

What are the **Challenges** in Your **Family** Relationships?

'We love because God first loved us. If we say we love God, but hate our brothers and sisters, we are liars. For people cannot love God, whom they have not seen, if they do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they have seen. The command that Christ has given us is this: all who love God must love their brothers and sisters.'

1 JOHN 4:19-21

Home is a holy place because relationships within the family reflect God's relationship with us

Where is love? Life-giving love flourishes particularly in healthy marital, parental and family relationships. Such relationships can be messy, of course; we cannot deny that. But they serve as the ties that bind us together. And that is where our God is to be found: in the heart of family love and in the heart of family connectedness or *communion*. What are the challenges in your family relationships? How, if at all, do you cope with these challenges?



Talking it Through:

Do Family Relationships Matter?

The Catholic Church views healthy family relationships or family *communion* as the bedrock of communion in society and in the wider church. But perhaps more importantly than either of these considerations, healthy family relationships are critical to the growth and development of each and every one of us as individuals and crucial to our survival as a family.

'Purely functional relationships are not enough for human beings. They need interpersonal relationships that are rich in inner depth, gratuitousness and self-sacrifice.'

John Paul II. Jubilee of Families 2000

During *Listening 2004* and during the process of developing this resource, families have continually affirmed the importance of family relationships to their physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. How important are family relationships to you? How have they helped your relationship with God?

Challenges...

'At the moment the biggest thing for me is acceptance – to accept them in all the things they do or think that I don't agree with and I don't like and aren't of me. And for them to accept me for my weaknesses.'

Simon, husband and father of three teenage boys

'Human relationships between Christians and their families, friends, and neighbours are the most powerful evangelising force in England and Wales'

Evangelisation in England and Wales: a report to the Catholic Bishops, 2002

Responding to the challenge

How do healthy family relationships flourish and what can the Church do to help? This list of strengths found in healthy families suggests some ways forward. Catholic writer Dolores Curran developed it in the 1980's after consulting experts in education, family counselling, health services, voluntary organisations and the church. These experts agreed that healthy families:

- **Communicate and listen**
- **Affirm and support one another**
- **Teach respect for others**
- **Develop a sense of trust**
- **Have a sense of play and humour**
- **Exhibit a sense of shared responsibility**
- **Teach a sense of right and wrong**
- **Have a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound**
- **Have a balance of interaction among members**
- **Have a shared religious core**
- **Respect the privacy of one another**
- **Value service to others**
- **Foster family table time and conversation**
- **Share leisure time**
- **Admit to and seek help with problems**

Have these strengths stood the test of time? Which do your family possess? How can your parish help families develop these strengths?

More Questions

- **What's good about your family relationships?**
- **During the making of the DVD Emma described her marriage as central: 'As long as we are steady as a team together we've got a chance of the rest of the family working.'**
What can your parish do to help

For Groups:

Family Focal Point

Invite your guests to bring an object from home that best represents for them their family (eg a symbol of family activity, a photo). Cover a small table with an ordinary tablecloth. Light a candle that is usually found at home—the small, squat variety are best. Invite everyone to place their object on the table and to say a few words about their choice and what it means to them. Say a short prayer of thanks to God for the gift of family.

Darkness and Light Ritual

Materials needed – large candle, small pebbles, small tea lights, soft music

Have a centre table with a large candle and enough tea lights for everyone. Give out stones to represent the burdens we carry. With appropriate music playing invite people to consider privately, and name in their heart to God, whatever burden they are carrying in their family relationships and to lay it down around the candle. Invite them then to think of what is the most joyful and hopeful aspect of their family relationships and to light a candle for this.

You could also use the baptismal symbolism of **a bowl of water** and invite people to dip their hands in it and if they wish, refresh and bless themselves with water.

couples stay 'steady as a team'?

- **Margaret says one of the hardest things for her is feeling a failure at everything. Have you ever felt like this? How can your parish help parents like Margaret?**
- **When have you experienced 'the light and love of God' enter through 'the cracks and gaping holes' in your family life?**

Further resources available:

www.homeisaholyplace.org.uk