

Just between Us...

Newsletter of the Bethany Family Institute
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From time to time we introduce Bethany as an international support organisation for family life ministry. I am sure that in some circles that sounds rather pretentious. It remains, nevertheless, a fact, borne out not least by our website statistics. In the week that this newsletter went to press, we had visitors logging on from Belgium, the USA (government, military *and* academic sites!), Canada, Italy, Australia, South Africa, Austria, Poland, New Zealand, Singapore, and Taiwan. Sometimes these visitors do more than pass through, and contact us for information. One such is Laura Shahani who has been preparing a paper on the family for her local synod in Chennai province, India. Laura has kindly allowed us to reprint some of her proposals so that our readers can see how life is for the family in another part of the world. We hope you find it interesting.



"The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them"

Albert Einstein

With a review of government family policy launched recently, it is a good time to revisit those areas where the government has directed its efforts since the consultation document *Supporting Families* was published in 1998. If you are not yet clear how your taxes are used in support of family life, check out our summary on pages 11-13. Beverley Hughes MP, the Minister with 'overarching responsibility for the family' across government, believes that "voluntary organisations, by and large, are the best way forward to cope with both the mainstream and more specialist work with parents". We invite those of you with experience in working with government as a voluntary organisation to contact us with your views! As ever we really appreciate your feedback, so if anything in this issue inspires you to respond, we will enjoy hearing from you.

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Happy Easter from us both at Bethany!

Visit us at: www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

Diary Dates 2003

- May 1st Involving Fathers: a day conference featuring Steve Biddulph. Fee: £40 includes lunch, parking and refreshments. Carlisle Business Centre, Bradford.
To book contact Barnardos CANA Project 0113 2744940 or email Sarah Driver or Marie Pettman at cana.headingley@barnardos.org.uk.
- 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 23-25th Christian Initiation in Interchurch Families: Baptism, Confirmation & Church membership. Interchurch Families Annual Conference. The Hayes Centre, Swan-wick, Derbyshire. Contact AIF, Inter-Church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7SA. Tel: 020 7523 2152. Email: aife@msn.com
- 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: Intams@skynet.be.
- Sep 24th-27th Many Threads... Many Weavers. 23rd annual NACFLM Conference, Houston, Texas. Featuring Eric Law. Info: www.nacflm.org
- October National Parents Week. Theme: Family-friendliness
- Nov 1st-2nd Rainbow's Registered Director Continuing Development Training. Harborne Hall. Birmingham. Contact details above.

Can you help...?

I am presently writing my dissertation for a Masters in Religious Education. My topic is on how people with a language and/or learning disability can participate in the liturgy of the Mass. I am particularly interested in the experience of families who have a disabled member. Would any of your members or contacts be willing to share their experiences of taking people with such disabilities to Mass and in having them prepared for and receiving the sacraments? All information would be treated as confidential.

I can be contacted on this email address Sctshell@aol.com or at

303 Maryvale Road,
Bournville,
Birmingham B30 1PL

With thanks

God bless

Shell Scott

Since Vatican II the Church has been charged explicitly with the responsibility of listening to the People of God. Section 4 of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) explains why this is a prerequisite for ministry:

"In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, it should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which people ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other."

In order to answer questions, one must first listen for them. It has long been acknowledged that listening to family experience forms the basis for any plan of pastoral action on behalf of the family. One of the first - and continuing - Bethany projects was to listen to the faith experiences and concerns of families. The collection of witness statements from our Family Faith Survey remains a moving and challenging inspiration for our work.

In recent months, in England and Wales, there has been consideration of a proposal to listen more broadly and intentionally to the concerns of Catholic families. In 1980, in their Easter People message following the National Pastoral Congress, the bishops of England and Wales reported the faithful's urgent desire that the teaching Church should find ways of listening attentively to the experience of married Christians. More than 20 years later, efforts are being made to bring this about.

So we are devoting space in this issue to a brief consideration of the process of listening. Many questions come to mind when such a project is proposed: How can we make this happen? How do we ensure that those we listen to feel that they have been heard? How do we manage fears and expectations so that both listener and listened to can experience freedom in the process? Where do we start when we want to listen? And what are the practical ways in which we can promote a rewarding, user-friendly process without it all becoming too labour-intensive?

Listening is one of the key skills in developing a collaborative approach to ministry, and to which Loughlan Sofield devotes a chapter in his book *The Collaborative Leader*. For Sofield, listening is the *primary* task of leadership, and for Christian leaders, the model of Jesus as listener is particularly important.

"Love is the foundation for all that he does, and that love is nowhere more evident than in the way Jesus listens. He is direct and open with people, erecting no barriers between himself and those he meets. It is his listening that puts his leadership approach in sharp contrast to that taken by others in the gospel story. Jesus listens intently and responds compassionately."

Sofield offers a corporate understanding of listening as a three-fold process. The first component involves paying attention to others; body language is especially important in communicating attentiveness. The second involves listening to what they believe, need and want. The final component is to communicate with them in such a way that they feel that they have been heard, that they are in dialogue and that a relationship has been established. These three elements are all essential to ensuring the success of any listening process. The same key elements also form the basis of active listening explored by Mickey and Terri Quinn in their parenting courses:

"Faced with doubts and puzzlement the temptation is to have a quick and easy answer. We may be so afraid to really let the puzzlement touch us that we do not really listen"

Timothy Radcliffe OP

"A parent's attention and understanding communicate respect, acceptance and love. And this frees a child to change, to love and to grow as a

"Just as love of God begins in listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but lends us His ear. So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

person....listen beyond the words, beyond the story, beyond the details, to discover the feelings, the person.. Check out in your own words that you are hearing those feelings correctly. "

Turning to a relatively old family ministry text *The Ministry of Listening* (1987) we find J. Daryl Furlong exploring the foundational aspect of listening:

"Family ministry is not telling families what to do, nor is it doing for them what they can do for themselves. It is listening to families and discerning their strengths, their gifts, and their needs and enabling them to care for and minister within the context of their own families and the "parish family".

These listening objectives correspond to a principle identified in the 1978 US Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry: awareness that understands. Listening is designed to raise the awareness of the Church to the sacramental nature of Christian marriage and family life and to the realities of everyday life faced by families. This consciousness raising is dual purpose, raising church awareness and families' own awareness, of their mission, gifts and needs.

Diana Garland in her book 'Family Ministry' makes the point that churches do not necessarily need to know everything there is to know about the family in order to identify areas of concern. Some issues make themselves known without questions being asked. Nevertheless, without explicitly asking families, churches run the risk of their assumptions being wrong. As Garland points out, parish families may not actually be what they seem to be. Their usual appearance may be different to their church appearance. Less visible family characteristics are likely to be more significant than those readily apparent, and needs perceived by outsiders may not, actually, overly concern families themselves.

Once reasons for listening to families are clarified, ways to listen become important. Furlong and Garland, as well as NACFLM, have devised questionnaires or 'inventories' to assess family needs and strengths. Because of the huge amounts of information generated by this method, both Furlong and Garland offer analysis services that parishes can buy into. The briefer NACFLM tool comes with its own PC-friendly software with which to interpret feedback. Although questionnaires have notoriously low response rates, they do offer a relatively simple, non-intimidating means of eliciting information on a range of topics.

Surveys generally fall into two types: quantitative and qualitative. With quantitative surveys, everyone has the opportunity to participate. Yet qualitative surveys generally produce the same findings with a more strategic investment of time, energy and resources even with a random sample. As *The Tablet* pointed out (March 8th 2003), the 2001 government census (costing billions) came to much the same conclusions about religion in Britain as its own poll (costing much less) of 1000 individuals published in December 2001.

However, there are other ways to listen that offer more opportunities of giving families an experience of being heard. Leif Kehrwald was an early proponent of inviting families with common characteristics to form focus groups, for sharing concerns and being heard, by each other as well as church leaders. Family forums offer a similar opportunity, so long as careful facilitation ensures respectful sharing. Larger groups make such sharing harder, especially as there are invariably those who rise to an audience. A variation on this can be an indirect forum, where discussion questions are wall mounted and responses are invited via sticky post-it notes. This facilitates listening alongside an arranged schedule with the extra

Furlong's listening objectives:

- To increase awareness of families about their own needs and strengths in the hope that the very process of asking the questions might enable families to verbalise their strengths and needs more clearly;
- To do an accurate assessment of the physical, social, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of families within the parish;
- To develop ministry to and of families by surfacing and enabling leaders

advantage that responses are already written down.

In any listening process care must be taken to include the differently-abled who may not have access to transport, or to usual means of communication. Sensitivity to, and acceptance of, difference is always going to be the hallmark of a successful listening project. Good and creative planning can alleviate challenges to inclusive listening and even become part of the process of reconciliation.

"The real church is hard to express in statistics. The real Church is to be found in the quality of people's relationships with God, with themselves, with one another...some humble listening is vital..."

Desmond O'Donnell

One of the more interesting aspects about conducting a listening process is that it is likely to achieve much more than the sum of the original intention. Sofield points out that listening lies at the heart of relationship and relationship is one of the main thrusts of evangelisation. When we listen well we are engaging in much more than a simple fact-finding exercise. We are affirming the deeper humanity of those we listen to, gifting

them with healing, appreciation, understanding, love and respect.

A Process Approach to Listening

by Loughlan Sofield & Donald Kuhn

1. Carefully define the objective that collecting information will satisfy. Determine the specific areas for which information is needed and develop a few focussed questions to elicit responses.
2. Establish criteria for selecting people from whom information is to be gathered.
3. Using the selection criteria, have a small group (eg pastoral council) gather names of people who would likely provide valuable input.
4. Communicate to the entire parish what's going on and the fact that a sample of people will be interviewed. Make clear that involvement in the study does not differentiate these people from others in the parish who might also meet these criteria.
5. Carefully approach these people and explain the purpose, how confidentiality will be handled, who will be the interviewers and how the information will be summarised and used.
6. Conduct the interviews, using a few people to do them all. Typically the interviews should last from one to two hours. If people are agreeable, tape recording of interviews may make later analysis easier.
7. A summary of the findings should be prepared by either the interviewers or a few people with the gifts to listen and analyse the information. It is obviously critical that these be as objective as possible.
8. Determine the appropriate timing and the best way to make the data available to the entire parish or the group which will act upon it. The material should first be communicated to parish leaders for their reflection. Ideally they will meet together to use the data to discern where God is calling them as a Christian community.
9. Use the collected data for developing a dynamic pastoral plan for the parish or subgroup.

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Factors affecting the sanctity and stability of families:

Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, inadequate housing and medical benefits are some of the main issues being faced by the poor, while the rich are facing the onslaught of the influence of the media and exposure to western ideologies, developing a materialistic culture and consumerist mentality. Coupled with a lack of prayer and inadequate faith formation, many Catholics are so to say experiencing a crisis of faith. Drug and alcohol addiction, practice of dowry, caste barriers, immoral lifestyle and artificial methods of family planning (being promoted by the government) are other factors that have affected the sanctity and stability of the family here and make Christian family life very difficult to live out.

Perceptions about family life are different for different age groups. The decline of the joint family system in India, together with the influence of the mass media and the exposure to western culture, the generation gap is felt and communication is breaking down further.

Elders feel unwanted and their views are less respected.

Parents are pressured to earn and provide more but are not able to get the children to share responsibilities.

Women are still not able to have self-expression and traditional roles for them are curbing their involvement in varied fields of activity.

Children are being neglected on account of both parents being employed and this in turn is giving rise to several problems among the *youth* such as inferiority complexes, addictions to drugs and alcohol and bad habits with wrong relationships.

Marriage preparation for the youth, both by the parents and the church seems to be inadequate, in view of the increasing number of marriages not working out due to incompatibility and couples seeking divorce. There is a wrong attitude towards the sacrament of matrimony largely governed by the changing attitude towards the same all over the world. Poor parental example and a lack of values being imparted in Christian homes makes this problem worse.

Support and care to the broken families, widows and those affected by drug addiction and alcoholism is not sufficient presently. This is an area of concern. There is a great need for counselling and rehabilitation centres to handle these groups. The same has been proposed as a new ministry for the diocese.

Pastoral proposals:

Presently the **BCC** (Basic Christian Communities) are evolving as a means to strengthen the family in a personal and tangible way. Working with the clergy they are the means to deepen fellowship and allow for closer interaction among the families in a neighbourhood.

- Proper training to be imparted to leaders of the BCC's and guidelines formulated and made known about how the BCC's are to function. Handbook for leaders to be made available.
- Parish priests should visit the homes at least once a year. They should play a better role in the BCC's by way of input and guidance, since the meetings should not be reduced to mere prayer meetings or groups for rosary recitation.
- Frequent parish family get together and meetings or a picnic can be held to foster the sense of belonging. Openness and sharing of problems with a view to build solidarity and obtain solutions should be the aim.
- Resource material in simple language should be distributed at BCC meetings, for parents to educate and form their children in faith, prayer and areas of sexual morality.

The **Centres of Family Guidance** are meant to be sources of support for the pastoral care of families. They are intended to be local units that support families in the social, ethical, pastoral, responsible procreation sectors where they are very helpful for families.

- Family Guidance cells to be started and developed in every parish to promote the family apostolate.
- The family commission to have sufficient and well-formed animators deputed to every parish to guide the family cells and make their work known in every parish. Women's desk to be revived and popularised.

- The animators of family cells must be couples who are strong in their marriage commitment and have a focus of helping strengthen other families. They should be the group leaders and as a team formulate the strategy for the parish according to the local needs. These can handle problems being faced by couples, youth and children and also train leaders by utilizing inputs and services of professional resource persons.
- Problems that are acute or require additional help may be referred to the Parish Priest especially those of conflict resolution or those regarding abuse or addictions.
- Family cells to work with the lay apostolate to teach and strengthen family prayer.
- Formation of free legal aid cell from among catholic lawyers to assist the family cell.
- Vocation guidance and discernment team to assist parents with life choices for children.
- Teachings on issues of morality and Natural family planning are to be given in every parish.
- Diocese to set one Sunday in the year aside as **Pro-life** Sunday and the teachings of the Church on Pro life should be highlighted through homilies, exhibitions and input by professional teachers on the subject.
- People who are ready to work on pro-life issues to be trained and encouraged.

Adult catechesis is an urgent need in our diocese.

- Adult Catechism class and bible study programme for the parish level to be formalised.
- Seminars, retreats and workshops to be held in the parish regularly for faith formation and growth.
- Vatican II documents and Papal encyclicals study classes to be organised.
- Christian parenting courses to be conducted for young parents at the parish/vicariate level. This will also serve as a means to welcome and integrate new families into parish life.

Marriage preparatory classes:

- Diocese to conduct a compulsory marriage preparation course spaced over 6 months for all girls aged 17 and boys 20 with a certificate awarded for the same on completion. This should be attended irrespective of whether they propose to marry or not. All Catholic youth should complete this course. Presently

conducted courses should be well organized and more intensive.

- This should be followed up by the parish priests and supported by the marriage encounter groups. Weekend preparation can be held for the couples intending to marry. Church doctrine on sexual morality and Natural family planning methods should be clearly explained during these courses.
- In cases of arranged marriages to avoid any deceit, each family for their son/daughter, before the Parish Priest should produce medical certificate.
- Parents have the responsibility to evaluate the background of families and assess compatibility of partners prior to giving assent. Also the consent of boy and girl should be of paramount concern.
- Marriage encounter and Christian Family movement to be strengthened in our diocese and groups encouraged.
- Compulsory follow up programme of support for married couples to be held every 3 years.

Ministry for the broken families, widows and those affected by drugs and alcohol:

- Diocesan centre for counselling to be opened. Priests in this ministry to visit all parishes and address the faithful and promote formation of affiliated cells.
- Counselling cell in every parish to be established. The same may be entrusted to lay persons.
- Training for volunteers who are willing to work in this ministry to be conducted.
- Awareness of these problems and their solutions to be disseminated to the faithful through the homilies and through published articles in parish newsletters/periodicals.
- Reconciliation through dialogue to be fostered. Organise meetings for separated and divorced Catholics.
- De-addiction centre should be opened in the city at the earliest. Alcoholics /Narcotic anonymous meetings can be held in our church premises with due permission.
- Details of rehabilitation centres and support available must be made known to parishioners.
- Welfare fund for widows, especially for education of their children, to be set up in parishes. Homes for them to be opened wherever possible.

I read the articles on marriage with a non-believer and lone faith-parenting in earlier issues of *Just between Us* (Vol. 1: 2& 3) with much interest. The surprising thing is that so many of us who are interchurch couples (one partner a practising Roman Catholic and the other a practising Anglican or Free Church Christian), have been told so forcibly that this was a much better situation to be in than our own. So many parish priests have said, when we first presented ourselves to them as engaged couples wanting to marry: 'I've never met any couple like you before. What a pity s/he is practising. It's much easier for a Catholic to marry someone who isn't. There won't be such problems about the children'.

However, this attitude is much less widespread at the present time than it used to be. Probably the change reflects both a greater understanding of the difficulties of lone faith-parenting today, and also a greater appreciation of all that we share as Christians.

One domestic church; two church communities. So what are the specifics of interchurch family life? There are many different kinds of marriages that cross denominational boundaries; in some neither partner practises, in others only one does so. Even where both partners practise, they may be content to keep their church-going in watertight compartments. Here I am thinking particularly of couples who are committed to living their marriage and family life as Christians, to forming one 'domestic church' in their home. But at the same time, they also want to draw their spiritual nourishment from the two church communities (as yet divided) to which their one family is attached. They want to belong as a family to both these church communities, so far as they possibly can. Indeed, in the process they hope that they may in some small way help to bring those communities closer together.

Their problems come from the fact that their churches are divided, and there is no 'solution' to the difficulties specific to interchurch family life short of unity between the churches. However, as the churches grow closer together, they are increasingly able to see interchurch families as a

common concern, even as an opportunity for exercising joint pastoral care. When this happens, life for interchurch families is transformed - they no longer feel that their churches are pulling them in opposite directions.

Equal partners in marriage

It is this feeling of being tugged in different directions, whether by extended families, by local church communities or by denominations, that can be so destructive for interchurch family life. Many couples feel strongly nowadays that marriage is an equal partnership, and that the partners must be free to make decisions that intimately affect their family life, particularly the way they bring up their children. It was with great rejoicing, therefore that interchurch families welcomed the 1970 decision of the Roman Catholic Church to ask the Catholic partner *only* to promise to do all that he/she could for the Catholic baptism and upbringing of their children. Before 1970 *both* partners had to make an absolute promise to baptise and bring up all the children of their marriage as Catholics, or the marriage would not be recognised by the Catholic Church. It was a question either of renouncing the marriage, or of the Catholic being excommunicated. Over the years the form of the promise required from the Catholic has become much more couple-friendly. In 1990 the English and Welsh bishops inserted the phrase 'within the unity of our partnership' into the promise, to show that it was not to jeopardise the marriage. At world level the Ecumenical Directory of 1993 recognised that the other Christian partner might feel a similar obligation to that of the Catholic because of his/her own Christian commitment. There is now no canonical penalty for the Catholic if (in spite of his/her best efforts) the children are brought up in the church of other partner.

'You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity. Express that hope in prayer together in the unity of love.

Together invite the Holy Spirit of love into your hearts and into your homes. He will help you to grow in trust and understanding.'

Pope John Paul II, York, 1982

Bringing up the children

Of course couples may freely decide to bring up their children in one church only, or the stronger partner may insist on having his/her own way. Some couples, however, have found great joy in bringing up their children together within the life of both their churches. The churches have not yet been able to approve this, but it has happened! Not only is it common nowadays for an interchurch wedding to take place in the church of the bride, with both clergy having a part to play, but shared celebrations of baptism are becoming more common. When they are older, some children are able to receive communion in the churches of both their parents. As they grow up, they tell us that they do not feel confused, but enriched. Some find a home in one church rather than the other, but without feeling that they have cut themselves off from the other. Some try hard to bring the churches together for a confirmation service, or arrange a shared service in which they can affirm their faith, as an alternative when this proves too difficult.

In working hard for the unity of their own families, interchurch families hope that they are contributing also to that unity of all Christ's disciples for which he himself prayed. And thus to the unity of the world, and of the whole creation.

Resources and further reading

Churches Together in England set up a working-group which produced a 70-page booklet: *Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families* in 1994 for the International Year of the Family. £2.50 from the Association of Interchurch Families.

The National Board of Catholic Women has published a leaflet entitled *May my husband (or wife, parent, child) ever receive Holy Communion with me? - How?* to inform Catholics of the possibilities opened up by the Bishops' document on the Eucharist: *One Bread One Body*. 20p each, 15p for 10 or more, plus p/p from the NBCW, c/o 34 Park Road, Disley, Cheshire SK12 2LX tel. 01663 762 417.

The Association of Interchurch Families publishes a twice-yearly journal, *Interchurch Families* (£6 p.a. or £16 for 3 years) and has resources available on Getting Married, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and Eucharistic Sharing in Interchurch Families. Details from: Association of

Interchurch Families, Inter-Church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7SA tel. 020 7523 2152 email aife@msn.com

For details of the 2003 annual conference see 'Diary dates'.

For interchurch families world-wide see www.aifw.org

Working and praying to strengthen marriage and family life and to promote Christian unity, the Association of Interchurch Families offers a *support network* for interchurch families (where the partners belong to different denominations - often a Roman Catholic and a Christian of another communion) and an *information service* to all concerned for their welfare (clergy and ministers, relatives and others).

It gives interchurch families *a voice in the churches*: this is done by *articulating the experience* of these families in all their diversity; by focusing attention on interchurch couples' need for *pastoral care and understanding* which takes seriously both their marriage commitment to one another and the fact that two churches are represented in their family; by affirming the gifts of interchurch families and their potential as a *catalyst for wider church unity*.

Changes at the Bishops Conference

We are sorry to report the announcement on March 17th of the departure of John Anthony from the staff of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. John had been the first National Co-ordinator for Marriage and Family Life and we carried his hopes for his appointment in last September's edition of *Just between Us...* In his letter to diocesan co-ordinators, Bishop John Hine, Chairman of the Committee for Marriage and Family Life, assured them of the continued commitment to support marriage and family life ministry in the dioceses. As we go to press we await the decision of the bishops at their Low Week meeting regarding the further development of this work.

Supporting the Families of Armed Forces Personnel

Suggestions from the US National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers

Last month NACFLM sent us some ideas on ministry with deployed military personnel and their families. Our thanks go to Bishop Tom Burns for his help in amending some of the text. Although the conflict seems to be over, the armed forces are likely to remain in Iraq for a while and therefore continued support for their families is important.

- Conduct a weekly prayer service to pray for peace and to pray for deployed members of the parish.
- Maintain a book of special intentions for military personnel and their families. Include these names in the *General Intercessions* at daily and Sunday Mass.
- Maintain a parish master list of addresses for military personnel stationed overseas as well as an updated list of families here at home. Designate someone to drop regular notes of support from the parish to the person who is away and maintain regular phone or person-to-person contact with the family.
- Have children (or adults) from the parish put together Care packages for parishioners serving overseas. They should be sent to the individual's military address here in the UK prefaced with "OP TELIC", so long as the sender knows they are involved with the Iraq situation. It is wise to keep such packages a reasonable size and certainly no more than 2kg in weight. The mail department of the person's Unit can advise on larger parcels.
- Form support groups for family members of military personnel. To assist with this ministry, recruit parishioners who have been in similar situations (Desert Storm, the Falklands) and are willing to be available to listen and talk to anyone who needs support or conversation. Announce in the bulletin - and from the pulpit - that the support group will be available on a specific evening of the week and make sure someone is available at that time.
- Organize potluck gatherings of families so that they can spend time together getting to know one another.
- Allow children to gather together in the school, religious education or another supervised parish setting to discuss their concerns and worries for the deployed parent. Educational personnel should be watchful for any particular signs of stress among these children and youth.
- Organize a baby-sitting system for parents so that they can have time to shop, go to the movies or just spend some quiet time.
- Be aware that families may be experiencing financial or other difficulties while their family member is deployed. Can the parish connect these families with additional resources that they might need during this time?
- Develop a crisis team to reach out to families in case family members are reported as missing-in-action, wounded or killed.
- Children and adults of the parish could also be pen pals for military personnel stationed overseas. The more letters sent the better - they will be shared!

Why Pay The Earth For Your Wedding?

As wedding costs spiral beyond all belief, a timely little booklet has come our way from Marriage Resource. Priced at 20p, *Why Pay The Earth For Your Wedding?* explores some alternative options for couples (and their families!) who don't want to be hijacked by the darker commercial side of wedding arrangements. We may not all want to borrow a wedding dress or go without makeup on our big day but there is bound to be something in this leaflet to at least create some discussion before bringing out the plastic. Remember, money worries are one of the three biggest stresses in early married life (others are time and sex). Further details from Marriage Resource, 24 West St, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 1JS

The policy of the current government stems from a 1998 consultation document *Supporting Families*. Starting from the premise that families are both "at the heart of our society and the basis of our future as a country", the document focuses government family policy on three principles:

1. "Children must come first: we should aim to ensure that the next generation gets the best possible start in life.
2. Children need stability: there are many successful kinds of relationship outside marriage, but we share the belief of the majority of people that marriage is the surest way for couples to bring up their children.
3. Families raise children: the role of government should be to help and support, not to try to substitute for parents. The state should only intervene in extreme circumstances, for example, where the welfare of family members is at stake."

The document made proposals in the areas of advice and support, financial support, work-home balance, strengthening marriage and support for serious family problems. It invited responses to the proposals in the form of twenty questions relating to these areas.

Advice and support

One of the more visible results of the consultation was the creation of the National Family and Parenting Institute, designed to be a focus of advice and information on all aspects of family life. According to its own publicity, the NFPI works "by researching the concerns of families and the support available, trialling new ways of providing support to families, bringing together organisations and knowledge, influencing policy makers, providing information direct to families, and running public campaigns." The NFPI has been at the forefront of an annual campaign to raise awareness and highlight issues surrounding parenting; National Parents' Week takes place each October, based on a particular theme. In 2003 the week will highlight what it means to be 'family-friendly'.

Other means of supporting families particularly in under-privileged areas have been the Sure Start

projects. Piloted in the UK in 1998, Sure Start is a long-term project focussed on community interventions with families of young children up to 5 years old. Services vary but include childcare, primary healthcare, early education and play, and family support. The effectiveness of this preventative approach is based on evidence from North America. The full effects of Sure Start will not be realised until at least 2008, but the early indications have been sufficiently successful for Sure Start funding to have been extended nationwide. The multi-agency approach of Sure Start aims to:

- improve the social and emotional development of infants and children;
- improve health;
- improve the ability to learn;
- strengthen families and communities.

Financial support

Financially the government's policy has been to support individual families through a system of Working Families Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits, as well as the universal Child Benefit. The system changed as of April 7th 2003, with WFTC becoming a Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credits being paid in cash to the main carer. Primarily the government has arranged its welfare system as a means of encouraging parents into work. Varying rates of WFTC were paid according to the amount of hours worked per week: 16-29 hours or 30+ hours. The government also contributes to the costs of childcare, though this has in the past been reserved for registered childcare providers. Out of School Care Clubs have been another area of government investment to meet the needs of working parents.

Work-home balance

Extensive attention has been devoted recently to the area of work and family life, particularly the need to balance home-life responsibilities. In January 2003 the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury jointly published *Balancing Work and Family Life: Enhancing Choice and Support for Parents*, with proposals for helping families manage their working and home lives better.

The government's approach to the balance of work and family life has been to introduce some of the

measures already mentioned: a change in the tax and benefit system to support families with children and those on low income. The childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is now paid for approved childcare within the family home. Consideration is being given to extending this to include people who are not registered childminders. Maternity rights have been adjusted and parents of young and disabled children have the right to request a flexible working pattern. Employers are required to consider such applications seriously.

Since childcare is considered critical to parental participation in the employment market, the Government is investing in the numbers of places available. In 2002 the Spending Review doubled the resources for childcare. The National Childcare Strategy is targeting the creation of places for 1.6 million children by March 2004, some of which will be school-based. Following on from the Sure Start schemes, the Government intends creating Children's Centres in every one of the 20% most disadvantaged wards. These will bring together childcare with early years education, family support and health services.

The fourth element of the Government's home-life balance strategy is the encouragement of business to offer flexible working practices. In March 2000 a Work-Life Balance Campaign was launched to increase awareness and take-up of employment practices that benefit business and help employees. The vision of the campaign is that "everyone should feel they have more choice and control over working hours." There have been protests from smaller businesses about the costs and difficulties of shouldering family-friendly employment policies. Since the majority of those in work are employed by smaller businesses, this is one constituency that the government will have to win over if its efforts are to be successful.

Strengthening marriage

The Lord Chancellor's Department, since 1995, has had responsibility for marriage and relationship support and for divorce policy. The LCD has a role in preparing for, and strengthening, adult relationships, and for overseeing their dissolution when they fail, in addition to seeking - throughout - to protect children and their interests. In November 1999 Sir Graham Hart's report 'Marriage Support Funding; A Review' concluded that spending on mar-

riage and relationship support "is a highly appropriate and worthwhile use of public funds". In line with his recommendations funding was increased and a new Advisory Group on Marriage and Relationship Support was established. This Group's role was to help LCD develop a policy on marriage and relationship support and to assist in the development of a co-ordinated strategy. Its terms of reference were to achieve this by:

1. Defining the purpose of marriage and relationship support, its role within contemporary society, and how it can best be used to help fulfil the Government's aim of providing stability and security for couples and children.
2. Advising LCD on priorities for the allocation of resources to marriage and relationship support and research.
3. Identifying innovative ways of delivering marriage and relationship support services, both directly and in conjunction with other services.

The strategy proposed by the Advisory Group, *Moving Forward Together*, was published in March 2002 and pinpointed ten areas for action.

Evidence of government priorities when distributing the £5 million available for marriage and relationship support is provided by the outcome of the funding applications for 2003/2004. According to an analysis carried out by 2-in-2-1.com, these are as follows:

- § Counselling remains the major recipient with 61% (cf 60% last year) of all funding, whilst services to support couples and to prepare them get only 15% (cf 14% last year). The balance of 24% goes to enabling work such as research and access services, with research losing out slightly this year.
- § The traditional recipients of funding (principally Relate, Marriage Care and the research organisations) have 74% of the funding, but the LCD has shifted its funding so that 22% rather than last year's 17% of funding goes to their so-called "Research and Development" projects (described by the LCD as projects forming a distinct piece of work) rather than "core funding".
- § Community Family Trusts have borne the brunt of this change, seeing all funding

moved from core funding to the project category. Their funding has also been cut to 60% of last year with two trusts losing their funding altogether. However the good news is that the three most established CFT's have had their funding continued and we understand that there is a commitment that this will be continuing for the next three years. Strategically this is important, as it will give time for these key projects to be evaluated.

- § True funding for research has been reduced by 7% from it's allocation last year.
- § An increase in spending on marriage preparation comes particularly in the form of a grant to Alpha International for publishing their marriage preparation course.

Children and Families

The Home Secretary oversees the development, implementation and co-ordination of the Government's policies on the family, as chair of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Active Communities and Family Issues. The Family Policy Unit in the Home Office was set up in April 1999 to support the Home Secretary in this work; to co-ordinate family policy across Government; to raise awareness of family and parenting issues; and to increase the support available to families through the voluntary sector. The Family Policy Unit's objective is to support the development of strong and stable families by:

- Increasing the support available to families through co-ordination of Government policies and programmes;
- Increasing the availability of family support programmes within the voluntary sector;
- Encouraging awareness of family and parenting issues among voluntary and professional organisations and the wider public.

The Family Policy Unit administers the Home Office Family Support Grant which started in 1999 and is currently worth £5.8 million per year. The grant provides:

- Core funding for the National Family and Parenting Institute, Parentline Plus and Home-Start UK.
- Continuation funding for project work agreed under previous rounds. Most projects are now funded for three years.
- Funding for new work under an open round agreed annually by the Minister.

The Family Support Grant Team and the Unit also works closely with national organisations such as the Parenting Education and Support Forum, the National Council for One Parent Families, the National Council for Voluntary Child Care Organisations, the Trust for the Study of Adolescence and Fathers Direct. All these have received project funding and give a good indication of the governments priorities. Some of the key social issues giving current cause for concern are social exclusion, rising crime rates, teenage pregnancy and the consequences of fatherlessness, particularly among black youths.

In the view of Carol Smart, the Supporting Families document illustrates how government is caught up with trying to accommodate both changes and traditions in patterns of family life:

"In this document marriage is celebrated as the best basis for family life, yet other forms of families are recognised as legitimate (as long as they are stable). Schools are instructed to teach children the value of heterosexual marriage as the basis of family life, yet the ban on representing to schoolchildren the idea that homosexual relationships can constitute proper families is lifted. These are clearly contradictory policies and they reveal the extent to which the state can no longer presume that it addresses and/or regulates a homogeneous national culture. This must surely be one of the most significant transformations to have taken place since the 1950s. There are now several moral constituencies for the state to govern, each of which seems to demand different modes of governmentality. Those who cleave to marriage form a strong constituency which cannot be ignored, yet equally those who practice diversity are equally significant and may even be in the ascendant. A middle ground seems inconceivable and so family policy embraces two different forms of regulation. It will of course be of considerable sociological interest to see how these competing tendencies unfold in the twenty first century."

For families and those concerned with supporting them, the contradictions that Carol Smart identifies are not merely of academic interest.

Book Reviews

Seasons of a Family's Life: Cultivating the Contemplative Spirit at Home Wendy M. Wright. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003. ISBN: 0787955795 £12.68

Perhaps the idea of seasonal change is one that most highlights an essential aspect of the life of a family. The family is also much like a garden with times of planting and harvest. Wendy Wright, a theologian and spiritual writer from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, grows in this work a rich harvest of reflections as she takes family life as it comes to her and connects even the most ordinary moments with a spiritual truth.

This is a book to savour and read over and over for, with the touch of a poet, she assists us in seeing what's more than meets the eye. In the end we know quite a bit about her life and our own because one cannot help but think, over and over again as we read about hers, that we are also recalling our own. Like her I know about loss and gain. I know about seasons of emptiness and those of abundance. And it all has deep meaning.

One special feature of this book is her weaving the many spiritual traditions of Catholicism into a walk in the neighbourhood, a visit to a daughter who is just beginning her own life away from home or the solitary walk in nature where everything seems asleep, but really isn't. By taking as her starting point her own family experiences she is able to keep the entire discussion at a level of utmost availability to the reader. Everyone loves a good story.

She also challenges us to thought, to quiet moments where we join our daily fare with meanings deep and eternal. She is gifted with a rich imagination, a restless mind and broad acquaintance with the mystical. Being an active reader, my text is liberally marked with underlines and reactions - surely a sign that for me at least, this book was more than just a book. It was a sustained conversation with someone who looks at everyday life as quite surely laced with the truth, goodness and beauty of the Creator.

Know too that this is one of the first books in a

series of publications on Family and Faith to be published by Jossey-Bass. What an excellent beginning is this beautiful book by Wendy Wright.

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

Reaching & Keeping Tweenagers

Peter Brierley. London, Christian Research, 2002
ISBN: 1853211478 £9.99

I was delighted to hear about this book. With a whole chapter on the Influence of Home and Family, I was keen to discover whether the RAKES (Reaching and Keeping Early Secondaries) survey of 10-14 year olds would coincide with other research findings or if something new, current and particular to the UK, had been uncovered. The research was supported by a wide-range of Christian youth organisations: 2,172 questionnaires were returned from churches, schools and 'parachurch' agencies. So it looked promising.

Yet, the chapter on home and family began badly: "Today, many children find that their parents do not wait for them, as it were, do not really understand them, and however much they may yell, do not share their journey with them, either physically, mentally or spiritually". (p 19)

This may be true but it is also a sweeping generalisation. Although based (presumably) on the overall tone of responses, I wished the author had placed it in the context of the psychology of young adolescence or even of the heavy demands made on parents nowadays.

In discussing trust, the author expressed surprise that youngsters were unable to adequately articulate the reasons why they trusted their parents. Checking on my own children, they had the same difficulty - it wasn't something they thought about too much. Worryingly, the author attributes the single incidence of parental distrust to the possibility that marital breakdown may have taken place - but without any evidence to confirm this.

Brierley's position on divorce is further clarified when he describes children's feelings about their homes, calculated by academic ability.

when he describes children's feelings about their homes, according to academic ability.

"Could the fact that those with lower grades are giving answers of home being where they are uncomfortable or comfortable but not close, be a reflection that these are Tweens who have divorced parents" (p33)

Although some research suggests that an outcome of marital breakdown can be an effect on children's achievement, other research suggests that unresolved conflict is more damaging. Moreover Brierley's confines his speculation to this one possible cause. With such a focus I am surprised that incidence of parental marital status was not surveyed.

Another breathtaking statement was this:

"Churchgoing improves your trust! Not just in God but also your trust in other people as well, even such important people as your parents! No doubt this will encourage parents!" (p24)

No doubt it will, but again Brierley fails to explore other explanations the coincidence of trusting and churchgoing.

This book is a disappointment. Without an analysis integrating developmental psychology and family dynamics, or reference to the body of other research findings that exists, it is a severely flawed use of what must actually have been a worthwhile exercise talking to tweenies.

Elizabeth Davies
Co-Director, Bethany Family Institute

Children, Churches and Christian Learning:
A Practical Resource

Edited by Leslie J. Francis and Jeff Astley.
SPCK, 2002 £16.99 ISBN: 0281055327

This book, rather ambitiously, is offered as a resource for use at home, school and parish. On the face of it, a tall order! Closer inspection however reveals that there is indeed much within its covers that will appeal to all three sections of the faith developing community.

Its range of subject matter, moving impressively from the historically developing theology of childhood through a concise but academically rigorous exposition of current thinking on such issues as faith and moral development and extending to a

very practical final section, offers something for everyone. The editors have engaged with people who bring both scholarship and experience to their contributions and all speak with an easy and very apparent authority.

The extensiveness of subject matter makes it a publication for dipping into by the user although it would make an excellent reader for any course in Religious Educational studies. It is the concise nature of each contribution allied to a high level of scholarship that is the defining mark of this work. The quality is such that interest is immediately caught. The quantity is such that an insight is gained and, if the appetite is aroused, a clearly signed route is opened up.

Although, for the purposes of this review, one is looking at a book written by contributors from the reformed tradition from a Roman Catholic perspective, I can find little in this book that would not be just as helpful to the Catholic reader. The area of psychological research that underpins our own understanding of childhood and learning is accepted across denominational divides, as is the scholarship that underpins contemporary research in Scriptural studies. I was particularly interested in a chapter labelled "*Evangelisation and Outreach*" and was immediately struck by a quote from a Church of England report which describes evangelisation as "*a Kingdom activity rather than a narrow concern for church recruitment*", which resonates well with the recent report to our own Bishops' Conference on Evangelisation.

My one regret about such a book is that although it treats each subject concisely, it retains an academic tone that may just keep it out of the reach of a readership within a burgeoning body of lay ministers who would benefit from a deeper but more accessible understanding. Part Six practicalities in some ways stand apart from the more academic thrust of previous parts. Francis and Astley may rightly respond that that is a task more suited to well-informed practitioners. I for one would not quibble with such a response and will happily congratulate them on another work of genuine interest to anyone engaged in Christian education at any level.

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- To offer educational opportunities for leadership in family ministry

For further information please contact Elizabeth Davies, PO Box 2858, Wolverhampton WV3 0XL

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