

FAMILY: AN ECCLESIAL REALITY VISION

The family constitutes a special revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too, can and should be called the domestic church.

Apostolic Exhortation on the Family (Familiaris Consortio), 21

The Church is the sacrament of God's love. In the same way, the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. In its own way, it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church pass by way of the family.

John Paul II

A family is our first community and most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world. The early church expressed this truth by calling the Christian family a "domestic church" or "church of the home".

MISSION

**Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message of the US Catholic Bishops to Families
November 17, 1993**

...the basic vocation of every person is the same: follow the way of love, even as Christ loved you (cf. Eph 5:2). The Lord issues this call to your family and to every family regardless of its condition or circumstances.

What you do in your family to create a community of love, to help each other to grow, and to serve those in need is critical, not only for your own sanctification, but for the strength of society and our Church. It is a participation in the work of the Lord, a sharing in the mission of the Church. It is holy.

Follow the Way of Love

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the end of time.

Families are...

Matthew 28: 19-20

Disciple-makers	Initiators	Value Builders
Processes of attachment, self- concept and self- esteem, relationship development, life skills	Agents of socialization, life cycle passages, traditions, rituals, faith practices	Parents - the first and foremost educators of their children, value formation, principles

You carry out the mission of the church of the home in ordinary ways when you believe... love... foster intimacy ... evangelize ... educate ... pray together ... serve one another ... forgive and seek reconciliation ... celebrate ... welcome ... act justly ... affirm life ... raise up vocations. No domestic church does this perfectly. But neither does any parish or diocesan church. All members of the Church struggle daily to become more faithful disciples of Christ. **Follow the Way of Love**

FAMILY SPIRITUALITY

As the basic community of believers, bound in love to one another, the family is the arena in which the drama of redemption is played out. The dying and rising with Christ is most clearly manifested. Here, the cycle of sin, hurt, reconciliation, and healing is lived out over and over again. In family life is found the church of the home: where each day "two or three are gathered" in the Lord's name; where the hungry are fed; where the thirsty are given drink; where the sick are comforted. It is in the family that the Lord's injunction to forgive "seventy times seven" is lived out in the daily reconciliation of husband, wife, parent, child, grandparent, brothers, sisters, and extended kin.

A Family Perspective in Church and Society, 21

But remember, a family is holy not because it is perfect, but because God's grace is at work in it, helping it to set out anew everyday on the way of love.

CHALLENGES OF U.S. BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER FOLLOW THE WAY OF LOVE

- ✠ **To urge our diocesan agencies and parishes to create ways for families to communicate with church leadership about their needs and their strengths.**
- ✠ **To see that our parishes, schools, institutions, and diocesan agencies examine the extent to which their policies and programs help or hinder family growth and enable families to meet their responsibilities.**
- ✠ **To give serious consideration to changing those policies and programs that are no longer responsive to contemporary family needs or make it difficult for families to assume their rightful place as a church of the home.**
- **Call and Mission of the Christian Family**

Evangelii Gaudium - Joy of the Gospel #66 Pope Francis, 2013

"The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others

despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. As the French bishops have taught, it is not born 'of loving sentiment, ephemeral by definition, but from the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life'."

Lumen Gentium, #11

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, December 7, 1965)

From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries. In what might be regarded as the domestic Church, **the parents**, by word and example, **are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children**. They must foster the vocation which is proper for each child, and thus, with special care, if it regards religion.

Gaudium et Spes, #48, 50, & 52

(Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, December 4, 1963)

Marriage and married love are by nature ordered to the procreation and education of children. Indeed children are the supreme gift of marriage and greatly contribute to the good of the parents themselves...Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. But marriage is not merely for the procreation of children: its nature as an indissoluble compact between two people and the good of the children demand that the mutual love of the partners be properly shown, that it should grow and mature. The family is, in a sense, a school for human enrichment...the married couple must practice an affectionate sharing of thought and common deliberation as well as eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing...Everyone, therefore, who exercises an influence in the community and in social groups should devote himself effectively to the welfare of marriage and the family.

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Apostolicam Actuositatem, #11

(Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, November 18, 1965)

The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfill this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all their brethren in need.

**Evangelii Nuntiandi, #71 (Pope Paul VI)
(Evangelization in the Modern World, December 8, 1975)**

One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity.

At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of "Domestic Church." This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.

In a family, which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them.

And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms a part. Families resulting from a mixed marriage also have the duty of proclaiming Christ to the children in the fullness of the consequences of a common Baptism; they have moreover the difficult task of becoming builders of unity.

Familiaris Consortio, #17 ff, (Pope John Paul II) (Apostolic Exhortation on the Family)

Accordingly, the family must go back to the "beginning" of God's creative act if it is to attain self-knowledge and self-realization in accordance with the inner truth not only of what it is, but also of what it does in history. And since in God's plan it has been established as an "intimate community of life and love," the family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love in an effort that will find fulfillment in the Kingdom of God...Hence the family has the mission to guard, reveal and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the church, his bride.

Familiaris Consortio, #49

This communion of persons is rooted in the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members that constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community...the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called the "domestic church."

All members of the family, each according to his or her own gift, have the grace and responsibility of building day by day the communion of persons, making the family "a school of deeper humanity."

In order to better understand the foundations, the contents and the characteristics of this participation (in the life and mission of the church), we must examine the many profound bonds linking the church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a 'church in miniature" (ecclesia domestica), in such a way that in its own way, the family is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the church.

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE BENEDICT XVI at the 5th world meeting of families

Complete human fulfilment only comes about when we make a sincere gift of ourselves to others.

The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love.

The family is itself based primarily on a deep interpersonal relationship between husband and wife, sustained by affection and mutual understanding. The love between father and mother is a source of great security for children and it teaches them the beauty of a faithful and lasting love.

[the family] is a unique good for children, who are meant to be the fruit of the love, of the total and generous self-giving of their parents.

Father and mother have said a complete "yes" in the sight of God, which constitutes the basis of the sacrament which joins them together.

The Lord makes it possible for us, through our human love, to be sensitive, loving and merciful like Christ.

To hand down the faith to children, ... is a responsibility which parents cannot overlook, neglect or completely delegate to others.

The family is ... a school which enables men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity.

The experience of being loved by their parents helps children to become aware of their dignity as children.

Grandparents] can be - and so often are - the guarantors of the affection and tenderness which every human being needs to give and receive. They offer little ones the perspective of time, they are memory and richness of families. [Grandparents] are a treasure which the younger generation should not be denied, especially when they bear witness to their faith at the approach of death.

From *Amoris Laetitia*, the Pope's apostolic exhortation on love in the family

"I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems." [57]

"The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty.

Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union." [232]

"I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, 'always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street'." [308]

"Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort." [130]

"I think, for example, of the speed with which people move from one affective relationship to another.

They believe, along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at a whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly 'blocked'... We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye." [39]

"Here let me say a word to fiancés. Have the courage to be different. Don't let yourselves get swallowed up by a society of consumption and empty appearances. What is important is the love you share, strengthened and sanctified by grace. You are capable of opting for a more modest and simple celebration in which love takes precedence over everything else." [212]