

Just between Us...

PO Box 2858
Wolverhampton WV3 0XL

Newsletter edited & published
by Elizabeth Davies, MA



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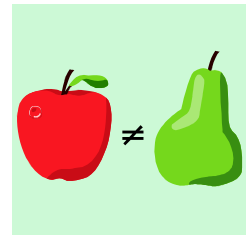
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"Families are where important things happen. It's where we experience the nearest thing to heaven and maybe hell. It's where we are offered our greatest joys and our deepest pains. It's where we are seen as we really are, without our masks (or maybe our teeth). It's where our principles and theories - maybe even our theology - get tested to the limit. It's where what we say and do can be compared. It's where we sometimes succeed and often fail." So said David Gamble in his sermon during the closing worship of the Churches Together for Families/FLAME joint conference, a report of which you can find on page seven.

These contrasts of family life, rooted in the ordinary (and simultaneously extraordinary) events of daily life, challenge us as we seek useful ways to encourage, celebrate, nourish, support and practically respond to families changing circumstances, in every season of their lives. In this issue we take a look at some samples of responses to these challenges. Last August the Conferences of Asian Bishops assembled to consider the pastoral situations and needs of families in that continent. A summary of their recommendations can be found on page ten. Whilst in the US the National Association of Family Life Ministers have been facing a different set of challenges— years of famine following years of relative plenty. You can read Winnie Honeywell's response to this—a call for 'differentiated leaders' - on page twelve.

But marriage is the main theme of this issue. We want to start looking in more detail at the political debate surrounding marriage and invite you to join us in doing this. Here is your challenge: Can you find something positive to say about marriage that is exclusively true of marriage and does not depend for understanding on a personal faith in God? We begin this journey on page three.

They say never apologise, never explain—but I'd like to take this opportunity to do both. This issue is late because I (Elizabeth) am extremely caught up in my 'day-job' of managing the Listening 2004 project. It's a wonderful adventure but very time-consuming and so my Bethany work has necessarily taken a back seat— to preserve both my sanity and my relationships with my four children. I trust you will understand and be patient during this particular time. BFI is very much alive but flesh and blood can only do so much.



"Individuals and
their differences
are a grace"

Matthew McKeivitt
(Bishopric of the Forces
Family Listening Day
October 16th 2004)

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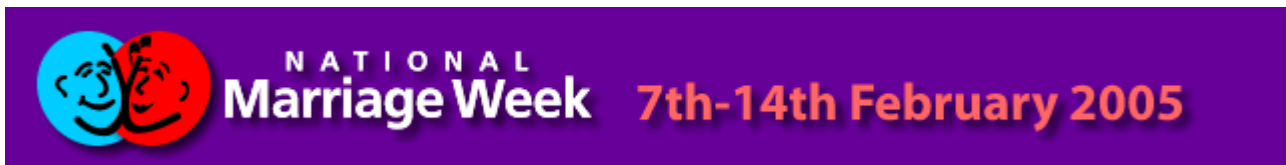
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Visit us at: www.bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

Diary Dates

- 14 November Listening 2004: My Family My Church. Archdiocese of Westminster Family Listening Day. Venue: Westminster Cathedral Hall Time: 12.00 noon - 5.00 pm Contact: Edmund Adamus, Director for Pastoral Affairs. Diocese of Westminster, Archbishop's House, Ambrosden Avenue, SW1P 1QJ Tel: 020-7798-9363 Fax: 020-7798-9077 email: edmundadamus@rcdow.org.uk
- 20 November Listening 2004: My Family My Church. Archdiocese of Cardiff Family Listening Day. Venue: St David's College, Cardiff. Time: 10.00am – 4.00pm Contact: Anne Ballard, 408 Western Avenue, Cardiff CF5 2BL Tel: 029 20212821 Email: myfamilymychurch@rcadc.org
- 27 November Listening 2004: My Family My Church. Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Family Listening Day. Venue: The Friary Hall, Haslett, Avenue West, Crawley. Time: 10.00 am– 3.00pm. Contact: Barbara Wallace or Liz James, at DABCEC.



From Richard Kane about National Marriage Week 2005.

Marriage Week provides an annual focus for all that is good about marriage, how to make your marriage better and to generally give the institution a bit of a shot in the arm. A new survey from Sainsbury's bank estimates the average cost of a wedding at £16,000. People are making the decision whether to marry based on affordability. One in ten weddings are now thought to take place overseas, where the average cost is just short of £6,000. More than a third of weddings are paid for by loans.

How about your Church offering weddings free of charge during April and October? This would be making a clear overture to couples encouraging them to marry. It would also create unequivocal church support for the institution. It's hardly a surprise to hear couples balking at the decision to get married because they "can't afford it". If anything the surprise is that so many people still want to get married.

It is of course true that many people are single, divorced, or cohabiting, and we do not wish to marginalize the unmarried. Nevertheless the thrust of Marriage Week is to clearly and proudly say that marriage is very good for people, and the key elements that make up a marriage speak of the love of God for mankind.

If you are able to offer free church weddings in April and October email your details with the words Free Church Weddings in the Subject box to Richard Kane at marriageweek@tiscali.co.uk. The Press launch will be in Houses of Parliament, Monday 7th February.

When pressed about the relative inexpense of marriage in the Catholic Church, Mr Kane had this to say: "I know what you mean about the fees and I have had some echat with others over this. But this is just a statement of support - most weddings do not occur in October, so it's just April really. I guess we are trying to make an anti culture statement - i.e. marriage is not about a materialistic day, sort of thing."

What does marriage mean in 2004?

A priority for supporting marriage has now diminished in government circles. Disappointingly so since the publication of the Lord Chancellor's Review in 1999 and the subsequent very positive strategy proposed in 2002. These documents made marriage very clearly a priority for resources but recently the language has changed as well as the funding priorities.

There is now a tangible anxiety among some in the Christian community who work hard both to prepare couples for marriage and to enrich and celebrate married life. We see some of this anxiety reflected in the debate around marriage. Some have begun to fly the 'cure-all' flag for marriage: get married and live longer and be richer! Some talk about the damage that divorce does to the cohesion of society and especially to children's development.

We wonder if either of these are the responses that we really want to engage our limited energies in. Arguing from what is at best a reactive stance is surely always a bad start. Isn't it better to 'get off on the right foot' and try to re-establish what is really unique, special, graced and gifted about marriage? What makes it different from all other sorts of relationships? And more importantly how can we express this in words that don't depend for meaning or understanding on a living faith in God nor drown the earthy & divine reality of marriage in a slushy sentimentalism? What can we honestly say about marriage that is not true for any other human relationship?

To launch this challenge (for challenge it is) we invited a select few of our members to contribute to an initial conversation. We asked them to address any or all of the following four questions, in as many or few words as they chose:

- How does marriage help society?
- What's special or important about marriage?
- What can the church do to help all marriages?
- What is the biggest challenge facing marriage today?

We selected participants who reflect a variety of experience. We hope you will find their thoughts thought-provoking enough to respond in kind. Our intention is to develop the responses in a subsequent issue, prior to National Marriage Week in February 2005.

How does marriage help society?

Stable loving families are the foundation of social life and loving, lasting marriage seems to be the best way to achieve this. Marriage is also proving capable of developing in line with more equal family relationships. (RC)

It benefits society primarily by providing stability through adult relationships and through the 'generations' of intact families rather than numerous broken families. Marriage creates stability in work and communities as people who have families to support need an income - they are less likely to change their job as often with a family to support. Marriage creates a solid identity for people. This leads to stronger communities rather than just groups of anonymous people. The relationships within marriage can create many opportunities for community building such as being involved in church groups, schools and other child/adolescent related activities. Marriage needs lots of support and friendships to help it sustain itself and these support networks and friendships add to its stability and longevity. (FD)

What's special or important about marriage?

The longer I'm married, the more I see the joy, adventure and challenge of living marriage. It's a living relationship in which you become one and develop as distinct persons. I believe that the power of the Holy Spirit given throughout marriage transforms the "natural sacrament" of marriage into something deeper. I understand the sacramentality of marriage to be the presence of Christ in marriage - in our loving and caring rather than as an image of Christ's love for the Church (though it is that as well). Having and bringing up children together is wonderful and fruitfulness is a great blessing. (RC)

It seems clear that young people retain an image of marriage and married life that remains attractive. This seems to prevail even among those who have experienced break-up of their own parents'

marriage. Having closely observed the sincerity of such young people, I have no reason to doubt that sincerity. I suspect that in a world in which relationships are so fragile, there remains the burning desire for that *relationship of relationships*. Remaining in purely speculative mode, I suggest that there may well be a parallel here with that other phenomenon where we see the same generation rejecting formalised religion but seemingly craving a satisfying spirituality. (WS)

If it's a religious marriage then its spiritual nature provides a longer term goal and aspiration than merely getting through this life - it also includes another person i.e. Jesus or Allah etc. This provides a more outward looking and selfless way of relating to the husband or wife. Marriage is more special than cohabitation as it gives the children a clearer identity and it also provides the couple with more solid expectations of staying together - most research shows that cohabitees tend to have shorter relationships perhaps because they know they have a 'get out clause'.

Marriage boosts confidence and morality as well as health, income and quality of life (providing that the marriage is a happy one!!! If not then these aspects will be radically diminished). Marriages also give the community and society a clearer identity of who's with whom! Many social networks depend on reliability and sustainability and marriage can help further these. Marriage is also good for basic housing and resources because it prevents so many people living alone or from moving house as often - it creates a base and roots - all good things for everybody.

Marriage also helps with resourcing the environment as a family can buy more efficiently and share resources more efficiently and than the same numbers of people all using similar resources separately. However, there is not necessarily more love in marriage than in other relationships which are just as committed but the love in a marriage may demonstrate different qualities at various times - such as staying together longer which presumably means through thick and thin purely for the sake of the children if no other reason. That love may become more sacrificial in those situations. (FD)

How can the Church help all marriages?

We minister the sacrament to each other, and we live it. The Church should acknowledge the number of married Catholics who conscientiously reject her teaching on contraception, while proclaiming the importance of chastity and faithful love and the wonder of fruitful marriage. I

believe this message would be more powerful if the bedroom door was left closed! Poor families: campaign for better support and social inclusion; especially housing and the environment in which many live. The government has done a lot in relation to family poverty and is right not to be judgemental about people who choose not to marry. We (the Church) need to offer our moral and spiritual vision in a way that catches hearts and minds (this happened to me when I was under instruction and when we married.) (RC)

The real problem lies, not in the early stages of marriage but rather, in its sustainability. To ask how the Church can support all marriages is in a sense to ask how the Church can reverse the trend of breakdown and divorce. It could start by:

- Embracing the developing role of women;
- Developing a culture in which dialogue, conversation and listening are the norm and where men and women are able to reconcile their different but complementary roles and re-discover the mutuality of sacramental gracefulness in such moments;
- Underpinning expectations of a better quality of relationship by offering a Kingdom vision with its integral *already but not yet* tension;
- Taking up John Paul II's call for a renewed theology of 'work' combined with a pro-justice critique of consumerism that can only be sustained by long working hours;
- Understanding the paradigmatic shift in communication technology and being all the better prepared to engage positively in the medium.

Matthew chapter 13 and the parables of the 'Sower' and the 'Darnel' seem to have got it just about right, as did *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II) about engaging with the real world. If society has to re-discover that marriage is the best way, the Church must be on speaking terms with those people who are at present rejecting or are ejected by its doctrinal and liturgical strictures. It must sustain a dialogue with those same people who still ask for baptism in spite of rejecting holy matrimony. It most certainly must consider sacramental hospitality to those from broken or second marriages.

The task for the Church is to courageously allow people to discover the perennial truths and simultaneously to open itself to reappraising its own position on those issues and practices that are not fundamental theological precepts. Among the abiding truths will be a re-discovery that for most people, the union of man and woman, consecrated by a genuine exchange of love remains the most effective environment in which to nurture children, a life long task in which "the joys and

hopes, the griefs and anxieties" (to appropriate the introduction to *Gaudium et Spes*) of life can be safely experienced. The Church as fellow pilgrim may well be an ecclesial model that has found its time. (WS)

The church should be much clearer about why marriage is important other than for just sex - the spiritual dimensions are so important; but the church could also be much more supportive to couples, families and all relationships so that people see how much they are valued in themselves! It could do this partly in its sermons on Sundays but partly through resourcing families locally in supporting them through crèches, counselling and in being less judgemental about adolescents and single people who haven't got married yet or aren't ready to - the church pressurises people a lot into thinking that marriage is the only relationship in which you can have sex but it doesn't offer much constructive support beyond the wedding day!

Also, the church isn't loud enough in its valuing of people who aren't priests, it isn't at all supportive of women and continues to undermine them at every level in the Catholic church - especially if they have theological qualifications, or it exploits them without appreciation and silences them when that serves its own purposes such as when lay women (and men) appear to be liberal in their views or are seen as threatening the roles of the priests. There could be more incisive and constructive writing about marriage coming out of the Catholic Church and for once written by women and not bishops!!!! But the church needs to endorse this writing rather than ignore or hide it if it isn't coming out of the Vatican.

The church therefore has a huge political role in working with governments to promote marriage much more specifically rather than all relationships in general, but at the same time it needs to recognise that other relationships have the potential to become marriage if supported properly. The church engaging with e.g. EU legislation on family life and relationships is critical right now as it will affect the whole of the next generation. The EU is also increasing its power in the heart of the family and in gender issues so the church has no option but to campaign for the sanctity of marriage and family life as soon as possible. Continuing to work closely with the UN will again be more effective which I know we already do but at the same time different countries will need different approaches to marriage and if the church isn't more flexible in its understanding of marriage and relationships then it will lose more members. It needs to get the right balance

between discerning what is a moral absolute and what is relative to a particular situation - the world is too complicated to have one set of rules working in exactly the same way wherever you go on some issues - such as gender - where we know there is a huge disparity between how women are treated and what opportunities they have around the world. This issue itself has huge ramifications for marriage because it can either destroy it or make it flourish. Likewise men in the west are now at a loss as to their identity and feel just as threatened and disillusioned as women about who they are and what they can contribute to society and to marriage. (FD)

What's the biggest challenge facing marriage today?

Fear of commitment, debts of the young, materialism, consumerism, the impact of so many broken relationships on readiness to commit, a media culture which seems to assume that infidelity and promiscuity are the norm. (RC)

Lack of confidence in it as so many marriages appear to fail and consumer pressure - materialism in the west is so enormously strong that marriage is seen as highly disposable, bound to fail, not necessary forever and we can always shop around for a new or better one if we feel like it mentality. (FD)

A Prayer for Marriage

In the warmth of intimacy
And the fire of passion
We find our need of one another.
And we thank you, God, for the thrill of
our union.
May the love that burns between us
Become a source of energy for those
around us,
And the firmness of our commitment
Be a rock of support for our loved
ones.
Use us, we pray,
To bring light to the world's greyness,
And warmth to the world's coolness.
In the name of Christ, who calls
all people to life in its fullness.

Timothy Woods

(Taken from Pocket Prayers for Marriage—see Book Reviews)

The recent publication of the provisional 2003 divorce statistics produced lots of press coverage, much of it fuelled by the hysterical response that it's all fuelled by the net and Friends-Reunited (who dreams up this nonsense??)!!

Let's first of all look at the statistics in the longer term context:-

- divorce rates are now much the same as they were throughout the early 1990s and only 5% above the average since 1980. The recent rises are well within the "noise" in the data.
- In 1993 there were about 163,000 divorces compared with 153,000 in 2003, so quoting "third successive rise" is simply being selective to raise alarm
- Median length of marriage ending in divorce now 11.3 years, was 10.1 in 1983 (why do commentators consistently confuse this with the average length of marriage??)

Secondly, the statistics always focus on breakdown, but:-

- 2/3 first marriages still last a lifetime – this means the median length of a marriage is still a lifetime!! (and the mean is somewhere in excess of 30 years)
- the chances of divorce are much higher (roughly double) in marriages where one or both marriages are for second or more time – this effect is increasingly influencing the overall statistics
- The breakdown percentages for simply living together are much higher – 80% last less than 5 years
- The real victims of this are children – we are raising a generation of children for whom single parenthood is the norm – without the role models of a father and a mother who are committed to each other

So what are the causes?

- Not Friends-reunited or the net! – these are mechanisms – it's about as sensible as saying mobile phones were responsible for the Madrid bombings!!
- The first problem is what is being passed on down generations – young people growing up with no proper role models, and no relationship skills to permit them to sustain what they still aspire to – marriage.
- There is a culture of "Laddism", which is a male backlash to feminism, and young men are seeking fulfilment in sport, alcohol, porn, free-sex, and irresponsibility
- Similarly we have a "Long working hours"

culture as people of both sexes seek their value in their material worth, not in their relationships

- Unrealistic expectations – romance and excitement – being in-love rather than loving. People lack the understanding that they will change, their partner will change and their relationship will change, and lack the skills and commitment to negotiate the challenges.
- Lack of information – people believe divorce is inevitable – they don't understand the value of marriage – this is a failure of Government and agencies to give a responsible lead.

What are the answers?

- Start getting the message across that marriage works, both for the individuals and for society.
- Address issues of responsibility and relationship skills in education – programmes like Students Exploring Marriage
- Give people good pre-marriage education – tools like Foccus and Prepare, programmes like Engaged Encounter and the Marriage Preparation Course
- Support people in their marriages – focus on good health, rather than the doctor when things go wrong – programmes like those offered by Promoting Marriage which help couples discover their vision for their marriage. Also mentoring – someone to come alongside to give confidence and work through issues.
- Support services at crisis points that help couples stay together, not just "do what makes you feel happy!". Couples need values and education, not just a comfortable way out.
- Recognition from society (and government) of the value of life long relationships – why not have tax benefits for those in long term relationships over 10, 20 etc years?

Let's work together to get out the powerful messages above, and let's get away from headline grabbing nonsense like blaming Friends-Reunited!!

Dave & Liz Percival of 2-in-2-1 produce a weekly email newsletter reviewing the latest news & reports on marriage and family from a Christian perspective. Go to www.2-in-2-1.co.uk to subscribe (free of charge but donations appreciated)

Vision for the Future

The FLAME/CTFF conference Highgate House, Northants. October 1-3, 2004

To celebrate the anniversary of the International Year of the Family, Churches Together for Families collaborated with the Anglican FLAME (Family Life and Marriage Education) network to sponsor an ecumenical conference on family life. Intentionally forward looking, the aim of the conference from the outset was to explore and offer strategies to Christian communities interested in responding to the needs of families in the twenty-first century. To achieve this objective, participants spent over half the conference in small focus groups considering such diverse issues as enriching marriage, blending families, families with children who are care-givers, domestic violence, families with learning difficulties/ disabilities, prisoners' families, fathers and families with early years children. It helped to lighten the load that the conference took place in the rather plush surroundings of Highgate House, Northants with swimming pool, internet café, massage chairs, games areas and superbly appointed en-suite bedrooms. Not to mention the food and the surrounding countryside.

The conference got off to an interesting start with two presentations from very different speakers. Duncan Dormor, currently Dean of St John's College, Cambridge gave a brief introduction to the topic of cohabitation and its meaning for Christian churches in the light of sociological trends. Helen Cameron, a voluntary sector consultant and lecturer in theology, talked about the problems of church membership in the wider context of societal changes and the challenges for churches in maximising the gifts of volunteers. Both presentations were challenging, stimulating and encouraging in different ways. Dormor seemed to suggest that marriage is almost being reclaimed or redefined by the general population after centuries of control by legal and religious authorities. Perhaps we are being forced back to a pre-Tridentine situation in order to learn something new about marriage as a human institution? Cameron illustrated her talk with figures and statistics that showed Church membership and involvement in a healthy light compared to other voluntary organisations. In fact, she suggested, the organisations that are increasing are those that want members to pay up but not show up, like the National Trust.

Saturday was devoted to group work and it became clear that the four sessions scheduled from 10.00am to 9.00pm were taking their toll.



Duncan Dormor

Though recreation time had been arranged for two hours in the afternoon, it was then that the heavens had opened preventing participants from walking in the beautiful Northamptonshire countryside. (Nevertheless a good number turned up for the late evening quiz that had been arranged by Anne Coley to provide some relaxation.) Over the course of the four sessions groups examined the issues surrounding the kinds of family experiences they were focussing on, identified the needs and challenges and developed strategies that might be used by local Christians to respond to the needs as well as the resources available to them.

On Sunday each group reported the results of their work and then it was left to David Gamble, Coordinating Secretary for Legal & Constitutional Practice in the Methodist Church, to tie together all the loose ends. This he did extremely effectively, not only pointing up the recurring themes in all the groups but using the families in the Old Testament to highlight the age-old messiness of family life.

The commonalities were about finding or creating safe places or space to allow families to talk, to listen to their stories, to encourage or support those families by respecting their experience, to celebrate diversity rather than expect conformity

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Ever since reading his *Doing the Truth in Love* some years ago I have wanted to hear Michael Himes speak publicly. My opportunity arrived last month when the Catholic Education Service provided him with a platform at a conference for head teachers and others involved in education. So, I cancelled appointments, booked the childcare and made my way over to Eastwood Hall in Nottingham.

I was not disappointed. Himes is not only an engaging speaker but presents Catholic theology with a simplicity and clarity that makes you wonder why on earth you haven't heard these things before. Moreover in listening to Himes, I felt no need to suspend critical faculties, change gear into church-speak, nor to take anything 'on faith' or 'as read', or recalibrated to allow for authority, gender or tradition. Himes speaks from the heart. What he says feels real, feels true, makes sense and therefore is extremely powerful. It was a very tangible blessing to have had the chance to meet him and to listen to him.

Himes' brief was to address the place of the catholic school in the education system. He did this in the context of the core doctrines of our faith: the Trinity, the Incarnation and our understanding of Sacramentality. In recounting some of what Himes said, I'm very aware that I lack both his gifts and his knowledge. Fortunately most of his presentation is contained in a recent publication, which I strongly advise readers to obtain—details below. His publishers are also bringing out a DVD of his recorded talks on the Catholic faith in a format suitable for adult formation or Café groups.

Himes began with the Trinity and pointed out that nowhere in any of our Creeds do we actually state an explicit belief in the Trinity per se. We list the Three Persons but not the whole. This is, said Himes, because the Trinity is our *overarching* or foundational belief: the Trinity *is the Creed*. So how do we understand Trinity? Well scripture tells us a great deal about the nature of God who is Trinity (Himes reeled off the huge list of metaphors, images and similes) but the least wrong way of understanding Trinity/God comes from John's gospel: God is Love.

Refining this further, Himes led us to a consideration of agapé and Augustine's image of God as Lover, Beloved and the Love that flows between them. Thus we see God in every act of agapic, self-giving love as *that act of agapic, self-giving*

love. This is how God is alive, incarnate, in the world today. Moreover we cannot come to know God unless we have personally experienced agapic, self-giving love. Incidentally, Himes suggested that the experience of loving agapically produces gratitude. Think about that one for awhile.

An understanding of God as agapé underpins Himes' vision of the Incarnation and of Sacramentality. Continuing on the theme of God as love, he moved into a consideration of the two great commandments, to love God and neighbour, which were actually made into one commandment by Jesus. Scriptural accounts of the scribe's question vary but essentially Jesus, in his reply, addressed an age-old Rabbinical disagreement over which was more important - love of God or love of neighbour. Jesus did not prefer one of these possibilities but combined both answers as being of equal importance.

To further illustrate this Himes explored the parable of the Good Samaritan. Scripture tells us that the two religious passers-by are walking towards Jerusalem and are therefore clearly going to the temple. They cross the road to the other side when they see the man lying, bleeding, because if they come into contact with his blood they will be defiled, and unable to enter the temple without performing the ritual purification. They clearly prioritise their religious duties, rules and their love of God. This is opposed to the Samaritan who has no religious priority but simply does the right thing by someone in need. Himes suggests that in telling this parable Jesus was telling us that if we think we can serve God by neglecting our neighbour then we are very much mistaken.

In an even more powerful Scriptural illustration, Himes returned to the story of Creation and specifically to the day that God created humanity. God said let us create man in our own image and likeness. Now fast forward, said Himes, to the temptation in the Garden of Eden: eat of the forbidden fruit and you will become like God. Why, asked Himes, would Adam and Eve need to become like God. *They already were like God.*

Seen from this perspective the story of the fall is not a story of man's disobedience to God, but a story of man's inability to accept that he really is like God, really, truly and fully. The Fall is much

(Continued on page 9)

more about lack of trust, lack of faith and lack of appreciation of humanity's Godlikeness. God saw that we were good. But we have difficulty with appreciating this about ourselves, even now.

The obvious response to this perspective was the problem of our human failings—how can they be like God? When pressed Himes drew again on Genesis but this time as a source of metaphors to help us understand evil. The story of Adam and Eve is about humanity's alienation from God, the story of Cain and Abel is about humanity's alienation from one another and the story of the Tower of Babel is about humanity's alienation from community. These illustrate the challenges we are called to overcome but, Himes cautioned against defining evil. That might suggest it had an intentional place in God's plan. It is mystery in a similar way that God is mystery.

The incarnation, according to Himes, is not therefore a one-time temporary unification of God and human in the body of Jesus Christ. It is a continuing reality, originating in our creation, and which challenges us to become more divine by becoming more human, because God is also human as well as divine. We cannot prioritise love of God and love of neighbour because they are one and the same. Our human destiny is to love, to love agapically and to grow in deepest humanity in the fullest and best sense.

We celebrate this love in our sacramental life. The Sacraments are an opportunity to celebrate that which is always and everywhere true, just as wedding anniversaries and birthdays do. The sacraments are the time and place for our community to reunite, to give thanks and rejoice in the reality of a graced existence as the body of Christ incarnate. The power of the Sacraments therefore comes from the attentiveness of the moment to that which is always and everywhere true.

The questions when invited were few and far between but remember that his audience were all professionals and not a few of them already versed in theology. The quiet and hesitation at question time suggested that Himes had opened up for many a new space within which to consider God. "I do have questions but I'd need at least a week to go away and think about them" was one comment, echoed by others. At lunchtime a deacon I had spoken to had chorled with glee at the amount of material he was picking up to use in future sermons. Yet by the end of the day he expressed sadness at the reality of a church rarely enlivened by the kinds of things Himes talked about.

Further Reading:

The Mystery of Faith: an Invitation to Catholicism, by Michael J. Himes. Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2004 £5.95

These talks on Trinity, Grace, Incarnation, Salvation, Church, Baptism, Eucharist, Sacraments of Vocation, Reconciliation and Tradition are available on CD or cassette. Visit the online catalogue at www.americancatholic.org and request items A6517 (3 CD's \$19.95) or A6525 (3 Cassettes \$25.95)

(Continued from page 7)

and to build awareness in the wider community, acknowledge the resources already available and to work together in all of this.

I left the conference feeling exhausted but joyful. It was both a luxury and a blessing to be with such a diverse yet committed group. Though the Anglicans were the largest denomination strong contingents came from the Catholic, Methodist, Salvation Army and Adventist congregations. There was a very real sense of being at home with these many others all committed to supporting marriage and family life. I hope there will be more opportunities for similar gatherings in the future.

The reports of the working groups are now being sent to all participants, with further work being undertaken to prepare them for publication, certainly on the CTF website and possibly in hard copy format.

Duncan Dormor's work on cohabitation is available in his book *Just Cohabiting? The Church, Sex and Getting Married*. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004. Helen Cameron's book *Studying the Local Churches: A Handbook* is due out in 2005. The Churches Together for Families website is www.churchesandfamilies.org.uk

Interchurch Families and Christian Unity, a paper adopted by the Second World Gathering of Interchurch families from eleven countries held in Rome in July 2003 is a really important and well-written document describing the characteristics, contribution and pastoral care needs of Interchurch families. Copies can be obtained for £1 plus p&p from the Association at Bastille Court, 2 Paris Garden, London SE1 8ND Tel: 020 7654 7251 www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk

Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences—8th Plenary Assembly

The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life

General Orientations:

- a. The Family as Evangeliser for a New Evangelisation in a New Century;
- b. The Family as the Focal Point of Evangelisation in the diocesan plan;
- c. Family as Domestic Church:
 - Church witnessing to family life through education reform, support of right social policies, etc.;
 - Creating awareness of the family's role in social transformation;
 - Preparing families for dialogue of life and action through neighbourhood involvement, collaboration with the like-minded;
 - Developing Family Life Liturgies and Prayer Books for celebrations like eve of wedding ("roce"), anniversaries, First Holy Communion, etc.

Programmes:

- Promoting systematic and holistic Love and Life / Family Enrichment programmes
 - at all levels (children, youth, adult);
 - for ecumenical, inter-religious, intercultural families;
 - for other forms of families (single parent families, families of divorced, remarried, migrants, etc.)
- Providing specialized Healing and Pastoral Care for families in special situations (divorced, addiction / violence-affected);
- Providing special care for children of deprived families;
- Setting up a Ministry for Men:
 - Developing Spirituality for Men;
 - Bringing them back to assume a responsible role in family life.
- Encouraging public witnessing to values of good and stable marriages at family milestones (e.g., wedding anniversaries, birthdays) through liturgies
 - Institutionalising contact programs for couples in first five years of marriage
 - Promoting programs that families would see as beneficial - like better parenting, relationship-building with siblings, parents, in-laws, conflict resolution

Structures:

- Reorganizing Family Ministry to affirm, encourage and enhance the environment for Family Life with Mentor Couples as Leaders, Priests as Collaborators and Professional Counsellors as Facilitators;
- Establishing structures of Faith Formation:
 - Home Missions / Family Councils / Cells in parishes and dioceses;
 - With Pastors, undergoing formation as animators in Family Ministry.

Research and Action on:

- Status of women;
- Families of migrant workers' white collar and other professionals facing frequent separations because of job demands.

Issues / Concerns for FABC Suggested by Regional Groups:

- Develop an Asian Theology of Marriage and Family - vocation, mission and conjugal communion;
- Create a Family Office / Desk in FABC;
- Promote Ministry for Ecumenical, Inter-Religious, Inter-cultural Marriages to inculcate mutual respect on religious practices and transmission of values to children;
- Special pastoral concerns:
 - Marginalized / vulnerable groups;
 - Families of migrant workers (encourage employers to adopt family-friendly attitude towards domestic helpers);
 - Elderly / senior citizens by developing neighbourhood extended-family support;
 - Trafficking in women and children;
 - Marital break-up and Domestic violence
 - Pastoral care for Same Gender Oriented (SGO) persons to respond to the universal call to holiness and service and to live as faithful members of the Church.

(Extracted from: The Asian family Towards a Culture of Integrated Life. FABC Paper no 111. The 8th FABC Plenary Assembly Final Document. September 2004. www.fabc.org)

Time for Parish Families

Time for Families was the theme for Parents' Week this year. Here are some of the ideas provided through the Listening 2004 website for parishes to celebrate the week.

Organise House Groups

Use the reflection material provided on the Listening 2004 website to encourage parents to share their experiences of managing time. Perhaps some parents have found ways of coping that others can try. Sharing difficulties often enables parents to feel less isolated. It seems too that this particular difficulty is sufficiently common to be a positive factor in building community.

Designate Family Time

Cancel all parish centred activities on one night of Parents' Week to encourage families to spend time together. Or consider having an inexpensive family social evening in the parish to give families a chance to mix and get out of the house. The NFPI Parents' Week pack makes several suggestions for community activities.

Designate Couple Time

Designate another night of the week as couple night. Either draw up a list of willing volunteer babysitters or provide a big children's social in the parish so that parents can have a couple of hours alone together. Make sure that all child protection guidelines are adhered to. Unite with a neighbouring parish if necessary or with other Christian churches in the local community. Put single parents in touch with one another to help them receive mutual support. Consider the needs of families with disabled members.

Incorporate Family Time in the Liturgy

Time issues seem to be creating a lot of pain within families. There are feelings of inadequacy, frustration and helplessness. Reflecting this in parish liturgies will be important. Invite parents to prepare bidding prayers in advance. Offer special blessings or healing rituals. Acknowledge the economic circumstances that often require adults to work outside the home and confine their time-choices. Acknowledge the sacrifices made to care for family members. Talk about being good-enough as opposed to perfect.

Campaign for Family Time

Invite families to share how they spend their time. Use the Time Diaries and Time Clocks produced by the National Family and Parenting Institute (download free of charge from http://www.nfpi.org/data/parents_week/ and photocopy). Create a parish profile that reflects how much time families spend in various activities in a typical day or simply create a display that others can visit. Celebrate the positives. Consider a writing campaign to local and national government to address the negatives. Use the local press to highlight the issues.

Advocate for Prayer Time

Encourage parish families to share the ways they pray together at home. How and when do they pray? What special rituals and prayers do they usually use? Publish the different ideas (anonymously) in the parish or school bulletin. This kind of practical encouragement, coming as it does from families themselves, can be more powerful than any book or sermon about prayer in the home.

Offer a Parenting Skills Programme

Parenting skills of communication, conflict resolution etc can help families use their time more effectively. Find out if the parents in your parish would be interested. Visit www.familycaring.co.uk for more information about inexpensive kits for facilitators and handbooks for parents.

Useful Websites



Keep Time for Children www.keeptimeforchildren.org.uk promotes the welfare of children through close and supportive family relationships. Activity is directed towards enabling parents to spend more time with their children, particularly at weekends.

A time for 'differentiated leaders'

by Winnie Honeywell

(from the Family Perspectives Journal of the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers, www.NACFLM.org)

The US Association of family life ministers (NACFLM) will be 25 years old next year. Every year they hold a national conference—until 2004 when they reluctantly decided to cancel it. American dioceses have had less and less money to invest in family ministry and those whose jobs have remained secure have smaller budgets. In a sense family ministry, although relatively well established in the US, still seems to be perceived as an 'extra' in dioceses faced with hard choices to make about their expenditure. In the wake of this shock the NACFLM newsletter, Family Perspectives Journal, published an article by Winnie Honeywell, one of their most experienced and gifted leaders. We have reproduced part of it because issues of funding and ministry priorities are common and because the need for differentiated leaders is constant.

The reason I said yes to writing an article was because I believe that all of us need to enter the conversation and to do the thinking together that will move forward the invaluable mission of family ministry in our Church and society. And I believe that the crisis we are facing is an opportunity to go beyond reactivity and into creativity as we face the new climate, the new scenery, the new realities of marriage and family ministry in our Church. The following is one office's attempt to try a new approach in these troubled times and to move beyond our fears with faith and with hope.

Our goal planning days this spring looked very different from what we have done for years. I even hired a consultant to come in and work with us and to help me design a direction for our thinking. The process below was the result - and I offer it to you as one model for offices (parish and diocesan) to begin to examine their presumptions and assumptions about family ministry and how it will look in the next decade. Just as some of the changes that have happened in the last few years were predictable, we think we can think ahead and plan for future changes. As Edwin Friedman used to tell us, we can plan for transitions - and that does make them more manageable.

Our staff began our planning by studying the notes from a talk by Rick McCord at a NACFLM conference in 1993. (Yes, he talked back then of trends that we have since seen come to pass!) He spoke back then of the need to "re-invent" family ministry because of the social context (e.g. demo-

graphics and racial and cultural diversity); the

ecclesial context (e.g. internal financial crisis and a growing disaffiliation with institutions); and the emphasis on the local church (read "parish" or "congregation").

He told us to expect downsizing and decentralization, as well as a move toward collaboration and flexible structures. He called on diocesan offices to look at how we could shift the focus of family ministry to the parish, how we could stop or slow our "over-functioning" for the ministry. He asked us questions like "What must you provide? What can you give away? He called on "us to define ourselves, to have a "sharper identity" in terms of what we can and cannot, should and should not, will and will not do. As our staff took another look at his comments and questions, we realized they were still helpful in 2004.

Then, as the staff reflected on the realities of this diocese (positive and negative) here and now, we realized it was time again to take a serious look at who we were and how we might face our own coming transition in a pro-active and positive way. Our first step was to imagine we were making a report to the new bishop on our mission and our work. "What is our work, and what is its value, and what role do each of us have in carrying out our mission?"

We then acknowledged that in the kind of transition(s) we were facing, offices could be changed, rearranged, or downsized and that we might need to look at alternative models for accomplishing the mission and ministries. We discussed possible directions for our work, given Rick's suggestions and our own knowledge of diocesan realities. Finally we asked ourselves what could we do between now and 2006 to assure that the good work we have done and are doing would continue, regardless of the structure of the office.

Surprisingly, these questions and the discussion that followed not only sparked our creativity but also got us thinking about the larger realities of what we are about: evangelisation, formation, pastoral care... i.e. carrying out our part of the mission of Jesus Christ and his Church. We have a small part of that mission and the presumption is that we want that piece to continue whether or not anyone of us continue in this ministry.

What resulted was a more objective (than usual) look at our programs, our training, our services - to see how they could be more effective, yes, but also how we can assure that the mission is more fully realized. In the course of our conversation and planning there was significantly higher energy and clearer focus on what mattered. We got ourselves out of the way in a way that contributed greatly to our final product: a set of strategies for moving forward on a number of fronts. The objectives we came up with, the strategies that we are currently designing call for improvements in teamwork communication (external and internal) as well as an in-depth review of all our programs. There is a stronger focus than ever on relationships with parishes, with the marriage and family movements, and with other diocesan offices.

I offer these thoughts - sketchy as they are - as a way of prompting thinking and creativity in others, particularly those of us who still have jobs, offices, and staffs. Using a term from Ed Friedman, this is a time for "differentiated leaders." To me that means sorting through thoughts and feelings, taking responsibility for our own fears and frustrations, and linking up with others who need us and we them to be bearers of light in the darkness. Those of us who are not in acute pain must reach out to those who are. With prayer and a sense of purpose, with humility and trust, we can live what we believe: our God is a God of Love, Christ is with us always, and our call is to live out the virtue of hope in a time of darkness.

What steps is the Government taking to promote stable families?

by Rt Hon. Margaret Hodge MP

"We believe that all children deserve the chance to grow up in a stable loving family, and we are increasing the support available to families who want it. We know that poverty places great stress on families and can be a major contributing factor to family breakdown. There are around 500,000 fewer children living in relative poverty than there were in 1997, and there have been significant increases in child benefit, and more generous support through new tax credits. We have also introduced the biggest ever package of legal changes to help working parents balance work and family, including the right to request flexible working—for fathers, as well as mothers and over one million people are now taking this up.

The Every Child Matters Green Paper put supporting parents and carers at the heart of our approach to ensure that every child reaches their full potential in life. Through the development of Sure Start, Children's Centres and Extended Schools we are now bringing together support for all children and families in a more integrated way. We are expanding the Children's Centre programme to create 2500 centres by 2008.

Every Child Matters also highlighted the role of relationship counselling and family mediation services. Current arrangements are being amalgamated to form a new Strengthening Families Grant programme to fund voluntary and community sector organisations providing relationship support. A family focused, single grant programme will help to promote stable families. However, the Government recognises that some relationships will inevitably break down and the recently published Parental Separation: "Children's Needs and Parents' Responsibilities" Green Paper details a range of measures to provide more effective support to families in relation to contact and residence after divorce and separation.

Although Governments cannot create stable families, we believe that these—and other—measures are playing a valuable role in supporting families.

(Margaret Hodge MP in a reply to a written question by Bill Wiggin (Conservative MP for Leominster) reported in Hansard 4th October 2004)

Book Reviews

Duncan Dormor. *Just Cohabiting: The Church, Sex and Getting Married*. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004. ISBN: 023252484X £10.95

Knowing Duncan Dormor would be speaking at the CTF conference I thought I'd better read his book. Notwithstanding my motives this is actually one that everyone working in the area of marriage preparation should also read, not only because it addresses a very real issue but because of the way Dormor contextualises cohabitation and offers a practical means of responding. Approaching his subject from a sociological perspective, Dormor starts by accepting that 'cohabitation has firmly eclipsed marriage as the marker for first partnerships between men and women.' So what does this mean and how should the Churches react?

Dormor examines by looking at the sociological trends behind 'living together', and includes a brief history of marriage from an Anglican standpoint. This brings him to understand cohabitation as a phenomenon rooted in the natural human state (in the sense that couples married in various ways long before the Church got involved) and its rise as connected with economic, health and social factors. What he describes as 'the Promethean shift' however was the moral endorsement of contraception by all the major Christian churches (bar one). This separation of sexual intercourse from its procreative impact paved the way for a more liberated approach to relationships - for good or ill, depending on your outlook.

Dormor's conclusion is that churches should accept cohabitation as part of the process of becoming married and see it as an opportunity for positive intervention in the lives of couples rather than continue to regard them as 'living in sin'. He recommends that churches abandon an indiscriminating opposition to premarital sex, acknowledge a role for cohabitation in the process of becoming married and broaden their focus from the wedding to the marriage.

Dormor also offers some comfort to parents still under the illusion that cohabitation negatively impacts the longevity of subsequent marriages. The research that implied that cohabitation pre-emptively de-stabilised marriage has been disproved using longer and more recent case histories which suggest no difference in marital stability between those who have cohabited and

those who have married directly. (For further evidence of this see chapters by John Haskey in *Population Trends* 68 & 96. London: The Stationery Office, 1992 & 1999)

This is a worthwhile and likeable book, sure to provoke further discussion—as it should.

Elizabeth Davies

Pocket Prayers for Marriage, compiled by Andrew & Pippa Body. London: Church House Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0715140183 £5.95

A truly pocket sized book of delightful prayers, mostly from the Protestant tradition (a good number from the Book of Common Prayer) but with many modern items from the Methodist Church's Vows & Partings and the Community of Iona. A good selection therefore of old and new, ancient and modern and some, I imagine, previously unpublished, written by the compilers and colleagues.

The selection is divided up to provide prayers for marriage preparation, the wedding day, times of change and of conflict, special times, partings, for anniversaries and for everyday.

What I liked especially about this book was the variety and the rootedness in reality. The weakest section being the prayers for those whose marriages have broken up but the variety of such circumstances probably makes this task especially hard.

Certainly a good present for newly weds and a good resource for those working with couples. Particularly impressive is the long list of prayer / reflections for pretty well every anniversary from paper to tin, from crystal to sapphire. A good buy and a good read.

Elizabeth Davies

Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004. 230 pp. 0268021791. £16.95

Seeing the Christian family as a genuine church was a belief that goes all the way back to the earliest days of the church. The idea enjoyed popularity for a few centuries, but then it was all but forgotten for hundreds of years. Families "belonged" to the church. Families "went" to

church. Families "contributed" to the church. But in the mind of most Catholics, families were more like outsiders as families. But then came Vatican II and through the insistence of Bishop Pietro Fioresi, who had been involved in the Christian Family Movement, the church was reminded on this important idea.

Thus in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church there appeared the affirmation that the Christian Family was the *domestic church*. Pope Paul VI in his wonderful exhortation on evangelisation said that all the essential features of the church could be found in the family. This meant that the family had a major role in evangelisation, catechesis, worship and ministry. Then Pope John Paul II adopted this same approach to families and mentioned its identity as a *domestic church* hundreds of times in his writings and addresses around the world. So much for church teaching.

Now it's time to spread the word and probe more deeply the many implications for Christian families. The author of this exhaustive study, herself a wife, mother and theologian (she earned her Ph. D. at Boston College with this topic being her final dissertation). In fact, the book builds on her academic work as she broadens its base for readers who have an interest in this important subject.

She describes the meaning of the term *domestic church*, its application to the mission of the church in the world, and how the life of the family itself contains a rich sacramentality, a theological concept she develops at some length.

Then she describes the relationship of the *domestic church* in the context of the family as a school of Christian virtue and the role of the family in serving life. Here she notes that the consistent ethic of life as proposed by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin somewhat misses the importance of the family. She also provides wise comments on how "imperfect" families remain as church. After all, all churches are imperfect to some degree. They are human and that's what makes them holy. They are all gathered by the redeeming and sanctifying love of God.

Throughout the book is a kind of plea that this notion of the family as church be given more attention both by church leaders and by families themselves. It can, and it already has played a major role in some families' lives. More however deserve to know about this sacred dimension of their ordinary life.

Readers should know that this book is an adapta-

tion of an academic work. There are over 50 pages of notes. Nevertheless, it's the best book we currently have to explore this important theological idea.

David Thomas

When Marriage Breaks Up: A Guide for Christians. Pauline Druiff. London: SPCK, 2004 0281056765 £8.99

Pauline Druiff is a founder member of Broken Rites, a support group for the divorced and separated spouses of Christian ministers. Her book is short, to the point and written from the perspective of personal experience, supplemented by stories and poems from others in the Broken Rites group. This helps to drive home a very important point that one marital break up is not necessarily like another and neither is the recovery period.

In eight chapters Druiff examines the beginning of a marriage and its subsequent breakdown, the Christian vision of marriage, the emotional turmoil of breaking up, faith issues that affect Christians, the specifics of life in a vicarage, the process of reclaiming identity after a divorce, moving on and marrying again. A bit of a 'slow-starter' the book improves with every chapter as the author's insights and experience come through.

One interesting point about the helpful addresses listed in the appendix. They include Marriage Care and Marriage Encounter but not the ASDC.

Elizabeth Davies

The Trinity at Home: A Family Likeness. Duncan Basil. London: St Pauls, 1999 085439561X £3.95

An interesting work with possibilities but spoiled for me by the author's attempt to 'fit' the persons of the Trinity into the human family persons of mother (Jesus), father (Creator), child (Spirit). I've always relished the female qualities of the Holy Spirit and practically speaking find it easier to see Jesus as child rather than mother—but then that's just me. However I'm not quite sure what the relationship of Creator/Son implies about Basil's understanding of husband/wife. He is a Cistercian monk so maybe there is a little too much idealisation or perhaps distance from the messy, complex dynamic of family life at the root of his thesis? I picked this book up because I was hoping for an Augustinian exploration of Trinity within the home but was disappointed.

Elizabeth Davies

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

Email: ElizabethDavies@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com or DavidThomas@bethanyfamilyinstitute.com

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