



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.



The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is... family, become what you are.

~*Familiaris Consortio* #17

Understanding the meaning of “family” can be challenging because of the diversity of thinking present in today’s culture. Some people think that a family is the basic unit in society, traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their own or adopted children. Other people believe that any group of people who live together and share common attitudes, interests, or goals is considered family. While both of these can be used to define the word family, this segment will explore family as designed in God’s plan and described by Catholic Church teachings.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states that the family in God’s plan is “established upon the consent of the spouses. Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children.” (CCC 2201) Basic to this teaching is the belief that each member of a family is equal in dignity and that each person has varied responsibilities, rights and duties that build the common good.

The Catholic Church calls each family a domestic church. This name reflects that each family is founded in Christ. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father’s work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ.” (CCC 2205) A family is our first community and the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.

“The family is the original cell of social life... Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and

fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom... The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped and the poor”. (CCC 2207, 2208)

These characteristics of family set it apart from the secular world’s view of family. Each Catholic family is given a divine charge to share the faith through prayer and virtue, become a community of love and care for its members. In 1981, Pope John Paul II wrote an apostolic exhortation called *Familiaris Consortio* (or On the Family), which addresses concerns of the family in the modern world. This letter presents an exciting vision for marriage and family life, and a blueprint for each family desiring to form itself according to God’s will.

The Holy Father identified four tasks that mark Christian families: form a community of persons, serve life, participate in the development of society, and share in the life and mission of the Church. These tasks serve as the “mission” of the family, giving direction on how to become what it is meant to be – a community of love and life. The end result of this mission is the family’s ability to reveal, guard and communicate goodness and love.

It is worthwhile for parents to think about each of these four tasks and consider how they might carry each of them out. Each task directs parents to a specific set of practical behaviors, and each requires effort and discipline. But the outcome is the accomplishment of the major goal of parenting – to raise an adult who is pleasing to the Lord.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

There are four tasks that make the mission of the Catholic family real.

Form a community of _____. The essence of the first task is to ensure that each member of the family knows they are _____ and _____.

_____ life. The distinct elements within the second task include a _____ that human life and the way it is created is _____ and that parents will _____ their children in the beauty of human love.

_____ in the development of _____.

The third task states that the _____ is the first and vital cell of society.

Share in the life and mission of the _____. The fourth task asks parents to _____ the kingdom of God through the family.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. The teachings of the Catholic Church state that your family is a domestic church. How might this “title” change your view of parenting?
2. Why is it important for families to be a community of persons, rather than just a group that shares space and resources?
3. Why does the Catholic Church teach that reserving sexual activity for marriage is a way to serve life?
4. How can parents express concern to their legislators about issues that have an impact on the family? What happens if parents do not express their concerns?
5. Besides receiving the sacraments regularly, how can families participate in the life of their parish? How can families build up their parish community?

Make a Plan

Forming a community of persons, serving life, contributing to the development of society and participating in the life and mission of the Church are the tasks of a Catholic family. Below is a table that offers concrete examples for integrating these responsibilities into everyday life. Read through the examples offered under each task. In the right hand column, write one or more actions that you are willing to institute into your family life over the next month. You can choose from the examples given or use your own ideas.

| Form a Community of Persons | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make meal time a “media free” zone.• Spend one hour each week playing games together.• Clean the house together as a family.• Take a walk together.• Snuggle on the couch and read a book.• Your ideas. | During the next month we will.. |

| Serve Life | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stop watching any media that degrades marriage.• Pray for the unborn.• Celebrate life – send cards for new births in the parish, help families with new babies, or visit nursing homes.• Visit with an elderly person.• Care for someone who is disabled.• Your ideas. | During the next month we will.. |

Contribute to the Development of Society

- Practice manners in your home.
- Get to know your neighbors.
- Contact a **local** representative asking to receive legislative updates.
- Contact a **federal** representative asking to receive legislative updates.
- Work in a food pantry.
- Your ideas.

During the next month we will..

Participate in the Life and Mission of the Church

- Attend Mass every week.
- Volunteer to help at a parish event.
- Tithe (give 10% of gross wages to the parish).
- Read your diocesan newspaper.
- Create a family prayer routine at meals and bedtime.
- Your ideas.

During the next month we will..

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Bishop of LaCrosse
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