

# Just between Us...

Newsletter of the Bethany Family Institute  
PO Box 2858 Wolverhampton WV3 0AB

Edited and published by Elizabeth Davies, MA



Volume 3, Issue 1  
ISSN: 1473-7035  
Jan 2003

## Ringling the changes!

Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? We did. After completing our first two full years we decided it was time to make some changes. Firstly, we have a new logo for our work, on the drawing board as we speak. We hope that this new identity will help us make even more of an impact wherever it is needed. We will be introducing this in our next issue. Along with the new logo we will be re-launching our website this year to make it even more user-friendly and informative. Our final target, which we will undertake at the end of this year, is to review the work and impact of Bethany Family Institute so that we can plan better for the future. We will need your help with this and we are currently devising some ways in which we can elicit a comprehensive response .

## Parenting leaflet amazes...

We are also very pleased and proud to report that sales of *Seeing God in Love With Your Family*, the leaflet we produced for Parents' Week last October, reached 10,000! This was simply an astounding number of copies and we are extremely grateful to each and every one of you who helped spread the words and bought copies to distribute to parishes. We could not have marketed it so successfully without you. Again, we shall shortly be embarking on some proper evaluation of the resource as we hope it may be a great basis for future projects (when we have time!). The leaflet is still available (without the Parents' Week references) because we had a lot of feedback that it might be useful to give to parents on other occasions. You can download an order form for this and all our resources from our website.

Visit us at: [www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com](http://www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com)

Heaven is...



the  
human heart.

(St Alphonsus Liguori)

### What's inside

Resourcing the domestic church	3
Families seeking asylum	6
Family signs of the times	8
News roundup	10
Rituals and family resiliency	11
Reviewing the literature	13

## Diary dates

Feb 9th-16th	National Marriage Week Info: <a href="http://www.nmw.org.uk">www.nmw.org.uk</a> and see below
Mar 1st-2nd	Network of FLM Co-ordinators Spring meeting. All Saints Pastoral Centre London Colney. Contact; John Anthony. Email: <a href="mailto:anthonyj@cbcew.org.uk">anthonyj@cbcew.org.uk</a>
Mar 8th	ASDC National Open Meeting. Nottingham Diocesan Centre, Mackworth, Derby. Speaker: Rt Rev Malcolm McMahon OP, Bishop of Nottingham
Mar 15th	Living Together, Betrothal and Preparation for Marriage: an exploration of relationships before marriage in a changing culture, with Adrian Thatcher. FLAME Day Conference & AGM. Leicester Cathedral Centre. Contact: Mrs Ann Hughes Tel: 01622 755014. Email: <a href="mailto:ann@csr.org.uk">ann@csr.org.uk</a>
Jun 7th	Northern Region Marriage & Family Life Co-ordinators Meeting.
Jul 11th-15th	Rainbow's Registered Director Training. The Endsleigh Centre, Beverley Road, Hull. Contact Rainbows National Office: 17 Market Square, Higham Ferrers, Rushden. Northants. NN10 8DJ. Tel: 01933 355175.
Aug 25th - Sep 5th	Building Block or Stumbling Block? Exploring the Place of Marriage in Society. An interdisciplinary course for students & professionals organised by the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS). Brussels. With Luk Bouckaert, Wendy M. Wright, Corinna Onnen-Isemann, Bernd Wannan wetsch. Contact: Dominique Van Haelst. Email: <a href="mailto:Intams@skynet.be">Intams@skynet.be</a> .
Sep 24-27	Many Threads... Many Weavers. 23rd annual NACFLM Conference, Houston, Texas. Featuring Eric Law. Info: <a href="http://www.nacflm.org">www.nacflm.org</a>
October	National Parents Week. Theme: Family-friendliness
Nov 1st-2nd	Rainbow's Registered Director Continuing Development Training. Harborne Hall. Birmingham. Contact details above.



*We had planned to produce a resource for Marriage Week this year, similar to the leaflet we created for Parents' Week. Unfortunately there has been insufficient time to bring this project to fruition this year but we intend to have it ready for 2004. In the meantime however, you can download both the material we produced last year, plus some further resources, from our web-site: [www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com](http://www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com)*

## Resourcing the domestic church: equipping families for evangelisation

Elizabeth Davies  
Co-Director, Bethany Family Institute

In our last issue we reviewed the *Report on Evangelisation*, which had just been published on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. The findings of the report fully supported our understanding of the family's foundational role in bringing individuals to relationship with God. Whilst the report stated explicitly that equipping and resourcing families to fulfil this responsibility was a particularly vital and pressing task, it made no specific recommendations of how to do this. Clearly this challenge deserves both a widespread and broad-based conversation. We would like to begin it with some thoughts of our own and invite you, our readers, to respond with your own ideas and perspectives.

I'll begin with one of those serendipitous coincidences that sometimes happen. In October I just happened to be browsing the stacks of Catholic University Library in Washington DC, when what should I find but the original study guide developed for the World Synod of Bishops on the role of the Family in the Modern World. Yes, this was the 'agenda' that sparked the bishops' reflections and discussions and eventually resulted in the publication of *Familiaris Consortio*. I read it with fascination, seeing some, but by no means all, of the final structure. Then, one paragraph caught my eye:

"It could be said that the Christian family has a single function or role, that of evangelising, as evangelising has been described in the previous Synods, namely as 'bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new'.... The action of the family is, like evangelisation, a complex, rich and dynamic matter, which cannot easily be defined, but whose factors must be investigated and distinguished in a fixed order, in order to reach practical propositions."

### **Family evangelisation has no boundaries**

Now this was one of the statements that did not get into *Familiaris Consortio* in exactly those words. But it does make a very important point that we must remember when talking about the evangelising (or prophetic) role of the family. Which is, that *all* that a family is, and does, has potential for evangelisation, whether within the home or outside. So when we seek to "equip and resource" a family for evangelisation, it means that we must necessarily expect to do this in terms of the 'all' that a family does. In other words, we cannot compartmentalise the prophetic role. Quite frankly, it simply can't be boxed in. It is spirit and therefore life: God's Spirit and God's Life.

The universality of this view of family evangelisation naturally finds its origin in Christ. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (§6) Paul VI reminds us that all the aspects of his mystery were components of his evangelising activity: his incarnation, miracles, and teaching; his gathering of the disciples and discharging them into the community, his cross and resurrection, and the permanence of his presence amongst his own. Each of these components finds its resonance in family life and if space permitted right now, we might explore the connections a little more deeply.

### **God is Love**

St Augustine's definition of the Trinity as the Lover, the Beloved and the Love between them is another very helpful way of understanding why the relational aspect of our personal lives has been shown to be so important in effective evangelisation. We are drawn closer to an encounter with God through our love relationships, indubitably since God is the love that animates those relationships. Yet, we may well ask, when are any of us aware of God's presence in our inter-personal encounters? The obvious answer might be: when there is love, kindness, sharing, forgiveness, healing, mutuality, equality, respect, laughter, joy, delight, fun...etc. But God is also there when it's both painful and scary to love and well nigh impossible not to count the cost. So how do we increase the frequency and efficacy of life-giving encounters? By offering opportunities for individuals, and therefore families, to improve their practical relationship

skills. How do we increase the likelihood of God-giving encounters? By increasing individuals, and therefore families', awareness and reflection at the soul or spirit level. Not forgetting that the context of an environment that listens to, understands, and seeks to alleviate, the external pressures on family life, is also an important focus for our work.

### **Relationship education is vital**

Many of us who have worked with the Family Caring Trust materials have seen at first hand the power they have to transform lives. In very practical ways, these materials enable couples, parents, teens and others to learn and practise techniques for managing the intricacies of daily community life: listening, non-anxious assertiveness, conflict resolution, decision making and much, much more. In other words, they enable people to grow in maturity, confidence, and mutual respect, and therefore love. These are the courses that should be at the heart of any parish or school initiative to support and strengthen family life. They should also be mandatory for any team that needs to work collaboratively, since the skills, though framed in the context of family, are infinitely transferable.

### **Finding God in ordinary family life**

The second part of the equation is less easy to solve. Few resources for family spirituality are as stand-alone and oven-ready as the Family Caring Trust relationship kits. The exceptions are our own *Seeing God in Love With Your Family*, the FCT's *I Have a Million Things to Do* and the *Moments That Matter* series, published by Matthew James. Each of these resources works from the premise that the family can do much for themselves given the right encouragement. But they do need help in uncovering a spirituality of their daily life that will make full use of their *familyhood*. Which leads us to another very important point about subsidiarity.

### **Walking the talk as a church community**

As a church we agree that family enjoys a foundational role in teaching, evangelising, praying and serving. The principle of subsidiarity teaches that no larger organisation should usurp the authority of a smaller one. In our church we are rarely attuned to empowering families to get on with what God created them to do. We train catechists for parishes and schools but not parents for the home. We devise service programmes that focus on individuals rather than groups. We work hard to create cell-church and new communities, overlooking the needs of natural inter-generational communities that already exist. We expect offerings, attendance, involvement, conformity and commitment from our families, and blame them when our numbers drop. Until we walk the talk on the central role of the family in our church, we have no excuse for bemoaning society's own failures on family. A family-centred approach to ministry will undoubtedly call for a great change of heart as well as a major leap of faith. But it makes sense.

### **Further evidence in support of this strategy**

It's appropriate at this juncture to revisit the recommendations of Merton Strommen and Richard Hardel, expressed in their highly recommended book, *Passing on the Faith*. They too reached the conclusion that only a family centred strategy would prevent the haemorrhaging of congregations and enable a true passing on of faith. The strategies they describe include assisting parents in the baptismal journey, working for long-lasting marriages, encouraging parents to be spiritual leaders, and providing help in parenting, all the while considering the high cost of neglect. They acknowledge the importance of parental harmony, effective communication, wise parental control and parental nurturing. The spiritual essentials include Gospel-orientated parenting, communication of moral values, involvement in service activities, and the sharing of faith at home. None of these components are plucked out of the air, but are based on years of research in Protestant congregations in several continents, to find out what actually makes a difference. It is this difference that must inform our plans for supporting families.

### **Practical Suggestions**

Whilst this challenge can sometimes seem overwhelming one can relatively easily identify some basic strategies:

- Incorporating programmes for the preventive care of relationships at every sacramental stage of life. Investing in people in such a basic way would be a major sign that the church really cares about its flock.
- Preaching a concrete, earthy version of family spirituality that assists families to make sense of good and bad times, and to see God in all of it. Offering an alternative to the traditions surrounding holiness that suggest a quiet, clean order is closest to God.
- Creating liturgies that reflect more closely the daily lives, hopes, dreams, and cares of ordinary families of every kind.
- Practical resources for parishes on becoming more family-centred, including ways to minimise negative impact and maximise positive impact.
- Materials for an annual, national celebration of family.
- Including a family component into every course of study leading to church ministry.

No doubt you will have your own ideas and so we invite you to add to this discussion. Please write or email us by the end of February so we can follow this subject up in our next issue. Contact details on the back page.



#### References and Further reading

Synod of Bishops: the role of the Christian family in the modern world (for the use of Episcopal Conferences). Study Guide. Vatican: Polyglot Press, May 7, 1979

Passing on the faith: A radical new model for youth and family ministry. Merton Strommen & Richard Harde. Saint Mary's Press, 2000. ISBN: 0884896064

Family-centered Church: a new parish model. Gerald Foley. Sheed & Ward, 1995 ISBN: 1556127677

Evangelisation in England and Wales: a report to the Catholic bishops. Philip Knights & Andrea Murray. Catholic Bishops Conference of England & Wales, 2002. ISBN: 90524124X

Paul VI: Evangelii Nuntiandi (Proclaiming the Gospel). Apostolic Exhortation 1975. Catholic Truth Society, 2002. ISBN: 0851831583

Moments That Matter: a series of four booklets for parental reflection on starting school, first Eucharist, first reconciliation, and moving on. Contact Matthew James Publications, Chelmsford, Essex.

Family Caring Trust materials: 8 Ashtree Enterprise Park, NEWRY, Co. Down BT34 1BY Tel: 01693 64174 Fax: 01693 6977. Website: [www.familycaring.co.uk](http://www.familycaring.co.uk)

## The Christian Community and Families Seeking Asylum: report of a meeting organised by Churches Together for Families

The challenges of serving our community are particularly acute when welcoming the stranger. By definition, we do not know the stranger, their gifts or their needs. The stranger, particularly in these times, can be a focus of community resistance and fear. Yet our Christian calling is to see Christ in these people. How therefore can we reach out to them and make them welcome? The abridged account that follows offers both some insight into the refugee experience and some practical ways of making a difference.

### **Families face hardship**

Jill Healey, has worked since 1996 as a project leader for The Children's Society, in the London Borough of Newham. She spoke first on "The needs of asylum seeker families, issues surrounding families and how churches welcome them". This was a powerful talk illuminated with a case study of a real family: Mrs B, a war widow, and her three children, ages 9 and under. This family were moved four times in their first 9 months, experiencing (at least) disorientation, bewilderment, and isolation. The first three places were bed and breakfast hostels where accommodation was insecure, often hostile and of a very low standard. In one place they were housed in two rooms - on different floors. Consequently the four of them effectively slept in one room only. By the time they eventually settled (temporarily) in a house, the eldest had been out of the school system for several months. Their health deteriorated considerably during the months after their arrival in Britain. The children became over attached to their mother and very withdrawn.

Refugee families apparently have no choice in where they are sent, despite the incidence of national groupings in particular parts of the country. They receive state benefits, but at a lower level than the normal population (average subsistence income is £37.77 a week). Their diet is therefore usually poor; they survive for example on fast food and jam sandwiches. Most bed and breakfast accommodation does not offer self-catering facilities.

### **Practical help important**

Churches could help initially in small ways - offering clothes stalls where families from hot countries could get warm clothing. This might open up opportunities for further involvement, based on the personal contact made with needy families, but as Jill Healey stressed, it was best to start small and let assistance/support services grow organically.

### **Myths and reality**

Jill challenged some of the myths about refugees created in the popular press. One of these is that we take more than our fair share. However, it is a worldwide trend that most asylum seekers go to their nearest neighbour. Britain actually only takes 3-4%. Another myth is that they come here for the benefits system. Yet they can only access the minimum subsistence level. Most asylum seekers actually want to work, and although London is desperately short of people to work, they are not allowed to find employment for 6 months. Even then they have to apply for a permit and tend not to be able to earn enough to pay for the bed and breakfast accommodation that they have been provided with. Another fallacy is that they want to stay here, but frankly most of the asylum seekers see this country as only a temporary resting place. Once their native country is safe and secure they want to return.

### **Learning from experience**

Jill concluded by listing some of the things she has learned as a result of working so closely with refugees. Firstly she advised churches not to be scared by the official status of asylum seekers. They are first and foremost people like us in need of support. She suggested that we all imagine how we would feel in their situation. Finally she advised against assuming that this was not something that affected us

in our area. Asylum seekers are now so widely dispersed that it was very likely that there we all had families very close by in need of our help.

Francois Jensen works at the St Mary Magdalene Church Centre for Asylum Seekers, London N7. Though based at an Anglican church this is in fact an ecumenical project, staffed by one full-time job-share and 7 sessional workers, 4 of which are language teachers and 3 crèche providers. The work of the Centre can be divided into three areas:

- Practical services
- Community building
- Empowering skills

#### **Food and laundry**

The practical services provided include an advice referral system, a clothes store, hot showers (not all B & B hostels have good washing facilities), hot meals, laundry services, health sessions and food parcels. The hot meals were available twice a week with sandwiches provided in between. Members of the congregation and other local church congregations volunteered on a rota basis to offer this service. Food was donated by local businesses - leftovers etc.

The community building projects included classes in art, creative writing, salsa and origami. These were open to the community not just to asylum seekers, so that relationships could be built.

#### **Enabling families**

The empowering skills included English classes (with a crèche available to enable parents to attend), a befriending service whereby volunteers from the parish or local community would befriend a particular family. A singing and praying group met in the Centre and a care group met in a private home. This latter group was established by a qualified counsellor, for individuals who might need more special attention to help them come to terms with personal trauma etc. The Centre also organised regular trips out and cooking sessions.

#### **What can churches do?**

Francois also advised churches to start small, perhaps making some warm clothes available to asylum seeker families and seeing where that might lead to. Put posters up in B&B's advertising what you are offering and see who comes. Generally Francois and Jill both said that word of mouth was the best advert. Once refugees felt they had a place to come to that they could trust and feel safe and respected in, then they would tell others about it.

#### Practical Resources to help churches concerned with refugee families:

*When I was a stranger you welcomed me*, by Tear Fund and Salvation Army (NB We couldn't locate a source for this but you might be luckier). The Tear Fund website has **downloadable fact sheets** of ideas: [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org). See also The Refugee Council magazine 'in exile' & their website [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) The Refugee Council can also advise if there are **refugees in a specific location** so churches can find out if this is something they need to be aware of. Asylum seekers nationally are the responsibility of the **National Asylum Support System** who have a website at [www.asylumsupport.info](http://www.asylumsupport.info). A new website is being launched on March 15th by ECSR - **Enabling Christians in Serving Refugees**. This is a new partnership of Christian organisations working together to enable Christians to serve refugees in the United Kingdom. For more information, contact Alison Brown at [info@ecsr.org.uk](mailto:info@ecsr.org.uk)

## Reading the family signs of the times—in England and Wales

Last spring the English & Welsh network of family ministry co-ordinators were delighted to welcome a very special guest speaker: Dr Richard McCord, Executive Director of the United States Bishops Departments for Women, Youth, Laity and Family. Rick's presentation introduced some of the trends currently challenging workers in marriage and family life in his part of the world. Taking Rick's headings as a way of reflecting on the signs of the times we have done some research and put together a regional version of his talk. See what you think! If anyone from other regions could put together a similar piece we would be very pleased to print it.

### *Signs of hope*

- Belief in and valuing of marriage appears to have remained steady. The most recent figures available show that the numbers of marriages in England and Wales in fact rose by 2 % in 2000. This is the first rise since 1992. Statistics suggest that only 14 % agree that marriage is out of date. 82% of young people aged 16-17 still expect to marry. 70% of children born within marriage will live their entire childhood with both natural parents.
- Divorce rates appear to be remaining constant. Despite an increase in actual numbers in 2001 (143,818 compared to 141,135 in 2000 - which incidentally had been a 22 year low) the mean rate of 13.0 divorced per 1000 married population is identical to that of 1999. 70% of all divorces in 2001 were granted to first-married couples compared with 80 % in 1982. The number of children affected by these divorces was 146,914 as compared to 148,000 in 1999.
- More public attention has been given to the personal and social consequences of marital conflict and divorce, especially for children, but also for their parents. Marriage and stable family life is explicitly a focus for government support.
- More public attention and resources are now given to researching the causes and prevention of marital breakdown. There is now a wide body of empirically based literature informing the process of marriage preparation and enrichment.
- There is a new level of interest in marriage education and parenting issues. This is exemplified in government by the formation of a National Family and Parenting Institute in 1999, and, in the Catholic Church, by the appointment of a National Co-ordinator for Marriage and Family Ministry in 2002.
- The entry of women into the workforce is bringing about more shared responsibility for parenting between husbands and wives. The role of fathers is receiving wider recognition and interest. However, British women still tend to be responsible for most of the domestic chores, doing 75% of the housework.
- Institutions and workplaces are progressing towards becoming more family-friendly and adaptive to diverse needs. Working parents represent 40% of the UK workforce. From 2003 parents of children aged under 6 (4 million) will have the right to make a written request for flexible or part-time working, and employers must make a convincing business case for refusing the request. The Department of Trade and Industry say the proposals will be monitored for three years and that they will consider tightening the legislation if necessary. Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that companies are being driven to adopt more family-friendly work practices by the need to retain staff and remain competitive.

### *Signs of challenge*

- Although marriage remains popular, people are delaying marriage until a later age. The average age for men in 2000 rose from 34.4 years in 1999 to 34.8 years in 2000. For women the corresponding rise was from 31.8 years to 32.1 years. The average age of single men marrying in 2000 was 30.5 years, and of single women 28.2 years.
- A functional redefining of marriage is taking place that, particularly for young people, has moved it towards a privatised interpersonal relationship and away from a public institution with social consequences. Expectations of marriage have correspondingly increased.
- The proportions of religious marriages fell again between 1999 and 2000, from 38% to 36% of all marriages. This compares with 1990 when well over half of all marriages were solemnised in a religious ceremony.
- The overall marriage rate is showing a long-term gradual decline, leading to a projection that fewer young adults will ever marry. A 2001 analysis suggested that the number could be as high as 20%.
- Although cohabitation has increased to the point where it involves about 25% of non-married men and women, it generally does not lead to marriage. Only 5% of cohabitations last 10 years or more; 60% turn into marriages while the remainder are most likely to break down. Combined data from the General Household Surveys of 1996-97 and 1998-99 show that for adults of all ages, 30% of men and over 25% of women who had ever married had cohabited prior to marriage. The largest proportion of those cohabiting are the divorced: 38% of divorced men and 29% of divorced women.
- The civil partnership or 'gay marriage' issue offers an opportunity to encourage society to think more deeply about the nature and purpose of marriage and sexuality, as well as the nature of living in relationship per se.
- The percentage of 'non-family households' has increased significantly, meaning that more people live alone. In 1998 one-person households accounted for 29% of all households. In the 1970's this was largely accounted for by the growing proportion of households of one adult aged 60 or over, 12% in 1971 increasing to 16% in 1983. During the 80's and 90's households of one adult aged 16-59 have increased, from 7% in 1981 to 13% of the total in 1998.
- Grandparents play a significant role in supporting work-family arrangements. A survey by the Future Foundation showed that 82% of children are regularly cared for by their grandparents, compared with 33% in the 1930's. Nearly half of all children under 12 are cared for at least once a month. It is estimated that grandparents save families more than £1 billion pounds in childcare/babysitting fees every year.

### *Signs for concern*

- Divorce is still widespread. Divorce and separation are the main cause of lone parenthood, accounting for the creation of 57% of female lone parenthood.
- The fertility rate continues to decline and in 2000 reached an all time low (of 1.64 children per woman of child-bearing age) since records began in 1924.
- 40% of all births in 2001 were to unmarried women. Women under 25 have the highest proportion of births outside marriage: 90% of births to teenagers and 63% of births to women aged 20-24.

- Work and family issues are still a major source of concern. A recent study showed that in the majority of two-parent families one or both parents frequently worked atypical hours and over half of employed lone mothers worked at atypical times. The main casualty of atypical working patterns appeared to be the time parents spend as a couple. Maternal work within the home is still unrecognised as contributing to the GNP and worthy of acknowledgement in fiscal policy.
- It is still more financially advantageous for couples to remain single rather than marry, as some of the media comment on civil partnerships has pointed out. Same sex couples would win valuable tax and pension concessions if they acquire the rights currently enjoyed now only by married people. But they stand to lose out on a range of welfare benefits. For example, under present rules (Dec 2000) married and heterosexual cohabiting couples are entitled to £84.65 a week, while two single people living together would get £53.95 each, a total of £107.90.

These are just some of the trends that we have identified using the list that Rick McCord provided. If we have omitted something you think is significant, please let us know.

## News Roundup

**Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue** of Lancaster Diocese has recently issued a pastoral letter asking each parish to promote marriage and family..... We have no further details as yet but that kind of initiative is always good news.

Kevin Flanagan, Director of the Church and Industry Centre writes: Just a quick note to let you know that we are holding an event at Salford Cathedral starting at 11 am Mass on February 9th. We are organising it in association with the Family Forum. We have invited marriage and Family Life organisations to participate and have mailed all the parishes with your web contact details. Keep up the good work.

It seems that we were under a misapprehension when we said that 2004 is the 2nd **International Year of the Family**. In actual fact its being marked as the tenth anniversary of the 1994 year. Churches Together for Families are partnering with the Anglican FLAME (Family Life and Marriage education) network to hold a conference hopefully in March 2004.

Meanwhile we are sorry to report that **John Anthony**, the National Co-ordinator for Marriage and Family Life has had to take sick leave after breaking some bones. We wish him a swift and complete recovery.

Mary McLeod, Chief Executive at the National Family and Parenting Institute, gave a talk at the July 2002 FLAME conference entitled *Families and their discontents*. You can read a summary in the Winter 2002 issue of the FLAME newsletter *Newsline*, but we were interested to note her final paragraph:  
 "Love is a complete exercise in contradiction. We love even when we know it means loss and pain. We need to celebrate that mystery, celebrate the personal, celebrate relationships, the relationships we have with one another, relationships that are not only 'social contracts' but about that most contradictory thing: the complete prosaic business of living together and about our deepest feelings of love and commitment".

Please let us know if you have any news at all that we could share with others.....

## Rituals and Family Resiliency.

David M. Thomas PhD.  
Co-Director, Bethany Family Institute

"It's just not convenient for us to come to it just now. We're really booked in solid with Jim's job, my school meetings and you know, we're right in the middle of the kid's soccer season. We'd like to go but you know how it is. The kids really didn't know their great grandma that well, and I'm not sure I want them to be exposed to all that "death" stuff. Tell everyone there we said "hello" and thanks for calling."

Death in the family. The funeral and burial was in a few days. But everyone couldn't make it. Like the family above. It wasn't convenient.

Family rituals, especially those connected with birth and death, are among the most important ritual enactments there are. They help the family survive. While their power may seem subtle, it remains very real. Family rituals energize the family to deal with the harder parts of life. And all families need reserve power for when those inevitable difficulties arise.

Fifty years ago psychological researchers began to wonder why some people survive life's difficult challenges, while others don't. The most well known analysis of this came from the sage psychologist, Victor Frankl. He observed that some people endured the atrocities of the concentration camps and others just gave up. He pursued the question while he too was incarcerated in a Nazi death camp. His conclusion was that those who retained meaning for their life, who believed that their own personal existence was worth saving, more than not survived. Those who felt the opposite usually perished. Similar findings were reported in the classic work, *Against All Odds* by W. B. Helmreich published in 1992.

In recent years, family therapists, along with those who study family dynamics, began to pursue a similar line of inquiry: Why do so some families weather the storms connected with serious illness, addiction and poverty while others just fall apart? While social support from outsiders always helped, there was something else that was crucial, something inside the family itself, an interior strength or a relational hardness, that spelled the difference between family survival and destruction.

One of the leaders in the study of family resilience is the widely respected researcher, Dr. Froma Walsh, a professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. Readers of this article will also want to review a work she recently edited called *Spiritual Resources in Family Therapy*. This, along with her seminal work, *Strengthening Family Resilience*, are both published by Guilford Press. Her research interest focuses on success both in marriage and family life. For too long she believes the helping professions have attended to failures in both areas. This emphasis helped to create the impression that relational failure was to be considered almost normal. She knew, however, from both her clinical work and her professional research that there remained many marriages and families who beat the odds by overcoming major challenges in their lives.

One of the most interesting aspects of her research is to show that resiliency is actually created in the midst of difficulty. Ironically, one's worst times can turn into one's best times. Hardships can bring out the best in people. But how this happens has remained more or less a mystery. Sensing we are not dealing with magic, she and her colleagues have been pursuing a set of patterns or strengths that are at work in securing survival.

One of the first findings about resilient families was that they stayed together during the difficulties. If they sought help, they did it together. In a sense, these families would say that as long as they were together, they could make it. And what kept them going, what was at the heart of their resiliency, was shown to be their belief system that contained an element of hope that they could make it. Now we come

to the matter of family rituals. The study of the relationship of belief (or myth) and ritual has become the mainstay of the study of contemporary religions. Rituals both express beliefs and reinforce their importance. Without meaningful rituals, beliefs tend to become lifeless and esoteric.

Rituals play a major role in strengthening families especially in difficult times because they bring appropriate, life-enhancing beliefs to the situation. They make the beliefs external and visible. They allow for those present to draw power for the ritual as it brings to the surface the needed beliefs for insuring survival.

And those beliefs associated with birth and death are the most important ones for the family. Survival events are really about birth and death. Something happens to challenge the life of the family. Will it continue to live or will it pass out of existence? Transitional rituals of life have the power to say that the family will live on. Even though a family member has died, or a home or a job was lost, ritualising the family's life-giving beliefs through ritual will often spell the difference between movement toward life or movement toward the eventual breakdown of the family unit.

Referring back to the conversation above, family deaths offer a significant opportunity for the family to ensure its own survival. Just like a wedding is more than a piece of paper, a funeral is more than a ceremony at the end of someone's life. For that person's family, it is also a ritual expressing that death does not have absolute power over life. And to fill in the rest of this story, all those rituals associated with birthdays and anniversaries, the beginning and the end of each day, they are contribute mightily to the survival of the family.

## NEW ACCESS TO RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

The relationship research organisation, One Plus One, has launched a new membership scheme designed to widen access to evidence-based information and resources for everyone with an interest in the couple relationship and the well-being of families. Among the resources included in the Springboard package is The Bulletin, One Plus One's quarterly digest of research and policy news covering family and couple-related issues. The 12 page digest enables readers to keep up to date on marriage and relationships as well as including thought-provoking articles designed to stimulate further debate.

In addition to The Bulletin, Springboard gives access to a "members only" area of the One Plus One website from where resources can be downloaded. These resources include: □ PictureKits (worth £39), the picture series designed to help trigger discussions on family issues □ Briefing Notes for Practitioners, key research-based messages with practical applications for practitioners working with couples and families □ Relationships Today, information sheets giving a topic-based overview on couple and family life Other benefits include a bespoke enquiry service and automatic discounts on seminars and publications.

There are three types of membership: individual, group or network. Several organisations have already decided to take advantage of the £150 Network Membership which will give any associated centre or individual a £10 associate membership. Penny Mansfield, director of One Plus One, commented: "By packaging our highly respected Bulletin with other practical resources we hope to broaden access to our work." One Plus One was established 31 years ago by the eminent psychiatrist and author, Jack Dominian.

**Further information** - Contact One Plus One on 020 7841 3660 or [info@oneplusone.org.uk](mailto:info@oneplusone.org.uk)

## Reviewing the Literature

*This issue we have decided to offer some excerpts from our email publication Bethany Briefings. Compiled by Dr David Thomas, this alerting service is usually only available electronically. See the back page for subscription details.*

### On Spirituality

**"My heart is breaking, my heart is awakening" a workshop by Gail Straub as reported by Krysta Kavanaugh in Marriage, May/June, 2002, pp. 28-31.**

The balance of in and out - self and other - needs recognized and needs met. The key to survival seems always to be the finding of balance. This article describes a workshop on how to achieve a rich balance to the self and the other, while becoming more compassionate. Outlined are four qualities of mature compassion: a quiet mind, an open heart, full presence and radical simplicity. What I particularly liked was the practices that prevent burnout and keep one fresh and alert to both oneself and others. Also noted was the value of having one's heart broken and what that can lead to, namely the capacity to be more compassionate. It reminded me of Henri Nouwen's great image of the wounded healer. Mentioned too are Gail Straub's books - *The Rhythm of Compassion* and *Circle of Compassion*.

**"What is apostolic spirituality?" by Brian McDermott in America, Nov. 11, 2002, pp. 18-20.**

A brilliant condensed presentation of what's at the heart of the life of a disciple of Christ, a person "sent forth" to create and to advance the reign of God on earth. But not so fast. Before this is done, we must pass through the key experience of the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus. First, we must experience the forgiveness of God. We are sinners. We live with sinners. We are equal in this regard. And we are forgiven much in the same way as were the first disciples, who abandoned Jesus in his hour of need. Then we can celebrate together our being forgiven. This is the moment of Eucharist. The moment of community. But it's not the

final moment. That is reserved for the sending forth into the world, which is at the heart of being an apostle of the risen Christ, a task that is for all Christians. The article also makes appropriate connections with Ignatian spirituality, which has become today a most viable explanation and reason for the life of the Christian in the world.

### On Contemporary Culture, Politics and the Media

**"Two thumbs up for social justice" by Patrick McCormick in U.S. Catholic, Sept. 2002, p. 46-48.**

Movies are probably the most powerful media we have. They can be deeply influential as well as being educational. In religious circles movies mostly seem to get a bad rap. The article states that movies can be a wonderful way of promoting the great social virtues, especially if they are explained and lifted above their role as simple entertainment. The five movies that the author feels most effectively show aspects of social justice are: *The Grapes of Wrath*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Norma Rae*, *Dead Man Walking* and *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Check out this article if you are curious as to how each of these classic movies embody some of the best examples of Catholic social teaching. And add to the list those you might see as equally appropriate. A recent movie that I would recommend for its powerful message is *My Life as a House* - particularly potent is the portrayal of a father-son relationship that still has me thinking.

### On Hope and Personal Survival

**"No timetable for grief" by Ashley Davis Frend in Psychotherapy Networker, Sept/Oct, 2002, pp. 23-24.**

Grief is an almost universal experience. Wherever there is significant loss, there is grief. Of course, the strongest grief comes after the death of a loved one, especially if the death was untimely. For a long time, it was assumed that "time will take care of grief." Soon the grieving person will be back to "normal" and "get on with life." This article

not only warns against using a simplistic model for the grief process, but shows some excellent ways to help people work through it. It's one of the best summaries of a challenge faced by us on a personal level, and on an interpersonal level, when we seek to help others walk this darkened path.

## **On Theology, Catechesis and the Church Today**

**"The next Christianity" by Philip Jenkins in The Atlantic Monthly, Oct. 2002, pp. 53-68.**

Think of how Christianity has changed in the last 50 years. Now try to imagine what it will look like 50 years from now. Rather daunting a task, isn't it? But why not try. This article is superb. It's well researched and reasoned. It predicts a very different kind of Christianity prevailing in the world up ahead. Led largely by developments in Africa, Asia and South America, the church will be changed in dramatic ways, as it becomes a part of the cultures of those areas. Right now church leadership, largely in the Northern Hemisphere, seems to be resisting these changes, but, the author predicts, they will not be able to prevent a new style of Christianity from coming forth. It's an exciting portrait, one that's never been seen before.

**"When your adult child chooses a different path" by Theresa Cotter in St. Anthony Messenger, August, 2002, pp. 35-38.**

What topic is more on the mind of many Catholic parents than this one? Parents have hopes and dreams for their growing children. Then there comes the time when the child becomes a young adult and starts to think and live according to their own lights. They do not always conform to what the parent thinks. So what's a parent to do? The common answer is to "let go" but as this article wisely points out there are many angles or facets to letting go. Further, what kind of interior work will help the parent make this situation a positive reality for all involved? This is a wise article - it's realistic and shows quite convincingly how this time in the life of the parent can be one of growth. It's hard. But what isn't that's really important?

**"Whose name is this? The intriguing archaeological find" by Joseph Fitzmyer in America, Nov.**

**18, 2002, pp. 9-11.**

It was front-page news. It was reported that a box of bones was unearthed that dated back to the First Century. Inscribed on the surface of the box was this: "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Could this be the same Jesus that we all know about? We want to know. So enters the discussion a widely respected Scripture scholar, who also is well-versed in matters archaeological - Joseph Fitzmyer. Will he let us know whether this is authentic or not? This article offers us a brief course in burial boxes, ancient inscriptions, language study, a summary of the burial customs used in the time of Jesus, information about the family of Jesus and much more. In other words, everything we need to know to make a good judgment. So now you probably want me to tell you the answer. True or fake? Well, you really should read the whole article but I can give you a hint. Regarding the question as to whether this box contains the bones of James, the brother of Jesus, who headed the Christian church in Jerusalem, the answer is "probably not" but "maybe." How's that for clarity! But maybe that's as close as we can get if we want to be totally honest about the evidence at hand.

## **On Marriage, Family and Interpersonal life**

**"The childless revolution" by Madelyn Cain in Utne reader, July/Aug 2002, pp. 71-72.**

I don't know a lot about the growing number of couples who chose not to have children. Their numbers have been increasing over the last 25 years. While I don't want to judge these couples, I know I do and it's good for me to read accounts of why such choices are made. In this article and another in the same issue entitled To have - or not to have, are balanced presentations about this situation. It's instructive reading for those who want to understand the full picture of marriage and family life. These people are all too easily stereotyped, but there's great diversity among them in terms of motivation and reasons for choosing to be childless. My eyes were opened.

**"How to be great grandparents" by Christine Gudorf in U.S. Catholic, Sept. 2002, pp.18-21.**

Grand parenting is getting to be as complex as parenting. The different arrangements of schedules and distance make today's situation quite demanding - but certainly not impossible. This article is filled with good ideas for grandparents and their important role in the lives of both their children and their children's children. The thorny issues relating to religious behaviour, different parenting styles, contrasting values are all faced here. Conflict can be avoided with some good common sense, patience and understanding. It's a delicate and even fragile relationship. But it's worth careful thought because the rewards for all concerned can be great.

### **New on our Bookshelf...**

#### **A word about us...**

We have had some new members recently so it's a good moment to say something about the two of us who direct Bethany Family Institute. We do so in our own time purely from conviction that the service we offer is both necessary and would otherwise be unavailable. We are always open to offers that will help us support our dependants!

Elizabeth Davies worked in family ministry for the Diocese of Menevia from 1994 until 2001. She has a Masters Degree in Community Leadership (Family Ministry) at Regis University, Denver, Colorado (sponsored by the Irish Ursuline Union) and is the mother of four children ages 6-14. Author of a handbook for parish family ministers, plus other nationally published articles on family, Elizabeth is a member of the Bishops Conference of England & Wales Committee for Marriage and Family Life and a member of the executive committee of Churches Together for Families. She is also a Registered Rainbows Director, an accredited marriage preparation facilitator and an Associate Writer for Redemptorist Pubns. Elizabeth is currently working on a course book on Family, Church and Community for Maryvale Institute and a book provisionally titled 'Loving the Family' for RP. Email: Elizabethdavies@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

David Thomas is an internationally renowned family theologian, author, and speaker. With his wife Karen, David is parent to seven, grandparent to three and has been foster-parent to over 70. Peritus to the US bishops during the 1980 World Synod on Family, David has served for many years on National Commissions on Marriage and Family Life. Amongst his numerous publications is the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Family-Style which won the Catholic Press Association's Family Book of the Year Award in 1995. He is currently General Editor of the Benziger Publishing Family Life Education programme. He has just written a new book on family spirituality and is currently writing on St Ignatius Loyola. Email: DavidThomas@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

Our Faithmap: a weekly resource for parish, school and home ministry. Available quarterly from Redemptorist Publications. Book, CD-Rom, reproducible sheets, differentiated instructions and activities.. An invaluable addition to the available resources for Children's Liturgy. ISBN:0852312644

Sex and Marriage in the Catholic Tradition: An Historical Overview. Douglas R. Letson (ed). Toronto: Novalis, 2002. ISBN: 2895071756

A Big New Free Happy Unusual Life: Self-expression and Spiritual Practice For Those Who Have Time For Neither. Nina Wise. New York: Broadway Books, 2002. ISBN: 076791079

Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions. Michael G. Lawler. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002. ISBN: 81465116X

Change, Communication and Relationships in the Catholic Church.\* David Barker. Chelmsford:Matthew James, 2002. ISBN: 1898366748

Authority in Roman Catholicism\*. Bernard Hoose. Chelmsford: Matthew James, 2002. ISBN: 1898366756

Training Course For Leaders: A Practical Do-It-Yourself-Kit for Forming people for Team Work. George Boran. Blackrock: Columba Press, 2002. ISBN: 1856073599

Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders. Mary Pipher. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999. ISBN: 1573227846

Quiet Spaces: Prayer Interludes for Women. Patricia Wilson. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002. ISBN: 0835809692

\*An Authority & Governance Project Publication.

*Coming in our next issue...due out Mar 2003:*

Looking back—looking ahead: A Bethany Review.

Living the challenge of ecumenism: inter church families

A voice for families? Listening for someone to speak.

Plus news, reviews and 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 Elizabeth Davies, PO Box 2858, Wolverhampton WV3 0XL

Email: ElizabethDavies@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com 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

**Bethany Briefings** An electronically-delivered quarterly current awareness service for family ministry/spirituality. Subscriptions: £15 per year. (£10 if subscribing concurrently to JbU or Nazareth)

## SUBSCRIBE TODAY

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

Name.....

Address.....

..... Post Code.....

Organisation..... Email.....

Please send to: The Bethany Family Institute, PO Box 2858, Wolverhampton WV3 0XL UK