

Just between Us...

Newsletter of the Bethany Family Institute
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Changes...! In our last issue we reported that John Anthony, the National Co-ordinator of Marriage and Family Life Ministry was no longer on the staff of the Bishops Conference of England and Wales. The disappointment of his departure was somewhat assuaged by Bishop Hine's reassurance that the priority for marriage and family life within the Conference remained. In the short time since April there have been some important developments. The Bishops have approved a national 'diocesan conversations' project for 2004 on the theme of family life and the church. In June Elizabeth Davies was appointed as the Marriage and Family Life Project Officer to assist Bishop Hine effectively implementing the project. We will have more space in our next issue to explore the implications of this latest development.



"To live is to change...,
to be perfect is
to have changed
often."

John Henry Newman

Thankfully Redemptorist Publications have offered to take some of the load of producing this magazine off our shoulders. We hope to bring you a newly revamped newsletter next time. It will be an exciting adventure, exploring ways to adjust our current format to take advantage of the experience and technology of another reputable publications house! Look out for the differences in October.

What's inside?

Nurturing
Family-Building
Church 3

Involving
Fathers 5

Sure Start:
Common Ground
for the Common
Good 8

God's Plan for
Marriage &
the Family 11

Book
reviews 13

Because of our work load we have decided not to produce a new resource for Parents' Week this year. Copies of last years booklet, *Seeing God in Love With Your Family* are still available for those who would like to use it. Contact us or download an order form from the website. Otherwise we recommend the Churches Together for Families site where you can download family-friendly resources for churches free of charge.

Visit us at: www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

Diary Dates

- Aug 23rd-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 Wannewetsch. 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
- Oct 20th-26th National Parents Week. Theme: Family-friendliness. See page 7.
- Nov 1st-2nd Rainbow's Registered Director Continuing Development Training. Harborne Hall. Birmingham. Contact details above.

Please let us have your dates and events and we will be glad to share them with others free of charge

Dear Elizabeth,

It is a good while since I contacted you, but I have had many happy times through your site and have given your web out to many, many people.

Our PP wanted a crèche during Mass when the 5+children went out during the Liturgy of the word. He asked for weeks. Then three of us independently said we would provide a liturgy for babies and their parents. Wasn't that the Holy Spirit?

Friends brought us a plaque of the Holy Family from Medjugorge. We hang it on the lectern from a ribbon of the right colour for the season. After the Collect the older children come out and the priest invites all the little children 0 to 5 years to come with a parent or older sibling to join the LITTLE CHURCH. We go to a large room in the priests house. The children sit on the floor. we hold up the picture and the children identify Jesus, Mary and Joseph. we call them the Holy Family, we remind them that they have Holy Families. We have rhymes and stories, we follow Jesus and his friends through fields, up mountains, onto the boat.

We have lots of fun. Then they can play with a box of toys or colour in the pictures someone has kindly printed on the back of the Redemptorist Leaflet which has a prayer for the week and a few words of explanation of the Gospel. we chat to any new parent, praise the babies and little ones, we praise the teenage brothers and sisters (what a learning opportunity for them).

It develops a social aspect as well. We have Dads who will put out the tables, chairs and toys and put them away again. Someone comes to warn us that the Creed is being said and we process into the church in time to join the offertory procession with our pictures or other works of art such a palms, doves etc.

We have managed to get the parents to teach the sign of the cross.. Jesus family in Heaven. Even two year olds are able to do it alone. It is fantastic to see them. If you want to know more just ask.

Olive Duddy,
Diocese of Salford

Supporting family life is a priority for the Diocese of Down and Connor which is pioneering innovative approaches to training and formation. Training began in September, 2001 with a pilot "Certificate in Family Ministry Programme" validated by St Mary's University College, Belfast.) This year (2002/3) the Diocese also piloted a Higher Certificate in Family Ministry and a five week programme called "Voices," aimed at enhancing family communication. The programmes were designed to nurture family relationships and family spirituality. The aim of the Higher Certificate was also to equip people with the vision and skills to put at the service of families in the family community.

This unique initiative has drawn participants from throughout the Diocese and from a wide variety of backgrounds. It has united the talents of clergy, lay people and representatives from the majority of religious orders in the Diocese - all keen to share their professional and/or pastoral experience and their spirituality with the participants. The project has been financially supported by the Diocese, by participants or their parish priests who have paid course fees and by a generous donation from a local paper.

The coming year will see the next step in the initiative as the now accredited "Family Ministry Volunteers" are guided by their parishes and by the Diocesan Family Ministry Commission in developing strategies for the support of family life in their Diocese. It would be inaccurate to represent this initiative as if the entire diocese were on the move towards energetic fulfilment of a common purpose. We are only human! The step is small but significant. The hope is that families will gradually come to realise and to claim the significance of their role in the life and mission of our Church.

Participation on the course has been a transformative experience for those involved. Maura Hannon, one of this year's graduates, writes of her year on the Higher Certificate programme:

The outline of the course appealed to my need to nurture and develop my own faith development, my strong belief that family experiences form individuals and their

experience of love and future relationships, together with a need to fulfil my mission within the Christian community and the wider society.

During the first term the assignment involved working with another student on the course to compile an eight page, A5 sized booklet (from a selection of eight topics) targeted at families within a parish. I decided not to request a particular topic but to accept whatever was offered and to rise to the challenge. I thoroughly enjoyed researching the topic, i.e. "Challenges of Ageing", and felt that the booklet reflected a family systems approach and had a faith development element, reflecting a balance between the fresh problems and opportunities, which arise with ageing, both for the older person and the family of someone approaching the autumn of their life.

The greatest challenge during the second term was to plan and undertake parish placements. I was assigned to a newly formed parish visitation group that was going to target families of children preparing for the sacrament of First Communion. Initially I struggled with the concept of a parish placement, however, with guidance from the Holy Spirit, diligence and tenacity, support from my supervisor, course co-ordinator, course director and peers the experience was the highlight of the course. Following the sessions I assessed, evaluated and reflected on the consequences of the assignment. This helped me to get a deeper and fuller understanding of all aspects of issues, problems, concerns, facing the group and indeed the broader parish community, and had provided a tool for moving my faith into action.

The course has reinforced my belief that family relationships and events are holy in themselves and that we need to recognise and celebrate Christ present in the 'ordinary', and then gradually and patiently develop appropriate ways to nourish this intimacy with God. In the first letter of John (4:8) we read, "The man without love has

known nothing of God, for God is love", therefore it is love that best teaches children about God.

On a personal level the course has created an awareness of my own giftedness, which is God-given, as well as an awareness of the giftedness of others. I have unearthed talents that I had long forgotten and become aware of new talents waiting to be tapped. The course has given me courage and confidence in my abilities, highlighted my communication skills together with my tendency to place artificial limitations on myself. As a direct result of the course, I undertook a power boat handling course walking out onto the front of boats, tethering ropes, in gale force winds, rain and hail, despite the fact that I cannot swim and have a acute fear of water!

For me family ministry requires a holistic approach, addressing an individual or community's physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs in their everyday social context. It challenges us to empower others by supporting individuals through enhancing their knowledge and skills to promote their well-being and calls upon us to recognise that all people have dignity and deserve social justice, fairness and respect. We are after all companions on a journey and Yahweh asks of us "To act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Maura is typical of the participants who, as a result of participation on the programmes, have a deeper appreciation of themselves and their family members and a new awareness of God present in the everyday circumstances of family life. They have an experience of themselves as a vital and vibrant part of Church life, glimpsing the fulfilment of Christ's promise.

"I have come that you will have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

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Email: down.connor@familyministry.freeserve.co.uk
or check the link to the Down & Connor Family Ministry website from the Bethany links page.*



Other Opportunities for Formation in Nurturing Family-Building Church

As we have reported in previous issues **Ushaw College** near Durham runs a one-year ecumenical certificate programme in Marriage & Family Life Ministry. This can be studied by distance learning as it requires attendance at only three weekend sessions. It can also be taken as part of a masters degree at Ushaw. For the last two years of the course Dr David Thomas of the Bethany Family Institute has visited to share with students Catholic theology of marriage and family life. For further details contact The Course Administrator, Ushaw College, Durham, DH7 9RH Tel. 0191 373 8510. Please address any comment, query or suggestions about the Marriage and Family Life Ministry Course, to Fr. Chris Fallon, Ushaw College, Durham, DH7 9RH Tel. 0191 373 8534, e-mail Chris.fallon@ushaw.ac.uk

Earlier this year, Elizabeth Davies of the Bethany Family Institute collaborated with **Maryvale Institute**, Birmingham to produce a module on The Family, the Church and The Community for their distance learning BA in Applied Theology degree for deacons and catechists. Students take this module in the penultimate year of their studies. We are also currently exploring with Maryvale the development of a one year certificate or diploma distance learning programme in Family Ministry and Evangelisation. If all goes well this course will become available in September 2004.

Involving Fathers: Report of a day conference in Bradford.

Breda Theakston. Family Ministry Co-ordinator, Diocese of Leeds.

'Dads - who needs them?' was the title suggested only half in jest by one member of the planning team for this conference. In fact, as the day proceeded two things became quite apparent. One is that this attitude to fathers, and men, is fairly widespread in our society at the moment. The other is that if this attitude is not addressed and men allowed to play their full part in family life we are all losers.

There appears to be plenty of evidence that something is wrong: One in four women experience domestic violence; 80% of all divorces are initiated by women; The male suicide rate in Australia currently stands at one in 32; in the last ten years young male suicide in the UK has increased by 70%.

In all, 210 people registered for this day conference held in Bradford. It was organised jointly by Barnardos CANA project, Sure Start, Family Life Ministry Leeds Diocese, Leeds Family Welfare, Parenting Education and Support Forum, Pre-School Learning Alliance, Leeds Mencap, Belle Isle Family centre and East Leeds Family Service Unit. As such it was a triumph of coordination.

The two key speakers spoke movingly from different perspectives about fathers and fathering. Dirk Uitterdijk of the YMCA 'Dads and Lads' project surprised everyone by bringing a completely new twist to the very old and very familiar story of the Prodigal Son.

He read the story out, introducing it as the most beautiful story he had ever heard. Then, instead of a homily on the healing and transformative power of unconditional love and parental faith hope and charity, he turned the story on its head in a way that threw a devastating light on the modern condition: 'in those days the sons left their fathers. We live today in an age when the fathers leave their sons'.

On the positive side, one third of childcare is now being done by fathers (David Bartlett of Fathers Direct www.fathersdirect.com) and the day was partly a celebration of that. However, when relationships break down it is all too easy for children to lose contact with their fathers. Given that

having a father who is committed to you is the second most important statistical indicator of your life chances it is important that we do all we can where it is safe for the children to maintain that contact. The good news is that what is important appears to be not his presence in the home but his connectedness with his children.

Of course connectedness is easier to build and maintain in loving committed families than in broken ones. From Eric John (of Babyfather Alliance) we got the statistic that 1/3 of all young people in offenders institutions are either fathers or about to become fathers. Babyfather and Barnardos are using babyfather actors to help these young men maintain vital family links. Parenting courses are being run for men in Doncaster gaol by Diocesan Family Life Ministers and Leeds FLM (www.flm.org.uk) hope to help Armley prison develop similar family support.

One of the benefits of a day like this was that it showed just how many people and organisations there are who care about helping fathers to make this connection with their children. What is the first step for those wanting to support this? Dirk's answer to this and his homework for us was: include men and fathers at all stages in your personal and professional life. The 'Dads and Lads' project grew out of Dirk's own personal commitment to such an approach. He saw fathers turn up to drop off and collect their sons from the YMCA football events having to find something else to do in the hour or so they were there. Dirk invited the dads to stay. The Home office now funds this and Dads and Lads is spreading. Dirk also spoke of the importance of perceptions. Not all youths are yobs. Not all fathers are abusers.

Steve Biddulph, Australian family therapist and author, provided some historical anthropological and biological contexts within which to think about men and their role in society. Throughout history, Steve told us, men and women have been involved in the care of children. The industrial revolution brought the systematic separation of the sexes into roles revolving around work and childcare. The damage this could cause in families is well described in D H Lawrence's Sons and Lovers.

Just as 20th century feminism was important for liberating women from too exclusive an association with childcare, so Steve believes that men now need liberating from detachment. For their own health as well as for the health and well being of women and children, men need to rediscover their value in the family and in society so that they can contribute positively. It is important that male children experience 'manhood' from close up. If dad is at work all the time what can his sons know of what it feels like to be a 'man'? In short, boys don't get the 'software' they need.

All children experience a lot of female care in their early years, with mum at home, female childminders and women teachers at primary school. This works to the advantage of girl children who are constantly exposed to women and so can watch and listen to what it is to be a 'woman'. Boys, cut off from men, do not get this insight and unless positive steps are taken by the adult males in their lives to actively engage with them, they can grow up just acting out an imagined 'role'. Girls need this awareness to, in order to grow up with a positive self-image and an innate understanding of the healthy limits of male energy and appropriate contact.

Men actually suffer from being 'bemused spectators to family life'. They want, Steve says, to share the 'sweetness of family life'. What can be done to help? Well, given that it is now five or six generations since men became cut off from their children, men today have to think about reconnecting with their own fathers where possible. Where there is no father a letter that is not posted might help this process. Otherwise a phone call or chat about 'what was it like for you in the war/ when I was born/ whatever' might be an opening. Boys need as broad an exposure to different kinds of men as possible as they are growing up. They need to get as much experience of what it is to be a man as girls do of what it is to be a woman.

Sport is an obvious opportunity and fathers can and do get together to kick ball. The important thing from Steve's point of view is not to create roles that people should copy, but to give children enough exposure to positive adult behaviour to encourage them to have confidence in being themselves. We do not want to see men in a particular role (the 1950s 'walking wallet' or the SNAG -

sensitive new age guy). We want men with both 'backbone' (useful in a crisis) and 'openheartedness'. Also fathers should think about what they are modelling: What do you want your son to say about you when he's 17?

In Steve's workshop ('Why fathering matters') some of these ideas were challenged and explored more fully. It became clear that women are not actually standing on such solid foundations either. Women cannot alone give child everything it needs. The hormone prolactin is released through breast-feeding and helps mums to focus on the primacy of the child's needs 'bonding'. But men who care for their babies also undergo hormonal changes in the brain that increases their attachment to the child.

From about the age of 6 boys begin to look away from their mother towards their fathers for someone to identify with. Boys at around the age of 14 get an 800% increase in testosterone pushing them away from the family towards the wider world. The whole community needs to be involved here to help 'grow' the boy. Dad can act as a barrier towards disrespectful and violent behaviour. Girls need a father to learn what men are like.

The idea of the whole community being involved is interesting. This would be a bolster for the nuclear family now that the extended family appears weaker. In Australia people work in communities with families to plan initiation rites for boys. These are serious processes that involve adult male commitment to the boy and family through time. In Britain a study found that those children who came across as 'happiest' were those with unemployed fathers. In Steve's book Manhood he has interesting things to say about work and mortgages and men's health.

Workshops in the afternoon included the following topics: Lone Fathers; Muslim and Asian Fathers; Funding for Parenting Groups; Sunday Dinners for Dads; the 'Dads and Lads' Project and Promoting Fathers' Participation in Parenting Groups. Most were oversubscribed and space was at a premium.

As a final treat, Clare Roskill from the Home Office put on a presentation about 'Parenting Support: What's really happening in the government' which was a beautiful blend of humour and information about the government agencies and

recent developments in policy and legislation to help fathers. Go to www.homeoffice.gov.uk/comrace/family/index.html for more on this. Then Revd Tony Parry of Barnardos chaired the final session, which gave an opportunity for people to question and respond to what they had heard during the day. This included some interesting suggestions for collaboration between the Department for Education and The Home Office on funding and support for parenting programmes in schools and prisons.

So, Dads, who needs them? Well, I for one was convinced by the end of the day that we all do. What's more I discovered that men cared about and could speak intelligently about the importance of relationships outside the privacy of the home. What opportunities do men have for this? Maybe Robert Bly (of the men's movement in America and an important influence on Steve Biddulph) and others have done us all a favour and at least made a start by putting men on the agenda. This conference on fathering was the first most of the participants had ever come across and thanks were profuse for putting it on.

The last word should go to the father whose summing up was: 'I go to lots of conferences and it is a long time since I have been to a conference that has moved me as a person. Wouldn't it be great if we could fill this whole place with fathers and do it all again?'

Parents Week : Oct 20-26th 2003

The fourth national Parents' Week will run from Monday October 20 to Sunday October 26 2003. The theme for this year's event is Family Friendly Campaign: Make Life Easier for Families and is aimed at improving the lives of parents, carers and children across the country. We greatly appreciate your support for Parents' Week, and hope you will be able to take part in the event in 2003. Last year saw our most successful week, with more than 1,400 groups getting involved.

The combined effect of this nationwide focus on the family can only be hugely positive, and we hope to work with you once more in keeping up the momentum of all that has been achieved. I am glad

to say that for the second year running we will be working with Arts Council England and the BBC.

This year, the launch of the week will coincide with the start of the major Family Friendly Campaign co-ordinated by the NFPI. Over the next 10 years we will be aiming to work with people across the UK to make this an even better place in which to bring up a family. To make this a campaign that really reflects what is important to families, we need constant interaction with parents and children and those that work to support them. Throughout the summer we will be seeking the views of as many people as possible about good and bad in family friendly practice, and in Parents' Week we will be seeking nominations for the recipients of the first National Family Friendly Awards.

The Parents' Week pack, including display materials, will be sent out in the new few months. If you would like to receive a copy, please email info@nfpi.org with your name and address and include "Parents' Week Pack" in the subject line.

As always, the theme is a broad one, which we hope will assist you in using it to further your own work, and support your Parents' Week activities. You may be interested in looking at how family friendly your environment is - whether it is a school, hospital, health centre, town, village or city. What could be done to make it better? What can others learn from the service you provide for families? Please let us know what your plans are as soon as you can - we will be compiling a database and publicising events wherever possible.

If you need more information, or have already made plans, please contact our Parents' Week co-ordinator, Christian Jenner, by email on jenner@nfpi.org. I do hope you will be able to take part in Parents' Week, and thank you again for your most valuable support. For further information about the week, please visit the Parents' Week section of our website at: http://www.nfpi.org/data/parents_week/index.htm

Best wishes,
MARY MACLEOD
Chief Executive, National Family and Parenting Institute
www.nfpi.org

Sure Start: Common Ground for the Common Good

Willie Slavin. Chairman. Howgill Family Centre.

In the last issue of "Just between Us..." Elizabeth Davies outlined the government's policy on family life, in the course of which she gave an outline of the Sure Start project. Talk about dropping hints in public. Is the lady persuasive or not?

In truth, because of my close involvement with a Sure Start project, in a voluntary capacity, and my commitment to the cause of family support, I had volunteered some time ago to write just such an article. As a Catholic, familiar with the Church's teaching and support of the family, I immediately saw a potential for the Church to engage with Sure Start. It was only when I began to study the possibility that I discovered that the prime minister had already beaten me to that particular punch.

"Community action has always been a central mission of the churches and other faith groups. We are giving new community-based initiatives like Sure Start for the under-threes in the most vulnerable areas, a specific brief to form partnerships with local voluntary and faith organisations."
{Tony Blair addressing the Christian Socialist Conference 2000 (Faith in Politics,2001:12)}

This is the first, and most direct public expression of the invitation from government to faith communities to engage with the Sure Start project. In drawing attention to the increasingly influential work of faith-based charities, Tony Blair assured his audience that the government was seeking partnership and not a substitute welfare system.

Sure Start is part of the overall strategy seeking to support young children in deprived neighbourhoods by investing in early childhood. The anticipated outcomes look for improvement in performance at school, a reduction in truancy and, in later life, a difference to employability, drug abuse and crime. Its goal is to ensure that all children are ready to learn when they arrive at school. Funding is targeted in particular on nought to four year-olds, and services include childcare, primary health care, play, and support for families. Collaborative working by seconded staff from both statutory

and voluntary agencies is the key ingredient of the success of this project.

The Sure Start project is modelled upon the High-scope programme from the USA, which has allowed for a twenty-seven year longitudinal study of the beneficial effects of early intervention. It is to the credit of the present UK government that social exclusion has been recognised as an unacceptable feature of our society. Its inter-departmental approach to addressing the problem has spawned a number of innovative projects of which Sure Start is but one. The recognition that the immensity of the task demands long term commitment and investment is reassuring and, although the span of a parliament is about as long as one can normally expect from a political initiative, the commitment of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to eliminate poverty has so far guaranteed an extended period of sustained support. In the long term, it is the government's wish that the experience will inform all statutory provision for family support and that mainstream budgets will meet the costs of a continuing multi-disciplinary approach.

In our own experience in West Cumbria we have seen the influence of a small but dedicated voluntary organisation, the Howgill Family Centre, with some five employees, transformed into one with over 70 professionals by the granting of Sure Start status. A whole range of professionals including health visitors, a midwife, educational and clinical psychologists, social worker, speech therapist and a plethora of supporting play and parent workers have made a most significant impact on the families in the area.

Our speech therapist, with the aid of a specialist assistant, has already made a very significant impact on the language development of all children entering school in the area. This work is now forming part of a PhD. Our Clinical Psychologist with the aid of a psychiatric nurse has made very significant inroads with a study of early intervention in cases of post-natal depression. A very active self-help group of mothers is emerging from this work as one of the bonuses of the project. Two members of this group are now representing the parental view

on our management committee. A netball team of young mothers is now active in a local league having discovered later in life that P.E. is not so bad after all.

The key features of the success of the project lie in its responsiveness to the most urgent needs of its clients. With key front-line workers, trained to spot the earliest signs of a problem, referral to a specialist member of the same team is all but instant. Where more than one discipline is involved then the two professionals can act in tandem. The often lengthy and burdensome referral system inflicted within two departments within one statutory service, to say nothing of that between two services, is instantly eliminated. Instead of a young mother depending upon regulated visits by a health visitor, she is introduced to the whole range of services that she can avail of at any time. If she is isolated, she can be supported by the Family Support team who will allocate a trained volunteer helper, of whom there are another seventy available, backing up the professional service. As one professional describes the process:

"We need to be empowering people not doing everything for them. We can use the volunteer help from the Family Support Team that frees up the professional help and acts as a bridge."

The work strategy of the volunteer helper is to offer support as an enabling mechanism for as long as it is required. It comes as near as I have seen to putting into practice Pope John Paul II's definition of solidarity as "*standing with someone until they can stand alone.*"

If a parent requires training then she (almost invariably women) can be guided into that with guaranteed child-care provided. One strand of training that has been particularly well received has been in child-care, leading to a marketable qualification. By offering this in preference to parenting training (a policy decision) the necessary skills and attitudes are fostered and acquired. A lack of trained childcare personnel is a gap in the employment market in an area that suffers from a higher than average rate of unemployment. The very presence of Sure Start is indicative that the area measures amongst the lowest 10% on indices of deprivation of which unemployment is only one. It is also just the kind of area in which a Church with a *preferential option for the poor* would/

could/should be engaged.

Two of our parishes, along with three congregations of other denominations, and two of our schools have been helpful in providing accommodation for Sure Start. However apart from that, this impressive project is passing us by as a Catholic community. It seems to be a feature of our concern for the poor that we so readily, and properly, respond generously to CAFOD and yet can be apparently so indifferent to the poor on our door-steps.

In interviews conducted with Sure Start professionals, I was left in no doubt that they welcomed the involvement of faith communities and were particularly grateful for the support that they had received. Their only reservation lay in a concern that church members may seek to take advantage of vulnerable people to proselytise. Indeed many of them expressed a faith position that underpinned their own commitment. One openly declared that she volunteered because the work gave her the perfect opportunity to express her faith in her work. Some felt that the presence of faith groups offered the possibility of engaging with the 'big questions', something that was lacking in the present set-up.

Where does this leave the Church? Where would it start if it wished to become involved? On the practical plane, there are already a number of Diocesan welfare agencies working with local Sure Start projects as part of wider partnerships. Through these, a few parishes have become engaged. What is not clear is how the involvement has drawn in *parishioners*. There is however an increasing amount of research that demonstrates that faith groups, when involved, can and do bring commitment, resources, hospitality and volunteers to the process.

Our own Church, that is as much in need of regeneration as any deprived community, can learn much from this kind of involvement. A Church that was able to proclaim in *Gaudium et Spes*:

"The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men (sic) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." (GS 1)

must surely recognise that this is where it happens. This visionary statement marked the beginning of the Church's engagement with the modern world, the beginning of a new understanding of itself and of its mission. Is it to be a Church that can look outward seeking to transform and to be transformed, or is it to try to reverse the dynamic of Vatican II and retrench in the more traditional role of being in the world but not of it? Seeking evidence of that sense of itself, in the here and now, is critical to any assessment of the possibility of the Church becoming involved in community regeneration through partnership.

In the document "*A Report on Evangelisation in England and Wales*" (which has the support of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales) it is clear where the Catholic Church in these countries is moving on the question of evangelisation. The work developed under the auspices of the Catholic Missionary Society (CMS) defines evangelisation as "*the work of the Church*" (CMS,2002:2). To be Catholic is to be an evangeliser. It is what we are and what we do and what we say. It is not an add-on. It wishes to celebrate the many things that the Church does and to understand them as acts that both proclaim and enact the Good News of Jesus.

"We thus primarily see evangelisation as a positive hermeneutic of the life of God's people expressed in personal conversion, ecclesial renewal and social transformation." (CMS,2002:2)

It is my conviction that in accepting the challenge to transform our society we will find both personal conversion and ecclesial renewal.

The CMS study of evangelisation is embedded in the ecclesial model of "*Gaudium et Spes*", as a Church reaching out to the world, and takes into consideration the developing thinking of the Church. The whole thrust of evangelisation is to promote the work of the Kingdom of God which is not necessarily the same as bringing more people into the Church, a more traditional interpretation. It envisions that "*The love of God transforms persons, society and history, the Church is witness to and instrument of that transformation.*" (GS:6)

In locating that witness and instrumentality of the Church into a mission based upon an understanding of the Kingdom of God, it can declare:

"A theology of mission that takes the Kingdom of God as its heart will seek to bring that transformation into all dimensions of humanity and indeed the integrity of the non-human world." (CMS, 2002:7)

It is possible to argue, then, that this is a task that can only be accomplished in close contact with the world. The days of the inward looking Church are numbered. The days of maintenance before mission are for a Church that seeks the glorification of itself, not the realisation of the Kingdom, a manifestation of the presence of God in a world moving towards complete fulfilment and transformation. It is of course paradoxical that it is precisely in so doing that the Church will find a renewed life especially if it engages with those at the margins, "*announcing good news to the poor*" (Luke 4:18). A point that is very well made in *Gaudium et Spes*:

"Service of neighbour and accompanying the poorest in mission must be an articulation of evangelisation - both as a moment when the Gospel is proclaimed through its enactment and as a place where the church is simultaneously herself evangelised and expresses her evangelisation. (GS:44 ff.)

A renewed authenticity is available to a servant Church, as my own interviewees affirmed simply through extending their hospitality. To develop that into active participation, filling the gaps left even by a comprehensive service like Sure Start, is to accept a responsibility for further essential development, beyond the means of the professionals. The Church, by utilising its existing agencies and its parish, deanery and diocesan structures, has that capacity for a holistic service. There is an opportunity to develop a comprehensive service and ministry for all families by co-ordinating the existing welfare work with the materially deprived, and the work with those families who seek support and enrichment.

I have no doubt that there has never been a better time to engage with a government on such important social issues. The prophetic voice that the Church can bring to a national conversation could well be the last piece of the jigsaw of partnership.

(Continued on p11)

The following extract from a parish talk was forwarded to us by Diana Russell of Reading.

When I got married, I knew that I was taking a very important step on the road of life, that I was committing to sharing my life with Phil and that God was around somewhere although I wasn't sure how. I could not foresee how that commitment would be lived out day by day. Marriage is a process of living and loving, learning more about love every day. While there is no substitute for my experience of marriage over the last fifteen years there is much that could have helped me if I had known about it both before I married and during the early years of marriage. I'm talking about what God, through the Bible and through the Church, has to say about Christian marriage and family life.

A community of life and love

One very important truth about marriage is that a married couple is a community of two people, a community where the two hold each other in mutual love and respect. Each has equal dignity before God and each other. When children come, they too are part of this community, equal in dignity with their parents. In the family, each person has full dignity as a child of God. For the children, their dignity starts in the family and is constantly affirmed by their parents as they grow.

The Bible tells us that God made everyone to be like God, made in his image. We are made with God's own life and love through and through, that's why we are alive. When two people share in this life and love in marriage, they become a community of life and love, giving and receiving. When children come, they become part of this community and make their own real contribution to it. Life and love are seen in family life when these two qualities

(p10 cont...)

...The 'big questions' are not being asked and who better to fulfil that role? However, if I can return to Elizabeth Davies' twin pieces on 'Listening' and on 'Government Policy' in the last issue, a Church in listening mode may well find the seeds of its own regeneration in the methodology of a socially concerned government.

are welcomed into the daily happenings that make up a family's reality.

Our marriage comes first

God also asks married people to make their marriage their first priority, before exams, jobs, and house, even before children. On our wedding day this may seem clear, but many issues requiring our attention can cloud our thinking. When a couple marries, they each commit their life to the other, for the whole of life. They begin a new journey, together, choosing to share their lives with each other.

This commitment demands a total sharing of two lives, a total giving of one to the other and a total receiving. For ordinary human beings it's difficult to stop selfishness getting in the way of love, so it's good to reflect on what this commitment means. Commitment in marriage affects every part of a person. It means sharing thoughts, feelings, sexuality, abilities and weaknesses, dreams and fears, illnesses and successes. It means the uniting of two bodies and two spirits.

Men and women were created for each other to live in a life long, very special form of friendship. When we try to live out this commitment day by day, our marriages are a powerful antidote to the individualism and loneliness so present in our world today.

Sharing God with our children

Where there is self-giving in love, blessings come. Amongst the most precious gifts are of course our children. God entrusts us with them, and gives us the responsibility and the joy of caring for them and teaching them. The most important lessons we as parents can give our children are the ones about God's love. A baby learns about God's love in the smiles of its parents, in nappy changes, in being fed, washed and dressed, in being held close. Parents are the faces of God to a child, making God real. As the children grow they see more and more of God's care in what their parents do and say. As they grow the connection between their parents' loving actions and God's love must be explained to

them, little by little, so that they too can be aware of God's love for them. Then they can learn, step by step, that they can choose to let his love work in their own lives, helping them to love and be loved with the quality of God's own love.

Sacrament gives strength

Another wonderful truth about marriage is that marriage between Christians is a sacrament. When I got married, I wasn't too sure how this made a difference. I find it easier to think about plunging into deep water - I can deepen in my experience of being open to love and enjoy swimming underwater even though at times the sunlight above seems more attractive. I find thinking in this way easier than worrying about or dismissing the thought of trying to walk somewhere above the level of reality. The great good news about marriage being a sacrament is that this is how God gives us the strength to commit our lives to our family.

Marriage is a sacrament that is available all the time because its gift is given by each person to the other. If each person welcomes God's love into their lives then this is present in all their dealings with their husband or wife. God's love gives each a new heart, revealing a deeper realisation of what love is and how to love. Marriage is a sacrament that strengthens and heals. Receiving God's love means that you can forgive, repeatedly, the hurts that happen between two ordinary people. Taking advantage of the sacrament means being able to accept the other into our lives again and again and to serve each other.

The domestic church

The last truth that I want to talk about today is that God wants the Christian family to be a church community, a 'domestic church' in their home. So home life with its noise and mess, all the daily events is also church life. Going to Church, although important, is just part of what happens in the church of the family. God's presence makes the home a holy place. He is present in the spaces between family members. Everything good that happens in family life affirms each person's identity as a child of God and builds up the Church community. This building is not limited to just within the family. The family church is part of the whole Church and the family church can make the

whole Church stronger.

A stable family is a building block of society. A marriage is a community of two people, and children become part of that community. Our marriages must be our first priority. Prayer enables us to make marriage and family life important and full of God's love. Marriage is a sacrament. God commits himself to our marriages. Our home life is church life and is part of the wider church. Let's aim to think and pray about God's plan now and in the days ahead, so that we can begin living our most important relationship and our family life with more love and more life.

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**Verbum Dei** is an international Catholic Community founded in 1963. In England, they have a centre at Carisbrooke, on the Isle of Wight, where they hold retreats for individuals and for married couples. The latter take place over a weekend - Friday night until Sunday afternoon - and are given by members of the community and by couples who work with it. Children are welcome and looked after, to enable the parents to attend the talks and have some time together alone.

A typical weekend has been described thus:

- There are talks on what God has in store for married people, talks on relationship skills, like real listening and honest, calm debate with your spouse.
- There is time to pray on your own and with your spouse.
- There are talks on inviting God into your marriage, day by day.
- There is time for discussion, in groups with other married couples and on your own with your spouse.
- There is time to listen to other couples' journeys in marriage, what they have learnt about love in their marriage and how they pass on that love to their children.

There are people there who give up time to look after the children who get to play, and go on country walks. They also learn about faith and prayer through song, craft activities, drama, friendships and listening to ideas about God's love for them and asking lots of questions. Parents are free to organise their children's schedule in whatever way they find comfortable.

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## Book Reviews

A Big New Free Happy Unusual Life, by Nina Wise.  
New York: Broadway Books, 2002. ISBN:  
0767910079

At times our lives seem to grow more frenetic and wearying and we long to pause and take time to do the simple things. How do we begin to live happier creative lives that are more meaningful? How do we listen to our inner selves? This book by Nina Wise helps us to enjoy, to experiment with, and to live life more fully.

In her introduction she says, "You already know all you need to know to live a big free happy unusual enthusiastic and amusing life. Creativity is an in-born aspect of being alive. All you have to do is to relax and let it out."

This is a happy, freeing book, which encourages spontaneity and fun in our lives. It reminded me of Julia Cameron's book *The Artist's Way* and is in a sense very like it, but the difference is, as I see it, that Julia focuses on looking at the blocks to creative living and connecting with personal dreams. Nina Wise is saying 'Just do it'.

Nina writes with enthusiasm and warmth and has gathered her wisdom from her years of experience in her workshops and in her connections with creative people worldwide.

There are ten chapters, which deal with topics such as rediscovering our bodies. In this chapter she encourages us to value the exploration of movement rather than be caught up in the need to have expertise.

As a result of her chapter "To sing like a river" I found myself for the first time in years singing in the car and in the shower - a small but liberating beginning for me.

Each chapter contains a number of "Practices" which if followed will gently lead the reader through the process of self-expression and spiritual practice.

I am constantly telling my friends that I'd like to write a book but never can get started. Simple

exercise in her chapter "Words on Words," which asked that I choose an object in the room and then begin to write about it saying "This reminds me of..." has given me courage to do some more creative writing.

This is a book to read right through or to dip into now and again when you are in need of enriching or uplifting. It is also for you if you want to liven up the romance in your relationships, sing, dance, do art or play on the beach. It will help you find prayer, peace and things spiritual in the most unlikely places.

This is more than a book. It is a gift for all those who want to lead unusual happy lives. I have now ordered more copies of the book, one for my daughter, who has two small children and needs the nurturing and empowering that this book brings from a wise, warm and exciting author.

Mary Cunningham, Newry, Co Down.

Faith in the Family, by Fr Ian Knowles.  
VRD Viewpoint Resources Direct, 1998, Repr. 2001)

This is a resource aimed at parents who want to find out more about the Catholic faith and who want to know how best to guide their children in that faith. First impressions are that it is beautifully presented with many lovely images in the video, although the participant's handbook is rather dry and dominated by text.

The course comprises six sessions, four to be run in participants' (parents) homes and two at larger venues. It has obviously been designed for a parish to organise several groups of parents who will follow the programme at the same time and gather twice for a plenary.

There is a Coordinator's Manual and the coordinator, with the parish priest, is responsible for the selection and formation of group leaders, for whom there is also a manual. The parish priest is responsible for one whole session on the Sacramental Life of the Church. There is a video for use in the home groups which is mostly fronted by a fairly formal Fr Knowles, in a beautiful church and in full clerical dress. There is also a Prayer CD for use at each

The coordinator's manual says that the course is designed to: *'enable parents to make friends; impart some basic formation in the faith of the Church; create a constructive opportunity for discussion about the faith; widen parents' experience of Christian prayer and provide an opportunity for the renewal of parents own faith as the primary way of influencing that of their children.'*

It is based on John Paul II's call to a 'new evangelisation' and a sense that the Christian Church has "faded into a grey indifference" in the West. While schools and priests have often been blamed for this, Faith in our Family asserts that "it is fundamentally in our families that our children 'catch' and learn their faith." This should come as a welcome acknowledgement of the importance of parents as the first teachers of their children. Certainly this course is, at last, a positive step to turn that truth into more than an empty cliché, which everyone says but no one really seems to believe. However, warning bells ring, because it appears to transfer the 'blame' for 'lapsation' and confusion about faith onto parents. In truth, parents need ongoing formation in order to do their job properly. It is no good just batting the ball into one another's court.

The Preface to the participants' manual says that "The course is not an exhaustive introduction to the Catholic Faith; rather it is an attempt to provide a little space for reflection and food for thought." And "all of us...continue to struggle with the Catholic Faith. Nowhere is this more acute than in matters pertaining to your children. This course is designed to help you in this struggle". So far, so good. These are reassuringly non-judgmental words and in large part the course seems to measure up to its promise.

Session one introduces the person of Jesus. It urges parents to do the important work of disentangling Jesus from the realm of mythical figures like Fr Christmas, whom children will grow out of, and from the sentimental view of Jesus as just a 'good person'. Parents have to grasp the mettle and let it be known that what is special about Jesus and the nativity story is actually the crucifixion - Jesus is God. If we believe that we can worship him. If he is just another good person like Nelson Mandela it would be wrong (idolatrous) to worship him. Without recognition of the centrality of Jesus' death

and resurrection, the Church's faith will simply seem irrelevant.

Session two opens with rather a fudged comparison of prayer between faiths. It was clear that Christian prayer was 'better' but not clear why. This session went on to say some wonderful things such as that children's 'awe and wonder' is the 'raw material of prayer.' It describes prayer as a relationship in which we 'open up to God'. Although the key image on the video at this time was a very formally laid out Lord's Prayer, the voiceover said that rote prayer does not get near to the heart of what it is to be Christian. Prayer, Fr Knowles said, is eminently flexible and has a vast variety of forms.

Session three is with the priest on the Sacraments of the Church and session four looks at 'our children and the church'. Here the message is that if your child's attendance at Mass is your only measure of her spiritual development it is an inadequate one. When children do not want to go to mass it is a sign of a deeper malaise. Here again I feel that Fr Knowles is touching on a real truth but not addressing it sufficiently. The images are of very traditional worship in a traditional cruciform church (a design inherited from the Roman Empire). Cardinal Hume appears surrounded by elaborately dressed Bishops and priests. This is not an image of a church designed to excite a teenager.

By not addressing the question of what exactly the deeper malaise is, the course leaves itself open to the interpretation that the parents, who as it says are central to their children's faith formation, are the problem. The images of 'church' as elaborate and formal ritual and an institution dominated by older people (mostly men) belie the message of the voiceover. It forces an interpretation that this way of being church is 'right' and that what parents should be doing is impressing that particular form of worship on to their children. I feel sure that this is not the message Fr Knowles intends. He does however urge parents to accept their children's right to be part of the 'pilgrim' church, a right which will require them to follow their own faith development rather than only doing the external observances.

Unfortunately, a serious critique of this programme must acknowledge the occasional discrepancy between the words (which were

invariably reliable) and the images which sometimes undermined them. In a visual age the image is often more powerful than the word and people could go away with less than the best impression of the otherwise excellent message of this series.

Session five ('Right, wrong or just feeling guilty') also fell into this trap. It talked about our children's formation into conscience and a sense of responsibility from the inside rather than one imposed from the outside. Again the message was good: what puts us right with God is not blind adherence to rules but our faith in Jesus. There is a very important point made here which I think really needs emphasising: about the importance of parental influence in forming their children's image of God: *God is seen as loving when parents are loving*. Again in this session I was drawn up sharply by a contradiction between the message and the image.

One family scene illustrating how parents help form their children's behaviour showed three little boys being told off by their father for playing on the sofa (they were small enough that that looked like harmless fun to me - boys like dogs need 'big' play.) While sitting in a row on the now tidy sofa and looking rather crushed, the father then pointed to a toy house (or something) on the floor and they immediately jumped down and stared obediently putting the pieces back into the house while the father cuddled a younger sister.

In another image, designed to show what can go so disastrously wrong when people are just brought up to obey laws and do as they are told promptly we were reminded of Nazi Germany and the death camps. The emphasis in the family scene on obedience simply called into question the Nazi warning: The result? An incoherent visual message was given.

It must be said though that the opening of section five was particularly good, comparing a certain image of priests as 'God's policemen' unfavourably with the gospel accounts of Jesus' love and forgiveness and willingness to spend time with 'undesirables'.

Session 6 is the plenary where people can continue to raise questions and discuss the material.

That is a fairly detailed but by no means comprehensive account of what I have seen of the programme. I have not attended any sessions and I have not read every word of the manuals but I have looked through the video.

So, what is my conclusion? Would I recommend this course to a parish? Well, to repeat a worn cliché, 'up to a point'. There is a lot that is excellent in this course and I think for some people it will be an invaluable resource. It is absolutely clear and basic in its teaching about the fundamentals of the Christian faith. I think the manuals offer many opportunities for going further than this into the details of the Catholic practise of the faith. There is a glossary explaining many terms that confuse the ordinary faithful let alone someone new to the church or lapsed. Terms such as Blessed Sacrament; Exposition; Mystical Body of Christ; genuflection and so on are all explained very briefly. So, I would say that this is an excellent aid for anyone who wants to know more about the Catholic Church, its practices, what it believes and why.

Some people may be put off by the relentlessly solemn presentation and the images of middle class families around a formally set table. More crucially some people will simply not see the connection between themselves and this very formal and highly ritualised organisation. More importance given to families *as* the church, as evangelisers, is necessary. It could be argued that it is the current church structures that inhibit rather than inspire young people and it is then that they leave, maybe never to return or, only to get their children baptised in a rite of superstition or to get into the local Catholic school. The institutional church as represented so formally in many of these video images must begin to see itself and its practices as much part of the problem as this course claims parents are. (I have ordered a copy of the course for use in my work as Family Life Ministry Coordinator in Leeds Diocese)

Breda Theakston, Leeds

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