

Jesus Prayed:

“That they may be one

as we are one”

(John 17:22)

AROUND

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THE TABLE



FIRES

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AROUND OUR TABLE

This is a FIRES' booklet. It comes in response to the hundreds of families who have experienced the "Family Communication Workshop" and who now want to repeat and improve on this experience in their own homes.

Here are twelve possible Family Meetings around the table in your own home. They are twelve great opportunities to listen to each other, to communicate and understand each other better, to encounter and, therefore, grow as a Family - twelve challenges to each and every member of the Family. Before each Family Meeting there is a Personal Reflection. It is like God calling at the door of your home each time you plan a reflection and family meeting.

Are we willing to meet these challenges?

Are we willing to open our door to God?

Or - are we going to use the old outworn and tired excuse:

"We don't have TIME"?

That would be a false and superficial answer. We all have twenty-four hours each day, to be used for our real needs and wants. What then is happening? I think that, as in so many other things, we are divorcing our theoretical ideas and convictions from our actual behavior.

We must get rid of this mask. But how?

This booklet has been written to serve you and your family; to help you build a *BRIDGE* between your ideas and convictions and your behavior.

Remote Preparation:

1. On your calendar reserve a date for you and your Family to meet around the kitchen table. Agree also on the time.
2. Decide on the particular Family Meeting you are going to do, following as much as possible the order given in this booklet.
3. A few days before your Family Meeting, each family member should retire to a quiet corner and answer—in writing—all of the questions for the Personal Reflection. Each member of the Family should have his/her personal notebook for this very important purpose.
4. On the set day, and at the agreed upon time, while inviting God to be a part of it, the Family Meeting takes place.

I. GETTING CLOSER AS INDIVIDUAL PERSONS

Orientation

We live immersed in a materialistic and consumer-oriented society strongly invites and pushes us to value things over people, to do and to possess rather than to be. This materialistic and atheistic attitude is damaging our families and consequently our society.

Today, in our Family Meeting around the table, we will make an effort to regard one another with respect and admiration. As a Family, we are necessarily a community of “persons”, and therefore we must never forget that any communication is an encounter with ourselves as persons. It is important then that I start out by asking myself:

Who am I, i.e. what kind of a person am I?

Written personal reflection

1. Do I really feel that in my family I am a person with my own individuality?
2. Does everyone respect me as a person? Who does not?
3. Do I respect each family member as a person? Whom do I not?
4. What one word best describes each member of my family, myself included?
5. What one word best describes what our family is like, as a community of persons?
6. In our family, do we all feel responsible?
7. In our home, do we all feel free, and do we respect each other's freedom?
8. What can I do to help my family become a true community of free and responsible individuals?

Family Meeting

Each member of the Family reads his/her Personal Reflection, while everyone listens attentively and lovingly, without comments or discussion. Simply listen to each other with your hearts.

II. COMMUNICATING LITTLE THINGS OF DAILY LIFE

Orientation:

Just as birds were born to fly and fish to swim, so we humans have been born to communicate. When we fail to communicate, our personalities suffer and disintegrate. We cannot be truly alive if we remain isolated from others. Good communication doesn't have to be about earth-shaking events. It can be about small things of everyday life.

Families are, and should be, the best environment for this kind of essential sharing.

The result of this lack of communication about little things is that when someone has a serious and urgent matter to communicate, he doesn't know how to go about it and so searches in vain for other means, which in the end solve nothing and only aggravate the problem.

If we don't know how to communicate the little things of everyday life, how are we going to communicate the big and important things?

Written personal reflection

1. The three things I like to see are:
2. The three things I don't like to see are:
3. The three things I like to hear are:
4. The three things I don't like to hear are:
5. The three things I like to smell are:
6. The three things I don't like to smell are:
7. The three things I like to taste are:
8. The three things I don't like to taste are:
9. The three things I like to touch or hold are:
10. The three things I don't like to touch or hold are:
11. The best day of the week for me is... Why?
12. What I like to do best on a weekend is... Why?

Family Meeting

Listen carefully to each other as you answer those twelve points.

III. FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

Orientation

Without true reconciliation there is no possibility for deep communication and encounter. Reconciliation between family members is the key to a new family life.

We all have made mistakes and carry feelings of guilt within us, which interfere with our family relationships and may cause hurts to other family members. This is a daily occurrence in homes all over the world.

What is not so clear is the spirit and attitude of reconciliation in the great majority of homes, including even deeply religious ones.

It is important then, to effect a reconciliation between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters.

This is the first step toward true family intercommunication and deepened relationships.

Written personal reflection

1. Make a list of my principal errors and personal faults against each member of my own family.
2. What are my errors and faults against unity and family life in my home?

Family Meeting

Listen deeply and lovingly to each other in order to forgive from your heart - and also to be forgiven. This Family Meeting may end with a short but heartfelt prayer to God, and/or with a hymn.

There should be an attitude of love and understanding.

IV. SHARING OUR NEEDS AND WANTS

Orientation:

Good communication requires an atmosphere of mutual “confidence” and trust. It’s the key to true interpersonal relationships. It’s also the proof of true love because, in this context “confidence” refers to a state of mind whereby one intends to give oneself wholly and entirely to another person or persons; and that is the nature of true love. But this special kind of mutual confidence and trust (“confianza”) cannot be imposed. It must be earned. We learn to trust by trusting ourselves and others. The problems of drugs, alcohol, delinquency, and suicide are social phenomena which have roots in the inability of people to trust each other, thereby preventing them from sharing their innermost needs with their family.

A home should be a privileged place for confidences and for the most intimate interrelationship between husband and wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters.

Written personal reflection

1. Do I consider myself a happy person? Why? Or why not?
2. What do I like best about my family? Why?
3. What do I dislike most about my family or some member of the family? Why?
4. Have I ever considered leaving home? Why?
5. What is my main personal problem? Do I dare confide this problem to a family member? Why not?
6. Which member of my family do I trust the most? Why?
7. Which member of my family do I trust the least? Why?
8. Is there something I would like to communicate to my family that I haven’t because of lack of “confidence”?
9. Do I or don’t I want to communicate more with the members of my family person to person? How? With whom?
10. What is my most urgent need?

Family meeting

Listen respectfully and lovingly to each other’s sharings on the above ten points, taking care not to comment or criticize.

V. DISCOVERING OUR PERSONAL VALUES

Orientation:

In today's "Around the Table" Family Meeting we are going to make an effort to value each other more. There are unsuspected treasures of energy within each family member, which remain hidden for lack of timely communication and so are lost in the anonymity of the passing days, weeks, months, and years.

Our old inclination and attitude of seeing only the negative in our family members blinds us to the discovery of the positive aspects in them, and also in ourselves. We must overcome this ugly inclination which prevents us from improving our family life.

Written personal reflection

1. What are my three best qualities?
2. What is the best quality of each member of my family?
3. What do I like best about myself? Why?
4. What do I like best about each family member? Why?
5. What am I discovering about each one of us during these family meetings around the table?

Family Meeting

Share the answers to these five questions, striving always to encourage and support each other more and more.

VI. ACCEPTING OURSELVES AND OTHERS JUST AS WE ARE

Orientation:

Like it or not, we really are as we are. It may not be easy, but this is a reality that we cannot but accept. It isn't easy to accept myself just as I am. It isn't easy to accept others just as they are.

I would like them to be the way I want, not as they are. It is this lack of mutual acceptance which is one of the reasons for our personal unhappiness and our family's and uneasiness. A family where everyone feels accepted for who they are is a happy family. Is your family like that?

Written personal reflection

1. Have I come to accept myself as I am?
2. What do I find most difficult to accept in myself? Why?
3. Have I come to accept each family member as he or she is? Why or why not?
4. Whom haven't I come to accept as he/she is? Why not?
5. Do I feel accepted by each member of my family?
6. By whom do I feel not yet fully accepted?
7. What do I find most difficult to accept in my family? Why?

Family Meeting

Communicate calmly about each one of these seven points, trying to listen and express yourself lovingly and tactfully. Leave out all comments and discussions. If the opportunity presents itself, give heartfelt thanks.

VII. TOWARDS GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Orientation:

Misunderstanding is the result of poor communication and the lack of deep interpersonal relationships. We cannot understand someone whom we do not know, and consequently whom we do not fully accept. Today, millions of men and women of all ages and cultures feel misunderstood in their own homes, and are trying to find that longed for understanding in other communities.

This unfulfilled desire often leads to divorce and alienation between husband and wife. It is also the main reason children leave home - feeling unfulfilled and hurt. As the saying goes: *“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”* Let’s devote one of our Family Meetings to this important aspect of mutual understanding.

Written personal reflection

1. Do I currently feel lonely and misunderstood? Have I ever felt that way?
2. Do I have the impression that someone in my family feels lonely and misunderstood? Who?
3. Who among the members of my family understands me best?
4. Whom do I understand best?
5. Whom do I have to understand better?
6. Who would I like to understand me better?
7. What do I find hardest to understand about my family?
8. What do I think my family doesn’t quite understand about me that I want them to understand now?

Family Meeting

Share your beliefs, attitudes, and feelings so as to discover and determine your social and apostolic mission as a family in your community and your country.

VIII. HELPING EACH OTHER

Orientation:

When we respect, forgive, and trust each other, when we accept ourselves and our family as we are, and when we understand each other (or at least try to understand each other) then we are really helping each other.

This happens to be the problem with most people; they need help, and not finding it in their own family, they seek it elsewhere.

Sometimes they find it; such is the case of Alcoholics Anonymous and other such groups and organizations aimed at helping individuals, couples, and families. But for others—for the majority—such help never arrives, and the person, the couple, the family itself remains in trouble.

The purpose of our Family Meeting is to find ways of helping each other within the rhythm and warmth of the family circle.

Written personal reflection

1. Which family member has helped me the most? How?
2. Who is helping me the most at present? How?
3. Who would I like to help me more? Why?
4. In what area do I need special help, and how?
5. Who in my family am I helping the most? How?
6. Who in my family am I helping the least? Why?
7. Who needs more or better help from me? How?
8. Who is helping our family to be a family in a very special way? How?

Family Meeting

During this family sharing let us determine the best way in which we can help each other.

IX. LOVING EACH OTHER

Orientation:

As the saying goes: “Actions speak louder than words.” It is easy to say to someone: “I love you.” But it is not so easy to demonstrate to someone that we really love them. Love is really an art that must be learned at home. There are many kinds and dimensions of love. Today we are concerned with family love. Love, the Bible tells us, is a divine energy which God has placed at the heart of creation. And, the heart of creation is precisely the families which have love. Such families can change the world and history. You can be, if you are ready, one of those families.

Written personal reflection

1. Which member of my family shows through actions that he/she loves each one of us? How?
2. Do I feel loved by all members of my family?
3. By which do I not feel loved?
4. Whom do I love the most? Why?
5. Whom do I love the least? Why?
6. To whom do I have to demonstrate more love through actions from now on? How?
7. How can all of us transform our family into a community of true love? Give at least three examples.

Family Meeting

Recognizing that communication is the key to releasing the energy of love in the heart of each person and of each family, let us really attempt to communicate from the heart.

X. BEING OPEN AS A FAMILY

Orientation:

As we encounter ourselves and become united as a family, we can become open to the world. This is the goal of our “new family way of life.” We can achieve our family goal around our family table. Yet we can’t just confine our discoveries within our family. Our table must be expanded. We must consider our table as a map of the world, or as a big mirror, with the realities of our neighborhood, country, society, and life facing and challenging us.

And so, let us reflect together, and join our strength so that, as an open and united family, we can go forth and communicate with other families in our community. We can’t keep the “good news” to ourselves; we must announce it to the world, beginning with the families in our own neighborhood.

Let’s not forget that the marvelous energy which God has given to our family is in us, but is not only for us alone. The whole world needs it, and is waiting for it. Our basic mission is to be a family which promotes the concepts of love-service as the basis for all interpersonal relationships, in our neighborhood and beyond.

Written personal reflection

1. Is our family open or closed? (Examples)
2. Am I open or closed? (Examples)
3. Who is the most open person in my family? (Examples)
4. Who is the least open person in my family? (Examples)
5. Are we a hospitable family?
6. Do we know who the needy people in our neighborhood are? Who?
7. What are the needs of the families in our neighborhood?
8. What are we doing for the families in our community, particularly the needy ones?
9. What can we do from now on?
10. What can I decide to do personally and we as a family?

Family meeting

Let us share our beliefs, attitudes, and feelings so as to discover and determine our social and apostolic mission as a family in our community and our country.

XI. SEARCHING TOGETHER FOR GOD

Orientation:

Up to this point we have walked in the light of reason.

Quite possibly, a number of questions, and even some doubts, have formed within us. Before, during, and after our Family Meetings, we've had to overcome some problems, and new ones have developed. Some of them appear insoluble. Often the goal of family unity appears as an impossible dream. What is missing? God perhaps?

The reality for many modern day families is that God seems not to exist. If that seems to be the case with our family, not to search for Him together would be the greatest possible loss. If we do search, we will discover that He was already in our home.

Written personal reflection

1. What does God mean in my personal life?
2. What does God mean in our family life?
3. What part does God play in our home?
4. Does our family pray together? When? How?
5. Do we listen together to God's Word as revealed in the Bible? When? How?
6. Does our family follow God's commandments?
7. Do we as individuals try to follow our Lord's commandments both in and outside our home?
8. Are we helping each other to find God in our family life and in our home? How?
9. How can and should we help each other more to find God?

Family Meeting

Share your faith and religious principles so as to reach an agreement and covenant with God, as a family and community of believers.

XII. EVALUATING OUR FAMILY MEETINGS

Orientation:

We have celebrated eleven Family Meetings. It is now time to evaluate them. We have to determine how the marvelous energy which God has placed in our family is being released. We have to take stock of how we have been growing in the quality of our lives, both personal and family.

Each day, we must strive to become a better family-community of persons, messengers of our faith, serving society, beginning with our own neighborhood.

Written personal reflection

1. The family meeting I liked best was number ____? Why?
2. The family meeting I liked least was number ____? Why?
3. During these meetings I've discovered that: (Give examples)
4. What has helped me the most: why?
5. I've had the most trouble with: why?
6. I've observed the following improvements in each of us, including myself:
7. My present state of mind is: (describe)
8. My personal suggestions for the future are:

Family Meeting

Listen to each other carefully and lovingly on each of the eight points in order to experience the depth and efficacy of our Family Meetings and to note any shortcomings for possible future improvements.