

# Just between Us...

Newsletter of the Bethany Family Institute

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Published by Elizabeth Davies, Co-Director



**'A minor triumph'** was the verdict on the first issue of 'Just between Us', published last January. The response we received was overwhelmingly positive, with a wide number of people contacting us to say "Your first edition was excellent", "Very informative and enjoyable", and "Congratulations, you will go from strength to strength". One of our Bishops wrote us a delightful letter in which he thanked us for his copy: "I wish you every success in this very worthwhile venture". The Diocese of Leeds even requested subscriptions for *all* their parish contacts and so we had to develop a discount scheme for bulk orders! (Maybe you could make use of this—see the back page for details!) We also received a very favourable review in the March/ April edition of *Networking*, the magazine for Catholic Teachers. It's been an exciting Spring!

**'Just between Us'** was not only sent out to the four corners of the UK and Ireland but as far afield as the United States and Singapore. Sr Marilyn Lim, from the Canossian Missions sent "a million thanks for the Family Ministry material.... I enjoyed reading the contents and praise God for the wonderful ministry you are involved in and the many people who have been helped! May God bless you abundantly". Richard McCord, Executive Director of the NCCB (US Bishops!) Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth also wrote to congratulate us on a publication which he described as "informative, thoughtful and very communicative". Details of the "creative" Bethany website were published in his own nationally distributed newsletter. A compliment indeed. Incidentally, we now have an internet based discussion forum (mailing list) where you can interact with others, keep up with current Bethany news and consult the message bank. Join on our website.

If you still haven't subscribed, and this is the second free copy you have received, then please *send us your subscription now* if you want to stay on our mailing list. We have to revise our mailing list before the next edition. Everything we do has to be self supporting, so a strong subscription base is essential if this service is to continue. Please join now - don't put us to one side!

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## Diary dates.....

- May 12th ASDC Conference 2001: Catholics & Divorce in the 21st Century. Newman College, Birmingham. Speakers: Fr Tim Buckley and Dr Jack Dominian. Contact Frank Hacklett 020 8422 1591
- June 16/17th Bethany Seminar: Dr David Thomas will speak on the spiritual life of ordinary families. St Mary's, Dockendale Lane, Whickham, Newcastle Upon Tyne
- Aug 25/27th Christian unity: why ? Swanwick, Derbyshire. Association of Inter-Church Families, Inter-church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London, SE1 7SA  
Tel: 020 7523 2152 Fax: 020 7928 0010 Email: aife@msn.com
- Oct 22-28th Parents Week. This years theme: Listening to parents. Information Packs available in May from the National Family and Parenting Institute, 430 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, London, NW5 1TL. Telephone 020 7424 3460 Fax 020 7485 3590 Email info@nfpi.org

## Marriage & Family Life: Enduring Truths, Changing Realities

A symposium on the occasion of the  
20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)

August 15 - 18 2001

Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Arlington, Virginia

### Presentations & workshops:

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, PhD	Major Social Trends & Cultural Questions
Michael G. Lawler, PhD	A Theology for Marriages and Families Today
Joseph Atkinson PhD	What is Family Community?
Elizabeth Fox Genovese, PhD	Men & Women: Unify & Differences in Relationship
Scott Stanley, PhD	Commitment: the Key to a Lasting Marriage
David O. Coolidge, JD	Defining and Defending Marriage in the Public Square
Cecile Motus, MA	Cultures and Generations: New Challenges for Families
John Grobowski, PhD	What does Openness to Life Mean?
Joann Heaney-Hunter, PhD	The Family as Church; the Church as Family

### plus sessions on:

Family Holiness and Children Ψ Older persons in a Family Ψ Personal and Pastoral Issues for Infertile Couples Ψ Public Policies in Support of Marriage and Family Ψ Contraception: the Unasked Questions Ψ Building Strong Marriages through Natural Family Planning Ψ Linking Family and Parish Life: Ideas That Work Ψ The Evangelising Family

- A personal retrospective on the 1980 Synod by Mrs Dolores R. Leckey
- A dialogue on hopes & strategies for families & pastoral ministry, facilitated by Dr David M. Thomas

Full fee: \$175 Daily \$50 (Fri \$75) Hyatt room rates \$115 per night

[www.nccbuscc.org](http://www.nccbuscc.org)

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

# Family - the Prophetic Vision of John Paul II - Part Two

David M. Thomas. Bethany Family Institute

The third section of John Paul II's exhortation on family is really the heart of the document. Titled *The role of the Christian family*, it is sub-divided into four parts which are described as the four tasks of the family, (1) forming a community of persons, (2) serving life, (3) participating in the development of society and (4) serving the life and mission of the church. Supporting these tasks is a theological vision of family life that is both new and very significant.

The sections begins with the often quoted phrase of the pope, *Family, become what you are*. In the pope's mind, God has created the family to play an extremely important role in God's dream for human life. The family is judged as foundational for virtually all aspects of healthy and loving human development. His pastoral insight would be fully in line with the many theories of human life, especially those that identify the first years of life as decisive for all the rest.

*What you are* is the dream of God for family life. It's the power, the vitality, and the potential that is woven into the life of each family by God's creative love. The family is not asked to be or accomplish something that's beyond its capabilities. Nor is it expected to reach goals that are simply too idealistic for today's world. The pope is a realist - but, it must be noted, he's a *Christian* realist. The family is not alone in its effort at survival but is continuously nourished by God's presence and power. Never before in church writings has the family been pulled into such a central place in the Christian life.

While the worldly side of family life is noted, it is also positioned fully within the ambit of grace. Eventually the pope makes it clear that great demands can be placed before the family because the family is abundantly graced, fully accepted and cherished by God's Spirit.

No longer is the family to be viewed as just another created institution like the state or the nation. Rather it's assumed to be a major part of the life of the church itself. It would not be too much of a stretch (although the pope doesn't use these exact words) to say that the family is the *heart* of the church! Certainly he claims over and over that the life of love, the life of society and the life of the church itself come to be largely by beginning in families. This is no small claim

What's unique about his approach to the family as a *community of persons*? I see two quite important insights peppered throughout his presentation. First to reach full personhood, one must dwell within a community of equals. Life grows by being shared. The deeper the sharing, the more vitality there is. This sharing of life touches even the most mundane of family activities. The vision is comprehensive and coextensive with everything that happens between family members.

Second, love is described as the *life* of the family: mutual love, nourishing love, demanding love, forgiving love. Love between equals in the deepest meaning of equality. In his thinking here, the pope rejects even the smallest inkling of hierarchy or paternalism. The interpersonal humanism of the pope, rarely mentioned but I think is there throughout his writings, is more strongly stated here than anywhere else.

The task of *serving life* features the pope's personalistic argument on respecting human life, not only after it has come to be, but also in the process of its coming to be. Fully agreeing with the conclusion of *Humanae Vitae*, the pope bypasses arguments against artificial contraception from natural law and replaces the foundation for this prohibition with his own understanding of sexual intercourse.

For him this full expression of human sexuality requires a fullness of love present between the couple. Restricting the possibility of conception amounts to restricting the full gift of self, which is an essential aspect of the act. The pope doesn't use terms like *finality* or *purpose*, which were essential parts of

## Family: the prophetic vision.....continued

earlier argument against contraception. The Synod delegates had asked that the church's view on this issue be strengthened by new arguments that would be more acceptable and understandable to the majority. Archbishop John R. Quinn on the first morning of the Synod itself made a passionate plea for a consideration of how poorly *Humanae Vitae* had been received by married couples and priests ! Its arguments were simply not persuasive enough. The pope has responded by using language more in line with contemporary philosophy. Recall that his first career was that of being a philosophy professor.

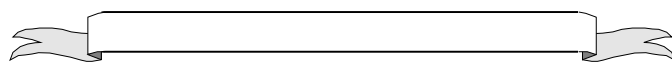
The third task of the family affirms the family's essential role in society. The family is called to be an active contributor to the general social life of the world. It is not to hide from, escape or flee from the demands of citizenship and participation in the many structures of society. The family is in the centre of society, like a leaven to humanize and to remind mass society that it exists to serve the members of society. In other writings the pope has shown how the evils of both socialism and consumerism erode the life of the person by reducing persons to objects, It is above all the role of the family to remind society that such reductionism is hideous, demeaning and ultimately destructive of the good of society itself.

The fourth task speaks to the role of the family in the *church*. I think this is the most revolutionary section of the *Familiaris Consortio*. Thoughts about the church as community easily tend to be airy or superficial. When applied to the family, however, the communal life of the church takes on characteristics of intimacy, dailyness and reality in the fullest sense. Could it be that the church has lost its sense of being a family? Could it be that in overlooking the life of the family itself causes the church to lose a sense of community in its wider forms? Could it be that in losing a sense of family, the church seriously weakens the value of what Jesus wanted as the most important sign of the church: that they love one Another ? These are difficult and probing questions. They come to mind as one begins to realize that the communal life of the family and of the church are in many ways *the same reality!*

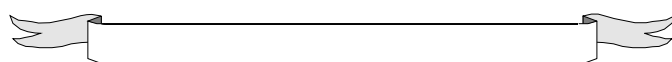
All the essential features of the church are found in the family. The family is both a saved and saving community. It is both a sanctified and sanctifying community. It is both an evangelized and an evangelizing community. Everything that is a mark of the life of the church is happening in the family *all the time*. Would that this awareness was in our Catholic faithful. Would that it were in our leadership.

The last part of the exhortation focuses upon all the pastoral changes that need to happen in order to support this exalted view of family life. Rather than summarize them, it's better left for your own reading. There's a message for all of us whatever role we might have in the church or in society. And most of all, it's directed to each of us who in the final reckoning, all came from and continue to live in family.  
(If you missed part one of this article, it can be downloaded from our website: [www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com](http://www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com))

Bethany Family Institute is pleased to announce that Karen & David Thomas are the recipients of this year's Family Exemplar Award presented by the Alumni Association of the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. Karen & David will



### Family Exemplar Award



attend the presentation on April 27th 2001. Commenting on the accolade they said, "This has to be an award for our whole family, not just for us, the parents. All that we have done for the children we have cared for either as foster children or adopted ones, could only have been done with the help and support of our five grown children. In a sense they were dragged into this, but they did so willingly and lovingly. " Some of you will

know that Karen & David are parents of seven, ages 33 to 8 and have fostered over 75 others. Many congratulations !

couple

# Equipping pastoral leaders to care for family life

Fr. Chris Fallon, Ushaw College, Durham

A new ecumenical Certificate in Marriage and Family Life was offered by Ushaw College (the Roman Catholic seminary in the North of England) between March and December 2000, as part of its response to the formation needs of the Church in the region. The course was designed in consultation with diocesan Marriage and Family Life Co-ordinators, with representatives of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Committee for Marriage and Family Life, of Marriage Care, and of the Anglican Family Life and Marriage Education network (FLAME). It was intended to meet some of the training needs of these groups and of key people they work with.

## Course Structure

The course was delivered over four residential weekends at Ushaw. Each weekend focussed on a phase of the Pastoral Cycle and each participant undertook a practical project in his or her local area and wrote an assignment. The cost of the course was £385, including accommodation, food and tuition. Fifteen participants began the course, one of whom, sadly, had to withdraw due to difficult family circumstances. Three were seminarians, eleven were lay people from England, Wales and Scotland who were already working or hoping to work in family ministry. Most were sponsored by their churches. During the final weekend, the participants were invited to make an evaluation of the course, mainly to help them to reflect on their own learning, but also to offer feedback to the course leaders and to offer suggestions for future courses. Their evaluation is summarised here.

## Hopes and Expectations

Participants felt these had been realised, many of them indicating such hopes as: meeting with like-minded people; improving their work in dioceses; extending their knowledge; analysing and testing their experience; gaining a greater understanding of the meaning of Christian marriage; practising skills; being challenged about their methodology; promoting the ministry of marriage and family life; discovering new ways of offering support to couples before and after marriage; being affirmed in what they were already doing. Participants all

felt that the course leaders explained their aims and rationale clearly and that they enjoyed the style, content and ease of the presentations.

## Pastoral cycle appreciated

Participants felt valued and enjoyed the discussions where their own experience could be analysed, tested and affirmed. Equally they enjoyed the process of the Pastoral Cycle: the sharing which took place represented a major element in their learning. One noted that the Pastoral Cycle had much to offer as a method of learning and was transferable to other situations. They appreciated the tutorial support offered, both in the planning of practical projects and in the writing of assignments. Some would have welcomed more support than was given, particularly those who had not done academic work for some time. All participants valued the ecumenical dimension and felt that it deepened and strengthened the course but would have appreciated more involvement of the Anglican and Methodist members of the core team.

## Areas of personal growth

There was particular learning for individuals in relation to their own ministry. Central to that learning were the questions people asked of themselves, such as 'What and who is involved?', 'Why do that?', 'How do I need to adapt and change?'. Among the areas of personal learning the following emerged quite strongly: the importance of prayer and a growing understanding of married spirituality; the acceptance of vulnerability; the need for patience and stamina, especially when new ideas meet with resistance; the courage to continue 'to work at our own marriages'; the need for support and networking; thinking hard about theology and contemporary life and the sheer complexity of moral issues; learning how others 'go to work' to inspire and enthuse others; learning to accept where people are on their own faith journey; the confidence to extend marriage and family life ministry; recognising that the acceptance of difficulties and disappointments is an inevitable aspect of ministering to others.

## Most enjoyable features

Amongst the most enjoyable features of the course, participants noted the following: being in communion with one another; being stimulated, affirmed and supported; increasing knowledge of issues in family ministry; the enjoyment of new relationships and the mutual respect and support; sharing of ideas and resources; the enthusiasm of the core team; being challenged to look at things differently.

#### **Discomfort**

Only two aspects of the course were mentioned as causing discomfort for participants. One was facing vulnerability and woundedness and yet recognising that ministry to the family cannot be done without facing one's own weakness. The other source of discomfort was the inclusion of the outside speakers who helped with the marriage preparation sessions. Participants felt that on this occasion their own experience was not sufficiently respected and the speakers were not as fully in tune with the aims of the course as were the members of the core team.

#### **Centrality of liturgy**

A highlight for everyone was the liturgy which course members constructed together each weekend under the guidance of one member of the core team. Some of the words used to describe this experience were: 'dynamic', 'powerful', 'relevant', 'inclusive', 'special', 'moving', 'rewarding' and 'enriching'. There was a great sense of achievement in having the freedom to prepare the liturgy in the light of work done during the weekend.

#### **Suggestions for improvement**

Suggestions for the future included: more input on specific areas of family ministry such as bereavement, parenting, cohabitation, divorce and re-marriage, theology of sex and committed loving; how to co-ordinate work in a parish/deanery/diocese; earlier notice of the programme, content and suggested reading for each weekend; access to a wider range of resources (possibly to purchase); more input on the social teaching of the Christian churches; inviting participants on the pilot scheme to contribute to the next course; external speakers to be more integrated with the core team. One member made the observation that this pilot

course was probably better suited to people who were embarking on family ministry and that more experienced people would perhaps need a deeper theological/theoretical input, though this view was not shared by other experienced participants.

#### **Course leaders perspective**

The course leaders' own reflection is that this pilot course has been an important and valuable learning experience. On the positive side they were greatly encouraged by: the experience, commitment and creativity of the participants; the enthusiastic response to the use of the Pastoral Cycle; the level of engagement which came from the residential nature of the course; the range and quality of the projects and assignments; the involvement of seminarians with lay workers; the satisfying experience of working collaboratively as a core team with differing gifts: lay and ordained, men and women, from three denominations. They had hoped for a similar ecumenical diversity amongst the participants and would be very keen to ensure wider participation in future courses. In planning for the future, they will take seriously the need to offer greater tutorial support, to brief carefully any external speakers and to keep under review the appropriateness of the level of academic input.

**Further information:** A revised version of this course has recently received validation by Durham University as part of a new modular series of post graduate qualifications in Theology and Ministry, though it will remain open to participants who are not seeking an academic award. It will probably be offered over three residential weekends at Ushaw during the academic year 2001-2002. Other modules being offered include a similarly structured ecumenical course in Chaplaincy and a core module in Theological Reflection. Brochures and application forms are currently being prepared.

To register interest in any of these courses, please contact The Course Administrator (Tracy Maratty), Ushaw College, Durham, DH7 9RH Tel. 0191 373 8510, e-mail t.l.maratty@dur.ac.uk Please address any comment, query or suggestion about the Marriage and Family Life Ministry Course, to Fr. Chris Fallon, Ushaw College, Durham, DH7 9RH Tel. 0191 373 8534, e-mail c.a.fallon@dur.ac.uk

I signed up for the Ecumenical Family Life Ministry course at Ushaw because I was hoping to work in family life ministry in my home diocese of Wrexham. It was an immensely valuable experience for me personally - that is

# We are no longer alone!

## First hand accounts from students on the Ushaw course

intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. The four weekends of the course followed the pastoral cycle; we reflected on our own experience of family life, at the present state of marriage and family life, at the teaching of the Christian Churches about marriage and family life and at the last weekend, we shared our projects - what each had done, how well it had worked. The contribution of the Anglican and Methodist tutors and of the Anglican Flame officer doing the course was very helpful.

The learning experience at the weekends was not limited to our work sessions. At meals, walking round the seminary grounds and in the bar, we were constantly sharing ideas, experiences, hopes and disappointments with one another and our tutors, especially the three on the seminary staff. There was a lot of experience of ministry among the group and I felt I was soaking up their wisdom.

For my long essay I decided to explore the idea that through human love, in our closest and intimate relationships, we all experience the love of God. - that marriage and human loving are in a sense sacramental. I wanted to look at the implications of this idea for the theology of marriage. Perhaps because I am a historian this took me to histories which have high academic standing as well as to modern theological writing. In itself, this was enriching and in writing the essay I came to a deeper understanding of my own experience and of the way God works in the messy and the humdrum, in our lows as well as our highs.

I finished the course having experienced "like to like" ministry in action and convinced that in family ministry within our own families and to others, the people of God will grow in understanding of Our Lord's teaching and in wise and life-giving loving.

Roberta Canning, Bangor, North Wales

We are not alone! More and more people in the UK are working for marriage and family life, perhaps because of what has happened to today's society - increasing number of marriage breakdowns, family homes which are little more than hotels, and the huge loss of respect for

Father, you are love and life.

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

(Taken from the Pope's prayer for families)

everyone else and everything that people stand for.

In the past there was informal preparation for marriage and family life where young people saw their parents and uncles and aunts relating to each other - that has mostly gone. In its place they are more likely to see marriage breakdown and family break up - usually involving acrimony and unpleasantness. People - particularly young couples - now need positive preparation from within their communities to help with understanding relationships, to budget and share their wealth and lack of it, and to find how sexuality in a marriage relationship is an expression of their love and growth together.

At the same time, those of us working for marriage and family life have found ourselves too much on our own. We sometimes see or accidentally hear about some of what others are doing but because of the lack of government help and direction (and unfortunately the same lack in many churches), we have all felt isolated in our work.

The pilot course at Ushaw College was a very successful attempt to offer training in practical skills. It included group exercises and discussions involving people involved in the many aspects of marriage and family life - some co-ordinators, some trainers, some teachers, some seminarians.

Each participant planned and carried out a project in family ministry in their own local setting and offered a report on their progress at the final weekend. The projects reflected the local needs of the participant and showed the different work needed and being done - marriage enrichment, parish family team ministry, bereavement support, promoting family responsibility in schools, setting up a diocesan ministry, and so on.

The course was shared by Roman Catholics, Methodists and Anglicans all recognising they had so very much in common. There was plenty of time for prayer, liturgy and reflection. Everyone participated. All learned a great deal. All left with greater confidence in their own work and with the knowledge that there were others climbing the same mountain elsewhere in the country.

Frank Ward, Ayr, Scotland

# Praying with children : does it 'work' with toddlers ?

Alison Bath, Todmorden

*Alison, with her husband Daniel, has two (nearly three!) very young children. Here she recounts some of their experiences of sharing prayer.*

## **Start young**

One of our discoveries is that the younger you start the easier it is. Children learn to pray as they learn to talk; they learn about God as they learn about the world around them. Our second discovery is that children enjoy saying prayers when they feel actively involved. Our son began to get quite belligerent about saying a prayer before meals, but one day he came home from his nursery class and spontaneously sang for us before dinner, to a rather uncertain tune:

'Thank you for the world so sweet, thank you for the food we eat, thank you for the birds that sing, thank you God for everything'.

We've adopted it, and both children still enjoy it. And it's great if we have company - we always felt too self-conscious to say grace ourselves, but to ask a three year-old child to do it for you is so much easier.

## **Bedtime rituals**

Bedtime is another moment when prayer fits easily into the routine. I hope it will become as much a habit as cleaning teeth, so that even when I'm not praying with them, our children will still feel it necessary to give some thought to God before sleeping. When our son was very small I would say a prayer after his bedtime story, and then we devised a simple prayer that he could say himself. It would work much better if he wanted to add his own needs or thanks or prayers for others. As he doesn't, it remains a handy if uninspiring formula, for when he is too tired for anything else.

## **Ways of praying**

Singing can be a good alternative, particularly at Christmas time, although I did think we might end up with 'Away in a Manger' every night for the rest of the year. Our three year-old is old enough to choose songs of a religious nature; our little girl is as just as likely to pick 'Mary Mary quite contrary' as a hymn for Our Lady, but that's fair enough. And if they don't want to sing themselves, they often like to listen instead.

## **And if it turns into a battle?**

What about when children don't want to say their

prayers? If a battle develops, it's counterproductive for everyone. Sometimes we need to let them off the hook, without giving up the principle. A child might listen to prayers rather than join in, or prefer a few moments of quiet. At bedtime children are often tired, distracted and quarrelsome, and just need to be whisked into bed, with a few quiet words by way of a prayer once they're tucked up, or maybe a bible story or song to send them off to sleep.

## **Capture their imagination**

Another option is to try and make prayer time more exciting. In our family this is definitely Dad's job. Sometimes they have 'candle prayers' in a darkened room - very exciting for little ones. Re-enactments of stories can be fun, or activities from earlier in the day can be used as themes - 'sailor prayers' or 'engine driver prayers', for example. Pictures, candles, musical instruments or big chunky rosary beads capture children's imagination and help them concentrate.

## **There's more to spirituality than prayer**

Of course there is much more to the spiritual life of small children than formal prayer - crisis and celebration, birth and death, going to church and going to playgroup, and all the events of daily life. Regular prayer at home will provide them with a framework and a context for these experiences, hopefully one that will develop through the years.

## **Blessings for parents too**

For myself it has become a source of blessing, a boost to my own neglected prayer life, and a way of drawing the family closer together. Above all, it has made me realise how much we have to learn from our own children. We pray with them so that they can learn about God, but also so that we can learn about God from them, from their challenge to our vague or overcomplicated faith, and from the very fact that God is their God. We, after all, must become like our children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

## Supporting and Celebrating Families : Ideas that may help....

### Parents Night Out

Can you use this Leeds suggestion in your area ?

Luddenden is in the Calder Valley, with an Anglican Church, Methodist and URC chapels and a Roman Catholic church about two miles down the road. They meet quarterly and find their time best used in common tasks.

Parents Night Out began last year. This idea, which originated in the USA, is primarily for parents who are both working and consequently spend little time together. Parents Night Out fulfils two purposes: firstly, it gives parents time for themselves (or on their own) and gives children a couple of hours of activities: craft, music, baking painting. Each evening takes a specifically Christian theme and explores it through different media. Parent Night Out runs on the last Friday of each month when up to 30 children between the ages of 3 and 8 come along – all for just £1.

The evening works because it is manageable, task focussed, and one where they are able to gather enough volunteers in people's busy lives. The work, planning and staffing of this is shared between the Methodist and Anglican Church and provides a good example of working together for the kingdom of God and for the benefit of a large number of young families in the area.

### Talking with your children about love.....Can you help us ?

We want to do a feature on the books that are available to help parents explain what's euphemistically called 'the facts of life'. It's an area which can be fraught with anxiety and so often it's helpful to have a good book to hand. It will be a big project looking at all the material available - so we need help. We want practising parents who don't mind reading approximately three books and giving an opinion. We will assess the books for readability, realism and the rest (the new 3R's—actually we haven't quite worked out the categories yet !) We do want people who can be positive in the way they review without being afraid to be critical. I hope that each book will be reviewed by a few people so

we can get a good cross-section of opinion. Contact us in the usual way if you can help or if you want to recommend any books we need to include in the project. The results will be published in a separate supplement to JBU sometime in the late Autumn – free of charge to all Bethany members ! Email: [elizabethdavies@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com](mailto:elizabethdavies@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com) By post to BFI PO Box 11 Carmarthen SA31 3YX

### Bethany Seminars

Another new venture is a series of seminars which we can bring to your parish or diocese. Precise details of course content are currently being worked out but will include a presentation by Dr David Thomas plus a package of course materials for participants. Charges are currently fixed at £75 for a parish session and £300 for a diocesan session. So far the working titles are: The Why and How of Family Catechesis; Family Ministry and the Future Survival of the Church and A New Theology for Christian Marriage and the Family. These are subject to review, but can be tailored to suit local needs. Contact us for more details.

### Supporting Family Awards ?

We would like to end our first year by making some awards to recognise the sterling work being done up and down the countries by some dogged individuals. I bet you all know someone you would like to nominate. We have thought of some categories but there must be more - cast around those busy minds for some inspiration. It's not only family life we need to celebrate but workers in family life. These should set you thinking - humour is purely intentional: The Bethany Award....

- for Diocesan Achievement
- for Outstanding Parish work
- for advancing the cause of Family Life Ministry
- for Parent of the year
- for Priest/Religious of the year
- for book/resource of the year
- The Lazarus Award - a special prize for turning something around that looked like it was headed.....you know where.

Suggestions for sponsors always welcome !

# Mentoring mothers – what does Elizabeth Ministry have to offer ?

Jeannie Hannemann, Wisconsin

## What is Elizabeth Ministry ?

Elizabeth Ministry is an international movement designed to support women and their families during the joys, challenges and sorrows of the childbearing years. The Elizabeth Ministry mission is to cherish children, encourage families and build community. We offer peer support, mentoring, educational materials, spiritual nourishment and inspirational resources.

## How does it work ?

Women volunteers become Elizabeth Ministers in the areas they have experienced. For example, a woman who has twins would visit and mentor a woman who is pregnant with twins. Continued support is given throughout the pregnancy and after the birth. This support comes in the form of visits, phone calls, cards, prayer, resources and other assistance. Areas of Elizabeth Ministry include, but are not limited to, pregnancy, birth, miscarriage, infant or child death, crisis or special needs, adoption, fertility and infertility. Support is available for mothers, fathers, siblings and grandparents.

## Who are the Elizabeth Ministers?

They are representatives of a faith community that become a link between the church of the home and the parish church. Elizabeth Ministers are not counsellors. They offer mentoring and peer support only. No lengthy training is needed. They are women who are willing to share their presence, stories, and experience in the hope that these will encourage another woman and her family.

## Who may participate?

Elizabeth Ministry was designed as a parish based outreach. It has since been adapted by hospitals and community settings. Elizabeth Ministry began in the Catholic faith tradition, but soon became active in other denominations. Any church or group who promises to uphold the dignity and worth of all life from conception to natural death may choose to form an Elizabeth Ministry Chapter.

## Why is this needed?

In the past, the presence, intimacy, and support that is needed during childbearing years was found

in the structures of family, neighbourhood, church and community. Today, these structures are undergoing rapid change. Our neighbourhoods are fragmented, leaving many families isolated. Our churches have increased in size, making it very difficult to create a hospitable and loving environment. Mobility has caused many extended families to be separated by miles. That makes frequent visits impossible. Yet, the wisdom drawn from sharing stories of the joys and trials of childbearing is still needed. The support, reassurance and advice, usually given by the extended family, often now needs to come from another source. Elizabeth Ministry is a response to this need.

## What are the benefits?

Elizabeth Ministry supports a faith community's commitment toward the sanctity of life. It is a way to reach young adults as they build their families. Elizabeth Ministry also provides a focused and expanded dimension to bereavement ministry. It offers wisdom in this age of reproduction technology. It builds community and fulfils the invitation of Jesus, namely, that we love one another as he loves us.

## How do you get more information?

Everything you need to start and maintain this ministry is available from Elizabeth Ministry International Headquarters. Additional resources to assist individuals and families are also available.

**Elizabeth Ministry International Headquarters**  
**107 Idlewild Street Kaukauna WI 54130 USA**  
**Phone: 920 766-9380 Fax: 920 766-1221**  
**Email: [elizabethministry@yahoo.com](mailto:elizabethministry@yahoo.com)**  
**Website: [www.elizabethministry.com](http://www.elizabethministry.com) (not up yet)**

Elizabeth Ministry workshops, seminars, retreats, missions and consultations are also available with founder, Jeannie Hannemann, M.A.

Elizabeth Ministry International Headquarters assists families, individuals, hospitals, churches and communities. Resources are available to help establish Elizabeth Ministry Chapters, assist individuals and encourage families.

## Going it alone: lone faith-parenting

Elizabeth Davies. Bethany Family Institute

In the secular world, we observe an increasing number of families being headed by only one parent. These parents qualify, and rightly so, for extra support from the agencies that exist to help families. Many studies have been carried out to investigate the effects of single parenting. This is not unreasonable - parenting alone is difficult and the challenge needs to be fully understood.

A similar phenomenon happens frequently in many Catholic families - families where there are, in fact, two parents. It happens in effect when only one of them takes responsibility for the spiritual upbringing of the children. It may happen for a variety of reasons—and obviously it may effectively be the case in a single parent family. But, it is profoundly significant when there are two parents present. The implications of lone faith-parenting are fundamentally related to the non-participation of a reluctant / disinterested / agnostic / atheist partner. One who is a counter-witness, whether overtly or covertly.

My father wasn't a Catholic. He wasn't actually a practising Christian of any kind, though nominally he was Methodist. I wasn't unduly worried therefore when I married a man who had no religious persuasion either. After all, my mother appeared to have survived the experience and, so far as I could tell, my brothers and I were practicing Catholics. Whatever obstacles there were, they clearly were not insurmountable. It was possible to bring up faithful children single-handedly. I was living proof.

Thirteen years and four children later I have a different opinion. As you might expect, my experience of lone faith-parenting, in a different era and culture than my experience of being lone faith-parented, has not been exactly straight forward. I think these differences typify the challenges facing most modern families.

Firstly, the milieu in which we rear our children is very different today. We could all talk at length on this but in short, when I was growing up, my parish was virtually my entire world: the school and church contained all the families my family had

ever known and ever needed to know. It didn't matter that my father didn't go to church - he really was the odd one out. My mother had intricate networks of family and parish support. Maybe there was even a broader consensus on the 'right' values, even among non-churchgoers.

My children are growing up over a hundred miles from their nearest Catholic blood relative. The parish where we live is fortunate to have a small Catholic primary school but there is no secondary school. The population of the parish itself is small and relatively transient. It does matter that their father doesn't go to church - it is my children, not their father, who appear the odd ones out.

Much of the literature on child faith development suggests that one of the most important factors in passing on the faith is a culture where faith is shared and practised. This sharing and practice should not be limited to traditionally holy activities but should pervade all aspects of family life. For a couple who do not share faith this aspect might be troubling. For the lone faith-parent it might become very distressing. It may feel as if they are struggling with one hand tied behind their back.

Whenever the church talks of the significance of the family as a locus for faith development it does seem to assume a level of co-operation between the spouses. The GCD for instance states:

"Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life" (226)

In a household where one partner may be, at best apathetic, and at worst obstructive, there may be precious little joyousness or closeness of God evidenced by the parents for the children to perceive.

Similarly, when the Catechism maintains that the "family is the first place of education in prayer" (2685) it is clear to me that the family is also the first place where children learn that some people don't pray. In every area where the Church

acknowledges the "irreplaceable" (Catechesi Tradendae 68) nature of family enlightenment on matters of faith, it also begs a whopping great big question: what therefore is the impact in those families where a tension of belief and non-belief is ever-present ?

In wisdom and honesty, the church used to advise against 'mixed marriages'. But for many, the alternative is simply not realistic. The majority of marriages these days are not between Catholics and even when they are, this is no guarantee of co-operation in the spiritual life. Only the most naïve seriously advocate a return to the old days. So we have to simply accept what is, and ask, what can we do to support and help such parents ?

It's not only church authorities that fail to address these questions. Looking for inspiration among lay, married, parents can be an equally fruitless task. Kathy and Mitch Finley in their really very good book 'Building Christian Families', write 56 pages before acknowledging the "pain of the family where one parent is interested but the other is reluctant". But that is as far as they go. Neither are they alone in neglecting a deeper discussion of the issues.

The one exception to this has been Anita Dowsing who touched recently on the issues of parenting while focussing on the challenges of the couple relationship in the same scenario. Her honest and thoughtful response to personal experience makes wonderful reading. I have to confess however that her experience hasn't given me hope for easy answers !

But maybe *you* can help. It's time the topic was opened up and discussed more widely. It's time to gather the stories in and find out what's actually happening. If you are, or know of, a lone faith-parent maybe you could think about these issues. Maybe you could even gather a group of parents in this situation together and get them to talk about their experiences with each other. We will consider publishing some of the responses.

Questions for Discussion

For believing partners:

- 1: What difference has having a non-believing partner made to your faith life, and to your family life ?
- 2: What were your expectations of this before you married ? With hindsight, in which ways were your expectations realistic or not ?
- 3: How do you find support for your faith-parenting ? What support do you need ?

For non-believing partners:

- 1: What difference has having a believing partner made to your faith life, and to your family life ?
- 2: What were your expectations of this before you married ? With hindsight, in which ways were your expectations realistic or not ?
- 3: Do you feel that the faith life of your partner has been a positive or negative influence in your marriage and in which ways?

Bibliography

Anita Dowsing A Marriage in our Time: When believer meets non-believer. Sheed and Ward, 2001  
0722052618 £15.95



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## Book Reviews

**Experiencing God with your children, by Kathy Coffey.** Crossroad, 1997 ISBN: 0824516478 £9.99

After a stirring and potent introduction Kathy Coffey writes poetically of the wonders of nature, the elements and a great deal about waves crashing on the shore. She invites us to use these environmental occasions to marvel at God's greatness with our children. There then follows chapter after chapter of charming anecdotes of daily experiences of God with her children in very mundane settings, e.g. the dentist and driving lessons. For those parents who put their children first and love and nurture them it is a gentle affirmation of what they already do with ideas of how to draw attention to God's role within that. The overwhelming message of the book is to create a protective atmosphere of love at home to enable our children to live, learn and love to the full. And this can never be said too often, "God draws us through the beauty of creation and transforms us through our love for each other."

*Realism: \* \* \**                      *Readability \* \* \**  
*Inspiration \* \* \**

JB Todmorden

**Parent-Child Retreats: Spiritual Experiences for Children Ages 3-6 And Their Parents, by Maggie Pike, Lynne Knickerbocker, Eleanor Sheehan and Mary Ann Figlino.** Living the Good News 1997. ISBN: 1889108162 £12.50

Great step by step guide on setting up your own retreat for parents and 3-6 year olds. Well researched, easy to read and well structured. Made me want to attend a retreat with my children and even tempted me to explore the possibilities of instigating one in our Parish!

*Realism: \* \* \* \**                      *Readability \* \* \* \**  
*Inspiration \* \* \* \**

JB Todmorden

**Let's Make Love: the Meaning of Sexual Intercourse, by Jack Dominian.** Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001 023252338X £9.95

Never having read one of Dominian's books before, I wasn't sure exactly what to expect when this review copy landed in my lap. However, it was a delightful, easy and thought-provoking read - and very difficult to put down. **Don't miss it**, but equally, don't expect a comfortable ride if you are

a very traditional Catholic - or, lets be honest, if you have any unresolved sexual issues yourself. That said, there were, for me, some wonderful 'a-ha' moments. Dominian refers to the kind of parenting Jesus must have had "to develop his loving side to the point where he was love and God's nature of love could co-exist easily with his human nature". His analysis of the historical background to the elevation of celibacy as opposed to matrimony is most enlightening. Best of all, his reframing of marriage as a place where the integrity of sexual intercourse is safeguarded, is honest, workable and most of all respectful. It places the couple, rather than their offspring, back at the centre of the sacrament. Dominian further challenges the church to transfer its focus "from procreation to an education for personal love...While we must still educate for the moral person, it is even more important to strive for the promotion of the loving person". This, I believe, is the heart of a matter which should concern us all and is a challenge that is worthy of our gifts. This may have been the first book I've read by Dominian but it won't be the last.

*Realism\*\*\*\*\**                      *Readability\*\*\*\*\**  
*Inspiration\*\*\*\*\**

EMD Carmarthen

**New on our bookshelf.....**

Growing Together: Six Intergenerational Celebrations. Vol 2: Spring and summer, with Sylvia DeVillers, Sara Fontana & Kathy Finley. Living the good news, 2000 1889108464

Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens, by Carole Goodwin. St Mary's Press, 2000. 0 884895742 £17.99

The Priority of Adult Formation. Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, 2000 0905241177

A Spirituality of Work. CBCEW, 2001. 0905241185

Substance Misuse Today: a Catholic Reflection. CBCEW, 2000 0905241169

This is a project designed to take a basic reading of the ways in which the presence of God is felt through ordinary family experiences. Catholic and other Christian theologies emphasize the role of family, naming them as the first teachers in all basic matters of life including its religious and spiritual aspects.

Our goal is to describe how this theological and spiritual understanding is actually experienced in practice by families. The survey will take the form of a short, open-ended questionnaire, designed to uncover:

- How religious beliefs and practices make a difference in family life
- How extensive is the family's awareness of God's presence in their life
- How families describe their need for support and assistance from the institutional church

### **Benefits of this research**

The nature of this research is both basic and innovative. Institutions rarely go to the people they serve to learn exactly what are the effects of their effort in the most fundamental unit of church and society, namely the family. Therefore, we assume the findings will have an impact on all those institutional roles that serve families. These would include clergy, pastoral leaders, both ordained and lay, educators and teachers of religion and spirituality.

However the ones we hope would most benefit from our research would be the families themselves. Presently, there is little communicated to families about the religious and spiritual nature of their ordinary lives.

Most church leaders acknowledge the importance of the family and then proceed to other institutional concerns. In a sense, the family is outside their view and control, leaving them without traditional methods of influence. The notion of family advocacy and support is hard to grasp especially in a social milieu where the family is sensed more as a problem than an opportunity for vital life

in all aspect of human experience. We see this study as an important starting point. Its results will be widely disseminated and will certainly generate other areas of research as we begin to identify and suggest practical ways to support what is the most important, yet terribly vulnerable, institution of the family.

### **Interpreting the data**

The data we collect will be measured against our anticipated outcomes. These outcomes will be divided into traditional and non-traditional expectations. Within each we will identify behaviour and belief that broadly reflect Dr. James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development.

We would also apply criteria currently being discussed in the field of family spirituality. For instance, we would expect a high level of normative response related to formal liturgical and sacramental celebrations, along with prayer both inside and outside the home. More reflective responses might indicate a broader awareness of the connection between service involved in daily family life and the service modelled by Jesus. Another example might be awareness of the 'where two or more are gathered' criteria for the presence of God.

We hope that the survey itself will pose a challenge for some families. Some families may identify prayer and services such as children's liturgy as their vision of a family spirituality. Others might identify moments of ordinary life that are sacred for them. There are no right or wrong answers: only a clearer understanding of how faith impacts on ordinary life. Our initial research indicates that no project of this kind has ever been undertaken in the Catholic Church.

### **Making Connections**

We will connect our research with the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church that are found especially in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We will also connect our findings with the Vatican's recently published *General Directory for Cateche-*

sis and with the papal exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (tr. *On the Family*). Finally we will connect our research with the writing of leading experts in the field of family spiritual and faith development.

Significant attention will be given to the study that resembles most closely what we are attempting namely *Passing on the Faith: a Radical New Model for Youth and Family Ministry* by Merton P. Strommen and Richard A. Hardel (Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, 2000).

**Parish Involvement - Can you help ?**

We are currently looking for one parish from each diocese across the UK & Ireland to implement the survey. We will provide as many copies of the form as required and pay the postage costs of returning the completed forms to us (one parcel only, I'm afraid). In Wales we have an additional emphasis in that interest has been expressed in enlarging the sample of mixed-church families. So we are looking for a greater involvement of Welsh parishes.

**Please—if you can help contact us immediately.** We would like to get most of the core sample in by the end of May. Tell your parish priest about it. And ask if he will help us.

Finally, we would like to thank all those of you who have already responded. We would like to share with you just a few of the many wonderful words we have already been privileged to receive and read.

In what ways does your religious faith help you in your family life ?

.....It informs all of my life....

.....It helps me to appreciate life's beauty..

.....Our faith provides a strong basis for understanding the love between us, how to look after each other and what we should be

striving for....

....During a very traumatic year, the Church has been a tower of strength.....

What are the times you feel closest to God in your family experiences ?

when my children are nice to each other..

....at the weekends when we are all together, not necessarily doing very much....

..saying evening prayers together.....

.....when my grandchild sings to me.....

How can the church help you to have a more satisfying family life ?

..empower older couples to help/advise/pray for younger couples.....

..greater awareness/appreciation of the challenges of parenting.....

..continue the support it gives when we are suffering and in need.....

*Coming in our next issue..due out July 2001:*

When believer meets non-believer. Anita Dowsing

Celebrating holydays ?  
Paul Kahn

Marital Spirituality  
Annette Barker

The four tasks of families  
Sara Fontana

....plus much more !

Make sure of your copy—  
subscribe today !

The Bethany Family Institute was created:

- To identify and describe the spiritual experiences and needs of families where one or both partners are Catholic
- To offer a means of connecting workers in, and supporters of, marriage and family life ministry in the UK & Ireland & elsewhere
- To highlight and create quality resources for families in supporting their spiritual lives
- To assist clergy, pastoral leaders, educators and catechists in serving families more effectively
- To offer educational opportunities for leadership in family ministry

For further information please contact

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or DavidThomas@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

**Just between Us...** Quarterly newsletter with a cross-section of articles on family spirituality and ministry, for both professionals and parents.

Subscriptions: Individuals : £15 per year

Groups : as above, but 20% reduction on every 5 orders, 25 % reduction on every 10 orders, 30% reduction on every 15+ orders (5 subs = £60, 10 = £112.50, 15 = £157.50)

Libraries/Institutions : £35 per year

**The Nazareth Programme** A lectionary based family programme to prepare for the Sunday mass. Monthly. Subscriptions: Individuals : £15 per year

Parish/School photocopyable resource: £35 per year

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY**

I would like to subscribe to Just between Us / The Nazareth Programme (please delete whichever does not apply) and enclose a cheque for £\_\_\_ made out to the Bethany Family Institute.

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We can accept cheques in £ sterling or IR punt !