus then stopped and called out to them: what do you want me to do for you? "Lord, they told him, "Open our eyes! Moved with compassion. Jesus touched their eyes, and immediately they could see; and they became his followers."

(John 9:1-41): The man born blind

"As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth... with that Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with saliva, and smeared the man's eyes with the mud. Then He told him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.' So the man went off and washed, and came back able to see." "Some

Pharisees around him picked this up, saying, you are not calling us blind, are you? To which Jesus replied: If you were blind there would be no sin in that. "But we see, you say, and your sin remains."

Reflect and share as a family

1. What makes us spiritually blind?
2. What is the Lord telling us through these Passages?

THE POSSESSED

(Matthew 15:21-28): A possessed girl

"It happened that a Cananite woman living in the district of Tyre and Sidon presented herself, crying out to Jesus, 'Lord, son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is terribly troubled by a demon.' Jesus gave her no word of response. His disciples came up and began to entreat him, 'Get rid of her. She keeps shouting after us.' 'My mission is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,' Jesus replied.

She came forward then and did Him homage with the plea, 'Help me, Lord! But Jesus answered, 'It is not right to take the food of the sons and daughters and throw it to the dogs.' 'Please, Lord,' she insisted, even the dogs eat the leavings that fall from their masters' tables.' Jesus then said in reply, 'woman, you have great faith! Your wish will come to pass.' At that very moment her daughter got better."

(Matthew 17:14-21): A possessed boy

"Suddenly a man from the crowd exclaimed: 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. A spirit takes possession of him and with a saddened cry throws him into a convulsion and makes him foam at the mouth, then abandons him in his shattered condition.

I asked your disciples to cast out the spirit but they could not.' Jesus said in reply: 'What an unbelieving and perverse lot you are! How long must I remain with you? How long can I endure you? Bring your son here to me'. As he was being brought, the spirit threw him into convulsions the ground. Jesus then rebuked the unclean spirit, cured the boy and restored him to his father."

(Matthew 8:16-17): Many who were possessed

"As evening drew on, they brought Jesus many who were possessed. He expelled the spirits by a simple command and cured all who were afflicted, thereby fulfilling what had been said through Isaiah the prophet 'It was our infirmities he bore, I and sufferings he endured.'"

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Reflect and sharing as a family

1. How strongly do I believe in the power of God? Explain.
2. Which are the most current evils in our home?

“THE RAISING OF LAZARUS”

“Jesus said plainly: ‘Lazarus is dead. For your sakes I am glad I was not there, that you may come to believe.... when Jesus arrived in Bethany, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days... When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet Him, while Mary sat at home. Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would never have died. Even now, I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ ‘Your brother will rise again,’ Jesus assured her. ‘I know he will rise again,’ Martha replied, ‘In the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus told her: ‘I am the resurrection and the life: Whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life. And whoever is alive and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she replied. ‘I have come to believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God: He who is come into the world.’

...When Mary came to the place where Jesus was, seeing Him, she fell at His feet and said to Him, ‘Lord, if you had been here my brother would never have died.’ when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had accompanied her also weeping, He was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions. ‘Where have you laid him? He asked. Lord, come and see,’ they said. Jesus began to weep, which caused the Jews to remark, ‘see how much He loved him!

It was a cave with a stone laid across it. ‘Take away the stone,’ Jesus directed, Martha, the dead man’s sister, said to Him: ‘Lord, it has been four days now; surely there will be a stench!’ Jesus replied: ‘Did I not assure you that if you believed you will see the glory of God displayed?’ They then took away the stone and Jesus looked upward and said: ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me but I have said this for the sake of the crowd, that they may believe that you sent me.’ having said this he called loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out. Bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. ‘Untie him,’ Jesus told them, and let him go free.’

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Reflect and share as a family

1. Is this passage of Scripture important to Me? Why?
2. How could we relate to our family life?

GOOD NEWS

Millions of people are desperately searching for good news, but they never really find it. Is there any good news in our times? What is the good news? Is the good news for all?

Good News has been with us for the past 2,000 years.

Jesus of Nazareth

He, as the Bible clearly reveals, is precisely the Good News that everyone everywhere has always searched for.

He is the only one: The messiah prophesied.

The Christ. The son of the living God.

The only savior, The Lord.

The one who died for all.

The one who is risen.

The one who is alive among us as He promised:

“Until the end of the world”

He is all of this for those who believe in Him as well as

For those who do not yet believe in Him.

Do I really believe in Him?

(Mark1:15)Amazing revelations: “The reign of God is at hand!

“This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel.”

(John 3:1-21) The good news

“Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

(Matthew25:31-46): Jesus’ second coming

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory... He will sit upon his royal throne, and all the nations will be assembled before Him. Then He will separate them into two groups as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep He will place on his right hand, the goats on His left. The king will say to those on His right: “come...because I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the just will ask Him: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness?’

When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison? The king will answer them: "I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me."

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Reflect and share as a family

- 1.- Which one of these bible quotations is most revealing to me? Why?
- 2.- What is the Lord revealing to our family? Explain.

GOSPEL COUNSELS

- * (Matthew 5:48) "You must be made perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."
- * (Matthew5:23-24) "If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."
- * (Matthew6:5) "Whenever you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your father in private."
- * (Mark 5:19) "Go home to your family and make it clear to them how much the Lord in his mercy has done for you."
- * (Matthew5:43-48) "My commandment to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for His sun rises on the bad and the good, He rains on the just and unjust."
- * (Matt.6:19-34) "Do not lay up for yourselves an earthly treasure. Moths and rust corrode; thieves break in and steal. Make it your practice instead to store up heavenly treasure, which neither moths nor rust corrode nor thieves break in and steal. Remember, where your treasure is, there your heart is also."
- * (Matt.7:1-6) "If you want to avoid judgment, stop passing judgment. Your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you. The measure with which you measure will be used to measure you."
- * (Matt.19:16-30) "If you seek perfection, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven".
- * (Matthew20:10-12) "Some men are incapable of sexual activity from birth; some have been deliberately made so; and some there are who have freely renounced sex for the sake of God's reign. Let him accept this teaching who can.
- * (Matthew5:38-42) "When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other."
- * (Matthew5:14-16) "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Men do not light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket. They set it on a stand where it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine before men so that they may see goodness in your acts and give praise to your heavenly Father."

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Reflect and share as a family

- 1.- Which one of these counsels applies to me? Why?
- 2.- Any counsel for our family life?

LIVING MESSAGES

Responsibility:

(Galatians 6:1-10) "Help carry one another's burdens; in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ...each man should look to his conduct if he has reason to boast of anything, it will be because the achievement is his and not another's. Everyone should bear his own responsibility."

Spirituality:

(Romans 8:5-13) "Those who live according to the flesh are intent on the things of the flesh, those who live according to the spirit, on those of the spirit. The tendency of the flesh is toward death but that of the spirit toward life and peace."

Variety and unity:

(Cor. 12:4-11) "There are different gifts but the same spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone." "Sing praise to the Lord with all your hearts. Give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ." "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for that is what is expected of you... "Fathers, do not anger your children. Bring them up with the training and instruction befitting the Lord."

"Remain at peace with one another... Admonish the unruly; cheer the fainthearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all. .

The gift of love:

(1 Corinthians 13:1-13) "If I have faith great enough to move mountains but have not love, I am nothing...love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love never fails...there are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.")

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Reflect and share as a family

- 1.- Which of these messages is my favorite? Why?
- 2.- Specifically, what is the Lord telling our family?

ENCOURAGING PROMISES

- * (Hebrews 6:12) Do not grow lazy. But imitate those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises."
- * (Mat.11:28-30) Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."
- * (John 7:37-38) If anyone thirsts. Let him come to me; let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: "From within him rivers of living water shall flow."
- * (Matthew 7:7-11) "Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you."
- * (John14:16-17) "I will ask the father and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you always: the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, since it neither sees Him nor recognizes Him because He remains with you and will be within you."
- * (Romans10:9-13) "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is the Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
- * (Matthew 18:19-20) "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst."
- * (Matthew 28:20) "I am with you always, until the end of the world"
- * (Matthew19:28-30) "Many who are first shall be last and the last shall come first."
- * (Matthew, 6:4) "Keep your deeds of mercy secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you."
- * "The heavens and the earth will pass away but my words will not pass." (Matthew 24:35)
- * (Matthew 24:44) "You must be prepared... The Son of man is coming at a time you least expect... Happy that servant whom his master discovers at work on his return!"
- * (John 14:3) 'I am indeed going to prepare a place for you, and then I shall come back to take you with me, that where I am you also may be."

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Reflect and share as a family

1. Which of the above promises strikes my heart most strongly? Why?
2. Among these promises, which do we need to recall as a family?

THE CODE OF TRUE HAPPINESS

(Matthew 5:1-12) Beatitudes

(Luke 10:23-24)

- * "How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs."
- * "Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled"
- * "Blest are the lowly: they shall inherit the land."
- * "Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness: they shall have their fill."
- * "Blest are those who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs."
- * "Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God."
- * "Blest too the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God."
- * "Blest are those persecuted for holiness- sake; the reign of God is theirs.
- * "Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way."
- * "Blest are the eyes that see what you see. I tell you, many prophets and kings wished to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."
- * John 20:29) "Blest are they who have not seen and have believed."
- * (Matthew 19:13-15) "Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. The kingdom of God belongs to such as these."
- * (John 14:27) "Peace" is my farewell to you. My peace is my gift to you; I do not give it to you as the world gives peace. Do not be distressed or fearful."
- * (Phil. 4:7) "God's own peace, which is beyond all understanding, will stand guard over your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus."
- * (1Cor. 1:3) "May the favor of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.
- * (Phil. 4:23) "Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

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Reflect and share as a family

1. Which one of these beatitudes is my favorite? Why?
2. Is our family happiness a result of living according to the beatitudes? Explain.

PART IV

REACHING OUT TO PEOPLE

Families are not islands

Families always exist in conjunction with other people.

But we all

Are very used to compartmentalizing our realities and making circles.

We have circles in: The economy, political life, religious life and family life.

We forget that all of life is a cloth that is woven together.

In that sense, families never exist in isolation. They are created by God, the Lord of love and life, to become spirals of life and love themselves, and change the universe.

Family members cannot look only in on themselves, but must look out to the world and to share with other people.

Happy families are open and reach out.

They know that they are families “for others” and consequently, they move together toward people.

How do they do it? Spiraling out from a closed within to wide and wider outside - relatives, friends and neighbors local communities, city, country and... the world.

This is the time for action

DISCOVERING OTHER FAMILIES

What is happening in the families around us?

- a) Is the situation of other families our own situation?
- b) What are their problems, their needs, their potential?
- c) Can or should we do something for them? What? How? When?

To guide you in this discovery is precisely the main purpose of the fourth part of this book.

You are invited to commit yourselves to this family adventure by taking together the following steps:

1. Reflecting about the facts.
2. Sharing with the members of your family.
3. Discerning what the Lord is telling you throughout the family sharing.
4. Responding with deeds in accordance to each one's talents and gifts.

LARGE FAMILIES

Large families are becoming a rarity. In the West parents think the ideal family is 2:5 children. Demographers cite the availability of effective contraception, the widespread delay in marriage and childbearing and the entrance of women into the labor force as just a few reasons for the disappearance of large families.

Many parents seem to think that they would be overwhelmed in an attempt to give enough financial and emotional support to each child if they had a large family. But interviews with parents of 5, 6 or 10 children indicate that the joys outweigh the burdens, even for families with modest incomes.

Statistics indicate that Black, Hispanic and low income families are more likely than others to include more than four children; and experts tell us that in general large families have a richer sense of group identity and group solidarity than other families. One family therapist with seven children said: "The sense of cooperation and connectedness in a big family is very powerful, and when it works, there is nothing better."

A Jewish couple that share their two-bedroom, two-bath Manhattan apartment with their five children said: "We're very easy going. Nothing is a big deal. Nothing's a tragedy." Their family income is about \$50,000 a year.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What is my opinion about large families? 2. Would I like to belong to a large family? Why/why not?
- 3.- How many large families do I know? 4.- What are their most important needs?
- 5.- Could we help any of those large families we know? How?

NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Is the traditional nuclear family father, mother and immediate children living in one house or apartment also becoming a rarity? Far from it. According to one census bureau report in this country, three-quarters of all children live in families with two parents. Fifty-seven percent of Americans are married and live with their spouses. About two thirds of all Americans, children and adults, live in households with two married parents.

Consider the people you are acquainted with and you will realize the great number of nuclear families. Great signs of vitality are found in many of today's marriage and family movements and organizations dedicated to enrich marriage and family life, working on marriage preparation and strengthening the quality of the nuclear family.

I personally come from a nuclear family. A nice one. Most of my relatives and friends' families are nuclear too. Looking back, my priestly ministry dedicated to marriage and family life in Spain and in other countries, the foundation of Christian Family Movement and Marriage Encounter, has been 95 percent supported by nuclear families. Looking around my actual priestly ministry I find the same thing. Looking ahead, I see today's nuclear families the hopeful foundation and bridge for the new families of the future.

Therefore, next time someone tells you that the nuclear family is no longer alive and well in today's society, just consider your own experience and testimony.

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Reflect and share as a family- decide to act

1. What do I think about the so called nuclear families?
2. Do I know many of them? ‘
3. What is my impression of them?
4. What are some problems that they might have?
5. What could or should we do to help some of them? ,

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

There has been an alarming increase in single parent families - a striking development in the past decades. According to a census bureau report, in the United States one in five children live with a single parent, but that with blacks and Hispanics it is nearly one in two.

Premarital births, separation, and divorce were the prime factors in the growth of one-parent families, over the last two decades. Single parenthood contributes massively toward poverty and dependency on welfare.

Nevertheless, single parent families still are families. They are groups of people with special rights to be loved and to love, to have stability and a future. Not one of us can remain indifferent to the needs of these families. They also have a special place in the Bible. When God established the ancient nation of Israel, He directed numerous laws to the care of single-parent families. For example, after Moses received the Ten Commandments, he informed the children of Israel that, (Deut. 10:18) "God administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing"

(James 1:27) "Pure and unspoiled religion before God and the father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"

Therefore, if you are a single-parent family, accept your place in life. God can become your special guest. Ask Him for the extra help you need, and He will assist you in a very special way.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What do I think and feel about the challenging reality of the single parent families?
2. What do I think are their biggest problems and needs?
3. What could or should we do to share with some of the single parent families we know?

STEP-FAMILIES

Divorce and remarriage are so common in the U.S. today that as many as one in 10 children lives with a stepparent, and one in four will live in a step-family at some point before turning 18.

It used to be thought that there was something inherently wrong with the step-family, that it was a pathological family form, but social scientists, accepting the reality, have realized that the step-family is a different family form with its own patterns, strengths and challenges.

The fact is that there are millions of families in which at least one spouse has been married before.

There has been a vast increase in the past decades. Television, newspapers, the media treat it as something taken for granted in society. You have both sets of parents are present at social affairs like graduations, etc. There are, obviously, many problems that accompany the phenomenon:

Which of the parents will the kids live with?

What school or church will they attend?

Who will discipline the children?

Who will put up the money to raise them?

What if the stepchildren dislike each other?

These and other similar questions show how complex the situations of the step-families is.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What are my thoughts about step-families?
2. Can I figure out ways in which we can help the needs of step-families?
3. Specifically, what are we going to do? How? When?

SENIOR FAMILIES

The prediction is that by 2030 the senior population will be 18 percent, because of the decrease in births, and the longer life span of the elderly. People living into their nineties is becoming more and more common. The evidence shows clearly that the great majority of married couples who reach the later years have, over time, adjusted fairly well to each other and stay together. They have:

1. *Autonomy and self-worth*, based on how they feel about their life individually and as a couple, as they look back over the years.
2. *Agreeable relationships with others*. A friendship on a day-to-day basis sustains their sense of self-worth because then they feel valued by people around them and feel supported and encouraged.
3. *Stimulation of mind and imagination*. What makes us human is our capacity to think, to understand and to dream. When we withdraw from the active life of the world, there is a danger that we may sink into a state of lethargy and indifference.
4. *Reasonable mobility*. The early period of retirement, when the couple is still vigorous, can be a time of going off on world travel, visiting their children, grandchildren, relatives and friends.
5. *Intense involvement* with some aspect of life. We all need to have interests that generate enthusiasm.

Personally, I think that these characteristics are in danger of collapsing if it is not founded in a personal and couple relationship with the Lord. He is the One Who “builds the house.”

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Reflect and share as a family- decide to act

1. What do I think and feel about senior adult families?
2. Could we do something together for some of those families we know? Concretely, what?

BEING PRESENT AND ACTIVE IN THE COMMUNITY

1. By facing the challenge of family violence in the community:

Wife abuse

Drug Addiction

Child abuse

Latchkey children

Abuse of older relatives

Alcoholism

Vandalism

Runaways

Premarital sex

Cults

Juvenile delinquency

Robbery,

Prostitution,

Drug selling,

Rape,

Homicide.

Suicide

2. By dealing with the roots of family violence: Anger; selfishness and pride; social pressures;

-- consumerism; peer groups; mass media.

Family poverty: -- Working mothers; unemployment; homeless; religious faithlessness; injustice

- 3.- By being involved and acting together:

Going out from the home to be with and help troubled and hurting families of our civic and religious communities. This is a hard but urgent commitment

1. FACING FAMILY CHALLENGES

- a) What is attacking families in our local communities?
- b) Do we recognize the facts?
- c) Are we aware of the widespread family violence?
- d) Do we understand the causes? What are today's most common family problems?
- e) Are we facing them, starting with our own families and homes?
- f) What are the most important and urgent needs of today's families, including our own family?
- g) What are our deepest concerns about the families of our community - both civic and religious?
- h) Are we actively involved in the rebuilding of the families in our own neighborhood, and in our parish or congregation?
- i) What could or should we do to answer the family challenges in our local community - not just with words but with deeds?

SPOUSE ABUSE

The physical or emotional mistreatment of a woman by her husband, ex-husband or male companion is considered the most common unreported crime.

The Facts

Authorities estimate that:

- Six million women are abused by their partners each year --about half of these figures are couples who are not legally married. Many of these suffer serious physical injury or psychological harm.
- From 2.000 to 4.000 women die each year from beatings.
- Half of all marriages involve at least one episode of violence.
- Only 1 in 10 episodes of wife abuse is reported to police.
- Wife abuse occurs everywhere: in suburbs; rural areas: inner city: among families of all backgrounds, religions and incomes.
- Wife abuse affects, first of all, the members of the family but also hurts the entire society. In fact, violent families are breeding grounds for problems such as crime, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism and drug abuse. Another fact is that the investigations of domestic violence are a leading cause of police killings.

Why?

The causes of wife abuse are very complex, but most abusers are likely to share the following traits:-

Poor Self-image.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| -Alcohol and drug-abuse. | -Bad childhood experiences. |
| -Lack of religious life. | -“Machismo” man’s despotic dominion. |
| -Superficial communication. | -Fear of change and stress. |
| -Job problems. | -Lack of self-control and maturity. |
| -Social and economic pressures. | |

What can the abused woman do?

Stay Married. Try to make basic improvements by strengthening marital communication, getting counseling, helping children, pray...

Leave the Marriage. Build a new life for herself and children by planning ahead with hope and seeking help and support.

* * * * *

Reflect and sharing as a family - decide to act

- 1.- What do I think and feel about wife abuse?
- 2.- Do I know a family with this problem?
- 3.- Could we do something for them? What? How?

CHILD ABUSE

“Child Abuse” is repeated mistreatment or neglect of a child by one or both parents or other guardians resulting in injury or harm. It can happen anywhere. It may be:

- * *Physical*: shaking; beating; burning; failure to provide the necessities of life - adequate food etc.
- * *Emotional*: failure to provide warmth, attention, supervision.
- * *Verbal*: excessive yelling, belittling, teasing.
- * *Sexual*: incest, rape, pornography and other sexual activity.

Facts

Public and health officials are faced with hundreds of thousands of cases of abuse. Children are burned; stabbed; electrically shocked; stamped on; thrown violently against walls; sexually abused by parents or others in charge of them.

Consequently, hundreds of thousands of children run away from their homes; then in the streets they become victims of prostitution, alcohol, drugs and all kind of crimes. Many times the result of child abuse and neglect is suicide.

Why?

Often it's a reaction to past or present problems or stresses parents or adults can't cope with, such as:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Lack of parenting knowledge. | . Unmet emotional needs. |
| . Lack of emotional control. | . Poor childhood experiences. |
| . Unrealistic expectations. | . Frequent crises. |
| . Social isolation. | . Alcohol and drug problems. |

How to help

The good news is that abusive parents can change their behavior, if they are willing to put forth the effort and seek help. How to enable them to get the help they need?

- *By giving troubled and hurting families a “helping hand” so that they can reconcile, learn to cope with crises, and live together.
- *By facilitating immediate treatment and experience counseling.
- *By detecting and reporting each case to the people who can help - like Parents Anonymous, National Center for Prevention, National Services, etc.; and in emergencies, calling police.
- *By offering daily prayer for that family.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Am I aware of the seriousness of these problems? Explain.
2. Is there any kind of child abuse in our family? Explain.
3. Can we give a real “helping hand” to a troubled family. How?

LATCHKEY CHILDREN

Children left home alone for long periods of time are called latchkey children (describing children who wore house keys on strings around their necks).

Facts

Researchers have reported that in U.S. at one time there were over 2 million latchkey children between ages 7 and 13. , and they may be more numerous now. Depending on the age of the child, latchkey children often suffer deep loneliness, terrible anxieties, recurring nightmares and obsessive concern for their safety as well as periods of boredom. They are more likely to be involved in accidents, fires, drug abuse and juvenile delinquency. When left home without parental supervision, protection and guidance, they are more likely to do poorly in school and be sexually abused by older siblings and children, or even adults.

Poor child-rearing practices can create a “latchkey situation” even when parents are home. Parents can live in the same building with their children, but never really be at home with them.

Penal institutions are filled with errant youths. For the most part, they have gotten into trouble because they have lacked proper parental guidance and supervision.

Why?

Latchkey children are products of a changing society where:

- More and more parents feel they must both work to meet the rising cost of living.
- Single-parent homes are increasing at a rapid rate.
- Child-care programs are often unavailable or unaffordable.

How to prevent and to cure?

Create a safe home environment by establishing house rules; posting important phone numbers; teaching and practicing skills and setting up emergency plans; promoting good interpersonal communication by discussing arrangements together; setting up a telephone network; returning home on time; improving arrangements; making shared time count.

Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Does this problem seem familiar to me? Why?
2. What can we do to prevent this situation in our family or in another family we know?
3. How can we help some of those in this situation?

ABUSE OF OLDER RELATIVES

Each family must deal with aging because it is a very real part of life. Homes should be the place where generations meet and work together. What is happening with the older people in today's society?

Facts

We live in a society which tends to ignore the elderly and their potential. Most newer neighborhoods include only young families.

- In many of today's families there is no room for older people any more. They are considered "not useful," "an obstacle," "a burden." Consequently, they are set aside in unacceptable ways, and they are being outcasts.
- Others are merely tolerated in the family as a "useless burden." They are frequently mistreated -- neglected, isolated, verbally abused, over-medicated and their personal funds misused.
- This causes acute suffering to them and spiritually impoverishes many families. For example, children grow up without the experience of a close friendship with any elderly person.
- Elderly people regularly do not report abuse because they are physically and/or financially dependent on the person abusing them, ashamed of having raised abusive children, or fearful of being put in an institution. Therefore, the situation continues to worsen.

Why?

Contributing factors of this kind of family violence could be:

- Unawareness about the role of the older people within the family, and how they can help to deepen family roots, clarify a scale of human values, and be a bridge between generations and times.
- Selfishness and materialistic interests and conveniences; for example, in order to be free and to do other things.
- Economic reasons, not enough money, lack of room, incapacity of assisting the older person in his/her illnesses and particular needs.

How to prevent and cure

Having respect, honor and true love, not only with words but mainly with concrete actions.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

- 1.- What do I think and feel about today's older people?
- 2.- Do we take care of the elderly in our family? Explain.
- 3.- What could we do to share our family love with some abused older people?

ALCOHOLISM

Alcoholism is an illness that causes people to lose control of their drinking. It is often referred to as a family disease because the family of an alcoholic shares pain, anxiety and frustration with the alcoholic person. The family's role in understanding and coping with alcoholism is crucial in helping a family member stricken with this illness to recover.

Facts:

Alcoholism is a leading killer disease, affecting millions plus their families.

- Among adults 7 out of 10 drink at least occasionally. Of these, about 1 out of 10 is an alcoholic.- Approximately sixty percent of alcoholics have or had at least one dependent parent.
- As many as 9 out of 10 teenagers have tried alcohol. Of these, 1 in 5 between the ages 13-17 has experienced problems as a result of drinking - like arguments with parents or friends, medical problems in the long run, drunk driving, changed attitudes etc.
- Alcohol-related car crashes are the greatest cause of teenage injuries and deaths.
- A medical fact is that alcohol, a depressant, rapidly enters the bloodstream and reaches the brain.

Why do people drink?

In the case of adults, either to "celebrate" for positive and joyful reasons, or to "forget" unwanted thoughts, feelings, people and events. Among teenagers: to assert independence; to rebel; to help overcome emotional, sexual, academic, family or legal problems.

How to help?

Alcoholism is a treatable illness. The only way to recover from it is to stop drinking. Therefore efficient and successful help depends on how you and your family:

- Motivate persons to face the truth and be determined to recover, ready to seek a solution.
Religious motivation is the best.
- Guide persons toward medical, psychological and spiritual help - Physicians, Counselors, Alcoholics Anonymous, Students against Drunk Driving, Community Support, Prayer and Healing Groups, etc.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

- 1.- Personally, do I have any problem with alcohol? Explain.
- 2.- What can we do to prevent this situation in our family?
- 3.- What should we do to help someone we know who has this problem?

DRUG ADDICTION

Drugs are natural and synthetic chemical substances which affect one's body and its processes, one's mind and one's nervous system, behavior and feelings. Used properly to treat medical problems, drugs can correct imbalances in body chemistry, protect against disease and relieve tension, fatigue and pain. But using natural and/or synthetic chemical substances for non-medical reasons causes problems in the individuals, families and society.

Facts

The problem of drug abuse in the world is critical and it is growing. Every year hundreds of thousands are treated in hospitals for drug-related accidents and mental and physical illness and many die. There are unnumbered arrests each year for drug-related offenses. The total costs for the criminal activity, lost productivity, the need for medical and legal services is in billions of dollars.

It is an awesome and disturbing fact that particularly teens and youth, have turned in increasing numbers to illegal substances like marijuana, cocaine, heroine, amphetamines, barbiturates, tranquilizers, hallucinogens and legal substances like alcohol and tobacco. By any medical standard, this widespread abuse is an epidemic. And for now it appears to be unstoppable as drug abuse spreads from person to person, friend to friend, brother to brother, and often, unbelievably, it is parents who introduce their children to drugs.

Why do people abuse drugs?

People find many reasons for abusing drugs: "For me a-pick-me-up." "For a spiritual experience." "To relieve boredom." "To reduce anxiety and tension." "To try just once then stop" etc. Most reasons involve trying to somehow escape reality. On the other hand, the "pressures" to try drugs are powerful and widespread.

They need help!

Family members are in the best position to help.

First of all, by taking the steps to find out the real causes and roots of each family member's drug abuse. Also by talking with the abuser about his or her problems, fears and concerns. Talking about drugs and drug use among peers and friends too, and praying for the afflicted with faith and hope. Secondly, if the problem is too much for the family to control, then don't be afraid to seek professional help.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Do I personally have a problem with any kind of drug? Explain.
2. What can we do to prevent or to overcome drug abuse in our family?
3. What can we do to help other people involved with drugs?

RUNAWAYS AND THROWAWAYS

“Runaways” and “Throwaways” are the logical results of family violence in our society.

Facts

More than 1,000,000 young people leave home every year. Most of them have been abused by parents or relatives and then turned over, voluntarily or by court order, to city, county or state institutions. Social workers refer to them as “throwaways” because they have been thrown out of their homes whether by force, or because they choose to leave being no longer able to cope with their terrible condition. In about half of the cases the parents do not report that they are missing, precisely because the reason for leaving is abuse. Only a small percentage are reunited with their families. Others become “Children of the Night” - developing families on the street. But a big majority of youngsters turn to and depend on theft, prostitution and crime to survive.

Finally, there is a tiny minority of youngsters who, having run away from their homes, have been able to find a job, a place to live, and to establish themselves independently.

Why do they run?

Family violence is the main cause, especially for the abused and for alcohol and drug victims. But there are other reasons like:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| -Breakdown of marriage. | -School problems. |
| -Disintegration of family. | -Lack of Self-esteem. |
| -Sexual activity. | -Strong feelings of neglect and loneliness. |
| -Cults. | -Lack of real love and caring |

Prevention and Cure

- *Prevention*: Avoiding all kind of domestic violence, creating a warm, loving and joyful family togetherness, family prayer.

- *Cure*: Having the door of the home always open; finding help and professional guidance; experiencing a deep and frequent family reconciliation; listening to the Word of God and periodically sharing.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Am I concerned about the situation of runaways? Explain.
2. Are there any runaways or throwaways in our family? Explain.
3. What are we going to do for some of those we know?

PREMARITAL SEX

Terms like “sex is fun”, “sexual freedom,” “the new morality,” “free love” and therefore, “unmarried sex, is ok” are used so blithely in today’s society that most teenagers are embarrassed about their own doubts. “If everybody’s doing it,” they reason, “then I must be a freak to hesitate.”

In this environment of lack of sex education, and social and peer pressure, few teens are able to honestly reflect and to consider that: -“Sex is beautiful”; “Sex is holy”; “Sex is a beautiful gift from God”; “Marriage is a call from God”; “Virginity is the best way to prepare oneself for a successful marriage and family life”; “Life is sacred”; “Sexual liberation includes the freedom to say No!”

Consequently, sexual intercourse outside of marriage is wrong because it cannot provide the commitment required for the act to be an expression of “total union of mind and will and heart with another person.” Therefore it is against God’s Plan.

Facts

- *Teen Pregnancy*: This is a widespread phenomenon of modern life, and one of the consequences of the “sexual revolution.”
- *The Living Together Arrangement*. Millions of couples now identify themselves as “Persons of the opposite sex sharing living quarters. Most are under 25.
- *Abortion*. Millions of babies have been destroyed (murdered) in the past decades, mostly among teenagers - perhaps a third of all pregnancies. This is an evil crying out to God for justice.

Choosing Life

The child in the womb is a human being, therefore the most gentle way to terminate a pregnancy is to give birth to the child.. In choosing life a pregnant teen has four legitimate moral options:

- *Get married*, if there is true love between the two parents.
- *Raise the child* as a single parent, avoiding a wrong marriage.
- *Parents can raise* and/or adopt the child, if they want it.
- The child can be placed for adoption.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What do I think, feel and plan about sex and love?
2. Am I “for life”? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything our family can do for a pregnant teenager or an unwed mother among those we know?

CULTS

Religious sects or cults are often dangerous but respond to deep human needs. Religious sects challenge today's families and religions to create more loving, caring, closer, open and God-centered homes. The phenomenon of sects and cults should be seen not so much as a threat to the families and religions but rather a challenge and a call from God to change, to renew and to improve marriage and family life according to God's vision.

The only way to face this challenging reality is to discover and release the powerful energy of love that is dormant in your marriage and family life.

Actually, until teens and youth can find what they are looking for at home, they will continue to search -and possibly get even more lost - elsewhere.

Facts

- Although cults have been around for centuries, cult membership is on the increase in modern times. Among the more than 250 existing cults or sects, the best known are "The Way", "The Unification Church" (Moonies), "Hare Krishna", "The Children of God", "The New Age Movement." In addition there are the Satanists (devil worship), occultism and witchcraft.
- Some of these people engage in vandalism, sacrificing the blood of animals, even murder and suicide in the name of Satan.
- A number of sects and cults use "Brainwashing" and highly sophisticated forms of social and psychological manipulation to recruit and hold new members. Among techniques are "love-bombing" by other sect members and isolation from former friends, family and other outside influences. Some methods and attitudes of sects are destructive of personalities and disruptive of families and societies.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What is the distinction between religion and cults?
2. How have my religious discoveries and experiences made me a more thoughtful, responsible and generous member of my family?
3. Is there anything we can do to help the teens and young people of our community avoid falling in the trap of the sects and cults? What?

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Misguided children (mostly between the ages of 8 and 18) are turning the inner cities into war zones of crime and gang violence.

Facts

All too many children in the inner city live with their mothers who are probably unskilled and unemployed. Their fathers have long since left the family. There are 3 or 4 brothers and sisters who share the three-room government-subsidized apartments commonly known as "The Projects."

They grow up in the graffiti-garnished, broken-glass-littered streets. In too many cases, one could say that the inner city child is reared in the streets and by the streets -- and the streets are cold blooded ruthless teachers. What do youngsters mainly learn in the streets?

- * *Vandalism* - an increasing phenomenon of inner cities.
- * *Stealing* - robbery, burglary, theft of motor vehicles, etc.
- * *Selling drugs* -- individually, organized.
- * *Assaulting and raping* -- individually, or in teams.
- * *Becoming prostitutes* -- both girls and boys.
- * *Committing Homicide* -- individually or in gangs.

**Many end up in prison or social institution where too often they learn to
"improve their skills."**

Can anything be done?

Yes! As a matter of fact, thousands of families in the inner cities, in spite of their environment, are successfully meeting the challenge. They are proving that just because you live in the ghetto, the ghetto doesn't have to live in you. Here is what you can do to prevent juvenile delinquency:

- * 1. High priority for family time - reconciliation and sharing.
- * 2. Make the Lord the Center of the home - Bible and family prayer.
- * 3. Joining with other families to fight violence in the homes.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What do I think and feel about the "street children"?
2. Are we a preventing family or do we need some cure? Explain.
3. What can we do for young delinquents we know?

SUICIDE

In spite of overwhelming difficulties, pain, despair, tragedy and loneliness, which are indeed part of life, definitely life is meaningful. It is from God and belongs to God. It is not for us to do what we want with it.

Suicides, even among teen-agers, occur every day, and add up in the thousands in the course of a year. But here are many more failed attempts; and tens of thousands who at one time or another contemplate it. It is the second leading cause of death among adolescents, coming right after accidents.

Why are teens killing themselves?

Suicide is not the beginning, it is the end of a long line of deep-hidden frustrations and sufferings. The causes vary with individuals and groups of individuals. The most common are:

- Marriage and family violence.
- Alcoholism.
- Social and peer pressure-
- Drug abuse.
- A sense of guilt or failure.
- Despair.
- Feelings of worthlessness.
- Revenge.
- Rejection by a loved one.
- Loneliness.
- Escape from reality.
- Physical pain.
- Anger, helplessness and hopelessness
- School problems.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Exhibits signs of a daredevil or self-abusive behavior.
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Inability to develop significant relationships.
- Social withdrawal from family, relatives, friends and teachers.
- Significant loss, e.g. anniversary of a significant loss.
- Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, confusion and/or desire to die.
- Recent experience of a broken or difficult romance.
- Diminished interest in personal pursuits and lack of purpose.

How can teen suicide be prevented?

- Recognizing warning signs.
- Having a trusting relationship.
- Listening, not lecturing.
- Getting help immediately.
- Praying with great hope.
- Being there and helping with deeds.

Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Have I ever thought or attempted to commit suicide? Why?
2. What would I do for someone who wanted to kill him/herself?
3. What could I do to prevent suicide in my family?

2. DEALING WITH THE ROOTS

Up to now you have reflected, shared and acted about the most important problems,

Needs and concerns of the families in your community.

Also you have learned more about its causes,

And hopefully have committed yourselves to some personal and family actions.

Now it is time to find the real roots to deal with them inside and outside of yourselves.

It is not enough to know what is happening.

If you want to be successful and efficient you have to go to the roots.

ANGER, SELFISHNESS AND PRIDE

These are three of the deepest experiences we suffer in life, that cause unhappiness in our hearts, in our homes and in society.

a) Anger

It is a powerful, but perfectly normal, feeling or motion that we all experience from time to time. Anger can be your friend or foe; it all depends on how you control and express it. If you recognize and manage your anger appropriately, you can overcome obstacles, achieve goals, solve problems, handle emergencies and even protect your health. But failing to recognize, understand and control your anger may cause you stress and anxiety, and that can drive you towards depression - feelings of disappointment, sadness, frustration, loneliness and desperation. How to handle it?

To efficiently control anger it is necessary to find its real causes like failures, infidelities, disloyalties, insults, fears, separations, threats, oppressions etc. But if we want to dig even further we will have to face ourselves from within, to discover what kind of selfishness or pride is the cause of our anger.

b) Selfishness

Selfishness is an innate tendency that we all have from the moment of birth that blocks our capacity to love. It is the opposite of love. It is an immature and immoderate love of oneself; an excessive concern for oneself; an exclusive care of one's own interests, accompanied by a total disinterest for others; an attitude of getting and receiving from others and of not giving; It is easy to see the selfishness in other people but, generally, we are blind to see it in ourselves.

c) Pride

This is the other natural tendency we all possess that makes it difficult to be loved and to love. Pride is rooted in a high and unreasonable concept of one's own superiority in comparison to others. It is an arrogant exaltation of one's own excellence. It is an eagerness to stand out, dominate, manipulate, and possess that easily drives to oppression. Pride is blind too.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. How do I handle anger in my personal life and home?
2. Are there clear signs of selfishness and pride in our lives?
3. What can we do to assist someone we know who is depressed or oppressed.

SOCIAL PRESSURES

Anger, selfishness and pride are rooted *in us*, but there are other causes for the instability of today's families that *are outside of us*, namely, social pressures. We've already reflected about some: divorce; sexual revolution; abortion; alcohol; drugs etc. Let us now focus on consumerism, peer groups and mass media.

a) Consumerism

It is a trend of epidemic proportions influencing everybody's minds and changing radically our system of values. Its essential message is: "The most important thing in life is to get and have things", so powerful, that today almost everybody follows this new gospel. And by getting things, we lose our own being. The crisis of identity of many of today's individuals, couples and families has its origin in this philosophy. How to overcome it? The key is true Faith.

b) Peer Groups

A "peer" is one of the same rank, like, an equal, a match, a companion. Therefore, a peer group is the group of people we relate to most easily, because of our common affinities and resemblances. Everyone, no matter how old they are, cares what other people think, feel, want, and how they dress and behave. Thinking in terms of families, there are all ages of peer groups of parents and of peer groups of children.

Peer groups can be our best friend or our worst enemy. It all depends on whether they are helping to fulfill or to destroy us. We have to be very honest to discern it. The "Everybody does it!" as a way of life, is the classical trap - especially for the young members of the family, and an easy way of losing one's own identity.

Remember: It is OK to say *NO* to your "Peer Group," and make your own decisions. Your decisions say a lot about what is important to you and what kind of person you are. So when you feel confused or unsure, try talking to someone you trust among your family members, relatives or friends. Make up your own mind and you won't give someone else a chance to make up your mind for you.

c) Mass Media

Namely: The Internet, Press, Magazines, Radio, Movies, Cassettes, Computers, Videos and TV sets are influencing today's families enormously. Although each one of these media can be part of the good that God creates through man in the world, nowadays most of them are strongly damaging families from within. Especially if the internet is used without control.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What do I think about the pressure of today's mass media?
2. How does television and/or the internet affect our household?
3. What can we do to use the mass media to reach out to the needs of some of the families we know?

FAMILY POVERTY

Poverty is relative and definitions can vary, but demographers estimate that one quarter of the world's population lives in poverty.

Facts

- * *Family Poverty:* Millions in the world live in dire poverty even threatening to life, especially the lives of children. In the West more than half live in single-parent households, and nine out of ten such homes are headed by women. Despite laws, few fathers are made to pay adequate, if any, child support.
- * a) *Working Mothers:* 70 percent of all mothers with school-age children work outside the home; some because they are their family's sole support, others because of increased living costs, inflation and unemployment require the woman's paycheck. Most women earn about two-thirds of what men earn in basically the same jobs.
- * b) *Unemployment:* No regular statistics are published on the family characteristics of the unemployed, but it is safe to say that more than half of the unemployed are married. Also, parents of large families suffer a higher degree of unemployment than those of smaller families. The present level of unemployment presents a grave threat to the family life of a country and indeed to the morals of our society. It breeds hopelessness, depression, apathy and a sense of injustice. It leads to irresponsibility, jealousy, vandalism of property and even violence. That is precisely what we are experiencing everyday in towns and cities throughout the world.
- * c) *Housing:* If our consideration of families with low incomes, either from wages or social security, is depressing and can generate little optimism, what about the situation of hundreds of thousands of today's poor families who live in miserable housing conditions or who have no home at all?

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. What do I think and feel about the poor families?
2. How could we further simplify our standard of living?
3. What could or should we do for a poor family we know?

RELIGIOUS IGNORANCE

Religious Faith is a precious gift of God to humble people. It is the glue that holds everything together when all else fails. It is a personal decision and choice for God, enabling the members of the family to believe and to relate to each other. The closer the members of the family are to God. the closer they are to each other. But what is the reality in today's families and homes, maybe starting with your own family and home?

Facts

In most of today's families and homes there is no Living Faith at all. In practice, numerous families do not believe in any One Supreme, Personal, All-Powerful God. They worship, instead, many and different "gods." Actually, in contemporary families, people do not argue against morality, integrity and God. There is no rebellion against God. For many He doesn't exist, and is therefore irrelevant. The real situation is that of practical indifference about truth, honesty, morality, religion and God. In most families the practical choice, not with words but with every day deeds, is to "have" many goods and gods. There is acquiescence in the New Age theory, that we are all approaching the point where we will all be gods.

Symptoms

The symptoms of this "atheism" in family life are quite clear:

- No communication about God's living experiences.
- No religious education for both parents and children.
- No awareness of God's Presence and Action.
- No "fear of God" and respect for Him.
- No prayer.
- No Bible.
- No Sacraments.
- Ignorance and transgression of the 10 Commandments of God.
- Ignorance and transgression of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Ignorance and transgression of the Teachings of the Church.

All of this results in a growing confusion, selfishness, injustice, violence and death.

No respect, no peace, no hope.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Do I really believe in God? Why or why not?
2. Are we or are we not a God centered family? Explain.
3. What could or should we do to improve religious education in our own family as well as in other families we know?

INJUSTICE

Injustice is at the bottom line of family instability. In other words, violation of the rights of the family.

What are the Family Rights

In 1980 the “Charter of The Rights of The Family” was born in the “womb” of the Catholic Church. Let us bring here a paraphrased and abbreviated form for your Family Reflection, Sharing and Acting:

Article 1: “All Persons have the right to freely choose their state in life, to marry and establish a family or to remain single.” Those who marry should expect from society the moral, educational, social and economic conditions that foster family health.

Article 2: “Real Marriage exists only when there is the right to free and full consent” Man and woman shall enjoy the same dignity and equal rights in marriage.

Article 3: “Spouses have the inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the number of children to be born.” Families have the right to assistance in the bearing and rearing of children.

Article 4: “Human Life has the right of absolute respect and protection from the moment of conception.” Abortion, embryonic experimentation and other genetic intervention must be excluded.

Article 5: “Parents have the original, primary and inalienable right to educate their children, and public authorities must assure structures that assure those rights.”

Article 6: “Families have the right to exist and progress as a family.” The dignity and the stability of the family as an institution is “attacked” by divorce.

Article 7: “Every Family has the right to freely live its own religion.” It will be free to take part in public worship and religious instruction without suffering discrimination.

Article 8: “The Family has the right to play a social and political role in the building of society. To form associations with other families to fulfill this role effectively.

Article 9: “Families have the right to rely on an adequate family policy -- in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains, on the part of public authorities.

Article 10: “Working conditions and wages must respect family needs and rights.”

Article 11: “Families have the right to decent housing, basic services, and an environment that will enable them to progress.

Article 12: “The Same Rights are to be accorded immigrants, refugees, and migrant workers.

3. BEING A WITNESS OF LOVE

CORPORAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS

Finally, happy families - true communities of life and love -are aware of the *needs* of the people they know, feel solidarity with them and consequently practice the forgotten works of mercy, meeting their needs - both corporal and spiritual. "Family love" is the most characteristic and powerful testimony in the community.

You, as a family, are called to become a witness of love, not just by words, but especially by deeds, always according to your personal gifts and your family's charisma. How? Here are some suggestions to help you in your reflection, sharing and actions.

Corporal Needs - reaching out to the:

- *Hungry*: Going out to them and providing them with food and feeding them.
- *Thirsty*: Giving them drink when needed.
- *Naked*: Clothing them, especially the garment of dignity.
- *Prisoners*: Visiting them and assisting their families.
- *Homeless*: Finding a shelter or sharing your home.
- *Sick*: Visiting them, especially disabled and terminally ill.
- *Deceased*: Burying, praying for them and assisting their families.

Spiritual needs

- *Admonishing* the sinners through one's honest life.
- *Instructing* the ignorant by sharing with them gifts and time.
- *Counseling* the confused and doubtful with wisdom and prayer.
- *Comforting* the sorrowful by listening to them with one's heart.
- *Bearing wrongs* patiently and with gentleness.
- *Forgiving* injuries by restoring one's relationship to wholeness.
- *Praying for* the living and the dead, both friends and enemies.

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Reflect and share as a family - decide to act

1. Am I a merciful and compassionate person? What are the positive or negative signs?
2. Are we, as a family, witnessing and practicing love and peace in the community? Explain about the positive or negative signs.
3. Looking at the suffering people we know, what is it we could or should do to assist them? How and when?

PART V.
FOLLOW UP

The Purpose of This Last Part of the Book

Is

To encourage you,

So that the fire of love in your family, always be kept alive and burning.

In this last part of the book, you will find helpful means, materials and tools

To keep growing side by side

Personally, as a married couple, as a family

And of course!

Sharing with other families

So that they also will become better families for a better world.

FAMILY ENRICHMENT

This is an ongoing learning process that enhances and improves family life. It is a deepening experience that draws from inside what is already dormant there. It is a means of affirming supporting and improving skills of Family Communication and - Family Relationships. It is not only inwardly focused but outwardly directed. It calls families to reach toward their potential to become Spirals of Life, Love and Peace. Its purpose is preventing by developing growth potential of the family, as a unit.

To help in all of this together is, fortunately:

* Abundant literature - Books, Magazines and Materials.

* Numerous Family Movements Organizations, networks, programs and services, such as:

CHRISTIAN FAMILY MOVEMENT

This is an organization that promotes family ministry within, by, and to families all over the world. It is a movement of Christian families who join efforts to save and enhance the human and Christian values of the family. In this way it becomes a force in the community that forms persons, transmits faith and, through its members, is committed to the total development of the community.

What does it hope to achieve?

Communication and dialogue between husband and wife to help them develop and strengthen their marriage; Opportunities for dialogue between parents and children, that will contribute to better

understanding of each other and the development of every member of the family: Better understanding of the environment in which it finds itself, to learn, to adapt, to choose, to enrich this environment with its own cultural values; A realization of the problems of the community and the will to bring about constructive change; The development of its own life-style according to the human and Christian values most appropriate for them in their own circumstances.

What does it offer?

- *A Formation Program*: It consists of three cycles based on the fundamental areas of family life. The material for each part consists of themes for group dialogue and conjugal or family dialogue, as well as suggestions for general meetings of various teams.

- *A Method of Work*: a three stage methodology:

1. *Observing* the awareness of the facts is the departing point.
2. *Judging* the finding of the causes and discerning God's Will.
3. *Acting*, in ways that will be objectively fruitful.

- *A wonderful community of families* ready to share family life, by giving and receiving personal experiences and testimonies from the parents as well as from the sons and daughters who are growing together!

FIRES

An acronym signifying Families, Intercommunication, Relationships, Experiences, Services.

FIRES is a dream. We live in an age where communication techniques improve at a very fast pace, but at the same time millions of people feel the anguish of isolation and loneliness. FIRES is a profound longing to reach out to the people who want to discover and to release the thermonuclear human energy of love which lies dormant in their homes.

FIRES is A Conviction. A deep conviction that interpersonal communication and relationships, in accordance with God's Plan --revealed in the Bible and through the Signs of the Times, is the key to the revolution of Justice, Love and Peace in our Society.

FIRES is a network for:

Weekend Experiences:

"Family Encounter" a weekend for involved families.

"Fraternal Encounter" a weekend for leaders of different organizations related to Marriage and family ministry.

The following are “Weekends” included under the umbrella of FIRES:

- Original Marriage Encounter (ME) -
For couples to encounter themselves individually and as a couple
- Marriage Re-Encounter (RE) -
For reconciliation with children while deepening the M.E. experience
- Engaged Encounter (EE)-
For an efficacious marriage preparation course
- Sons and Daughters Encounter (SADE) -
For an encounter with self regarding important aspects of one’s life
- Sons and Daughters Retorno (SADR)-
For an Encounter with the Lord, especially through Sacred Scripture
- Family Encounter (FE)-
For encountering one another as a family
- Self-Encounter (SE)-
For individuals in all walks of life
- Self Retorno (SR)
For an Encounter with the Lord, especially through Sacred Scripture
- Priest Encounter (PE)-
For re-evaluating one’s vocation; evangelizing through families; etc.
- Sisters Encounter (Sr. E)-
For re-evaluating one’s vocation; evangelizing through families; etc.
- Eucharistic Encounter (EuE)
For deeper understanding and experience of the Eucharist
- Fraternal Encounter (Frat. E)-
or aiding animators of family ministry to collaborate.
- Vocation Discernment Encounter (VDE)
For discerning what path the Lord is calling one to
- Family – Identity and Mission Encounter (FIME)
For families in a parish to discover who they are and what they should do
- Returning (RE)

For couples living together without marriage

Additional Experiences

- * Marriage Retorno (MR)-
For an Encounter with the Lord as a couple
This weekend is not presented as a “FIRES” program
- * Family Communication Workshop (FCW) -
For deepening communication among family members (a six hour experience)
- * Marriage Encounter at home (MEH)-
For a Marriage Encounter experience by mail.
- * Around the Table (AT)-
For family sharing over a protracted period of time.
- * Family Encounter at home (FEH)-
For a Family Encounter experience by mail.
- * Family evangelization” a family conference for families.
- * Family Retorno” a biblical weekend for encountered families.

At Home Experiences

- “Self-Encounter”: a self-awareness workbook.
- “Self-Retorno”:a guidebook for personal prayer.
- “Marriage encounter at home” an experience by mail for couples.
- “Face to Face” a handbook for married couples.
- “Little fires history” a booklet for 5 family sharing.
- “Around the table” a workbook for 12 family sharing.
- “Family encounter at home” a program for families by mail.
- “Family marathon” a weekend for animating families.

For More Information

FIRES, Inc. 1425 Otis Street NE Washington D.C. 20017.

<http://www.family-experiences.org/>

E. Mail: fires@mindspring.com

FAMILY MINISTRY

A family that has found its identity needs to keep growing as a family

Share with other families the secret of their happiness.

Fire only stays lit if it spreads, otherwise it consumes itself and goes out...

Therefore, you are called to action as a family.

You are called to serve other families:

In your neighborhood in your parish, church or temple in your local community

And in the world community. In other words:

You are called to a family ministry

* * * * *

Reaching out to

NEIGHBORHOODS

As we have seen before, there are strong pressures and negative influences on families in our neighborhoods of local communities. They are powerful challenges for families like yours.

How to react? What could you do, as a family, to prevent, to cure and to promote family awareness, family awakening and family perspective in your neighborhood and beyond?

The answer is: to join other volunteer families, and together start promoting a process of family ministry.

Ministry means service. Therefore, Family Ministry will be: Getting involved with other families, giving to them and receiving from them the nourishment, support and healing that is needed.

The like-to-like Family Ministry seems so natural and spontaneous. But in fact, it is not an easy adventure. For it to be true, solid and efficient is must be deeply motivated, rooted in the Word of God and challenged by the Signs of the Times.

PARISHES

We have to recognize that in most parishes Family Ministry is practically unknown. Why?

- The structure of the parish, basically composed of individuals.
- Individualistic approach of almost all services.
- Lack of family perspective among the responsible leaders in the parish.
- Parish-Centered Programs which separate children from their parents, or parents from their children in practically every activity: liturgies, retreats, religious education, prayer experiences and celebrations etc.

If we want the whole world to become "one family," and families to become the foundation of the "new world in the Lord," then each Parish has to become: a "Family of Families." With this family

perspective of the parish, priests and pastors will need to radically change, and to discover in which ways parishes have to serve families, not just as individuals, but as a “unit”. The Internet will provide the names of numerous books by experts on the family which can be very helpful.

Some suggested ways:

- * Organizing groups for visiting families, and learn their concerns, fears, needs, values, expectations and suggestions.
- * Promoting home-centered programs, to release home energy, like “Family Nights,” “Around The Table,” “Around the Bible,” etc.
- * Creating a parish-family centered plan. By monthly scheduling “Mini-Encounters” of different kinds: for Couples, for Sons and Daughters, for Parents and Children” and for “Families.
- * Facilitating periodic training for “family animators.”

EPILOGUE

A Dream!

Within each one of us
- Man, woman, child, young, adult, old,
Inside each married couple
-Black, white or brown, believer or non believer, rich or poor,
Deep within each family
- Traditional or single parent, step or blended, healthy or sick -
In every community
- Social, cultural or religious,
There is a mysterious and powerful loving energy created by God.

The source of life and love.
If we release that Energy
We will transform the face of the earth:
Violence will vanish and a new era of justice, love and peace will dawn.
Families, the heart of God's creation
Are the lever
For the rebuilding of society
According to God's wise and merciful plan.

Let us honestly ask ourselves
- Personally and as a group -
What can or should we do to release
That Transforming Energy