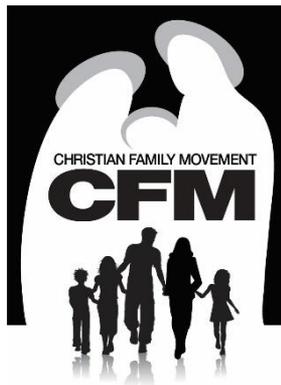


Loving the Family God Gives Us

The strength of the family
“lies in its capacity to love
and to teach how to love.”
-Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*

A CFM Program



*Christian
Family
Movement*



Loving the Family God Gives Us

*An Inquiry Book
Published by the
Christian Family Movement*

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Introduction

To confine itself to practical limits, the Christian Family Movement looks to the teachings of the popes in its search for effective and meaningful programs. This particular book is in response to Pope Francis' recent focus on all things family - including the Extraordinary Synod, a multitude of general audiences, the World Meeting of Families, and *Amoris Laetitia*.

"There is one institution which cannot be replaced by anything else, which lies at the root of the happiness of mankind, of peace, progress and civilization: It is the family which is the first cell and the first center of life, the first home. The family is an image of God, of the Blessed Trinity."

- Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, originator of the *Observe, Judge, Act* method

God has allowed the human family to be an image of the Trinity, and in that reality, is a great gift and a great responsibility. We must protect and nurture the human portrayal of God himself. This program guide will focus on the universal experience of being a child, something even Jesus himself experienced.

"Being children is the basic condition for knowing the love of God, which is the ultimate source of this authentic miracle. In the soul of every child, inasmuch as it is vulnerable, God places the seal of this love, which is at the basis of his/her personal dignity, a dignity which nothing and no one can ever destroy."

- Pope Francis, *General Audience, February 11, 2015*

Loving the Family God Gives Us will serve as a guide for reflection on the commonality of the following relationships: being created by God, being the child of a father, being the child of a mother, complementarity, loving our brothers, loving our sisters, having the opportunity to experience intimacy, and the blessings of generations and extended family. May God bless you as you explore the rich mystery of the image of God portrayed through the love of family!

Acknowledgements

The process of writing a CFM program book is a collegial one and involves the same three elements found in a CFM meeting. The editor, writers, and program committee members come together to *Observe* a concept in all its dimensions within contemporary society. We then *Judge* how we can shed the light of Christ's teaching on this reality through prayer, Scripture reflection, and Social Inquiry. Finally, we *Act* to produce a book which challenges and supports each CFM family as they strive to live the Gospel every day in their homes, parishes, and communities.

The following individuals were an integral part of the production of this book.

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Outline of a CFM Meeting

CFM groups usually meet in homes. If this is impossible because of the size of members' homes or geographical distances involved, groups sometimes meet in a church facility. The group members take turns hosting and leading the meeting.

GATHER AND REPORT ON ACTIONS

Take a few minutes to let one another know how your life has been since you last met. Group members report on the progress of CFM actions taken individually, as a family, or by the group.

OPENING PRAYER AND SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

God's word and our prayer move group members out of their busy lives and toward the issues of the meeting. Prayer helps them to focus on these issues from a Christian perspective.

SOCIAL INQUIRY - Observe, Judge, Act

OBSERVE

Members should "get the facts." At this stage of the meeting, members should refrain from expressing their opinions about facts. They should try to simply report, like any good objective newspaper reporter. The knowledge and experience of group members are valuable, but the group must go beyond its own members to gather facts from the larger world and report them objectively. One can editorialize later.

JUDGE

For CFMers, to judge is not to find another person sinful or holy; it is rather the comparison of how things are with how things should be, in accord with Gospel values. To make such a comparison requires objective observation of how things are, as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

ACT

If the group judges through prayer, observation, and reflection that things are not as they should be, then ways to bring about a change will come forth from the group. Actions listed in the book are suggestions. The best actions come from the group. They may be directed toward improving family life relationships, or toward the community and beyond.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

Simple questions are provided at the end of each chapter to facilitate carrying the conversation into the home with children and other family members.

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer is supplied for each meeting, but this is also a good time to offer prayers for the intentions of the group.

SOCIAL TIME

A short social with simple and inexpensive refreshments helps members to know and understand one another better and builds community.

Hosting a CFM Meeting

Many CFM groups rotate hosting the meeting each month. The host often facilitates the meeting, or another member takes this role.

Call the couples in your group 3 to 4 days before the meeting to remind them to come, give directions, etc. Encourage them to do their Actions and Observations before the meeting.

Try to involve your children in the preparation for the meeting. The night of the meeting, ask them to help welcome everyone...help take coats, put out the snacks, etc. Keep refreshments simple.

Provide beverages (soft drinks, coffee, tea) and some sort of dessert after the meeting.

Start on time and end on time. Remember the social time after the discussion is also important for the building of community...and relaxing! If the discussion goes too long it will mean less social time.

Be aware of the time and “keep it rolling” in order to progress from OBSERVES to JUDGES to ACTS...the whole sequence is the CFM meeting. If you’re spending more time on one question, call a “time out” to get on track or skip a question or two to keep things moving.

Don’t be afraid of silence. Often people need time to organize their thoughts before they respond. Leave time for this to happen.

Try to stick to the questions. If a really good side discussion happens, encourage people to continue it during social time.

ONE

Who Am I? Why Do I Exist?

We are all sons and daughters... We did not give ourselves life, but we received it....Being children is the basic condition for knowing the love of God.

- Pope Francis

GATHER

The host may choose a way to welcome the group and set the tone for the meeting. You could watch a Youtube video:

- “A Love Letter from Jesus,” by Tommy Coomes Band
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7phiWTPtLpA
(time 5:11, best used with a computer as it is music with a slideshow)
- “The Love of God” by Mercy Me
www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWnvmKoLWUU
(time 3:38, screen unnecessary)

As a group, go to page 4 and read the Introduction together to prepare for the theme of this year’s program guide.

OPENING PRAYER

“God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate,

make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.”
- John Henry Cardinal Newman

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Before birth the Lord called me, from my mother’s womb he gave me my name.”
- Isaiah 49:1

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are.”
- 1 John 3:1

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- Romans 8:38-39

1. What does it mean to be a child? What does it mean to be a child of God?
2. What sentiments do the passages above stir up within you?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

“At the intersection of philosophy and theology lies one question: ‘Why does man exist?’ Various philosophers and theologians have attempted to address this question on the basis of their own beliefs and philosophical systems. In the modern world, perhaps the most common answer is that man exists because a random series of events culminated in our species. But at best, such an answer addresses a different question -- namely, ‘how’ did man come to be?-- and not ‘why.’ The real question is ‘Why does man exist?’ Or more personally, ‘Why did God make me?’”
- Scott P. Richert, *Why Did God Make Me?*

The Baltimore Catechism answers this question in the following way: “God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, and to be happy with Him forever in the next.” These

points cover our identity, our mission and our destination. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “God created all things ‘not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and to communicate it.” and “Man is predestined to reproduce the image of God’s Son made man, the ‘image of the invisible God,’ so that Christ shall be the first-born of a multitude of brothers and sisters.”

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 293 and 381*

“At the heart of (our) faith is a God who looks with love upon the children he has created. He sees in us the devastating afflictions sin has caused, and he enters into the drama of our lives to join us and to comfort us. ...What was the cause of Christ’s joy that enabled him to endure the cross? First that you are worth it. He died for you personally, so your life must be worth immeasurable value. Second, that what he gained for you must be worth it. What awaits you in heaven must be of unimaginable worth. ... We deceive ourselves, though, into thinking that if we just tried harder we might be able to close the gap between who we are and who we ought to be...His death (and resurrection) is the only effective remedy for our gap. His mercy is the perfect response to our misery.”

- *Curtis Martin, “Triumphant Mercy”*

We are of heavenly birth and origin. Our self-definition ultimately has to come from God. God loves each of us as we are. God understands us and feels our pain. He sees the good more than the sin. We are priceless and valuable to Him! He delights in us. He celebrates us! If we depend on people to make us feel like we matter, we will be disappointed. God never disappoints. The only thing that can separate us is our refusal to permit God to love us.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Children’s Health*, research shows that children’s parents or primary caregivers are the biggest influence on a child’s self-identity from infancy through toddlerhood and preschool. As we know from our own experience, the first few years of a child’s life are very important. They are the formative years when the foundation is laid for the personality of the individual. One must receive love before they can give it. A

child must understand that they are loved. They need to experience the love of their parents, who are together a model of the love of God.

“When it comes to the children who come into the world, no sacrifice on the part of adults is too costly or too great, to ensure that no child believe he or she was a mistake, is worthless or is abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men”.

- Pope Francis, General Audience, April 8, 2015

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. What are some typical criteria people use when describing themselves? What gives a person his or her identity?
2. Research the developmental stages of self-acceptance and self-worth and common times when problems might arise.
 - You might begin at *Encyclopedia of Children's Health*, <http://www.healthofchildren.com/S/Self-Esteem.html>.
 - What are some of the signs that might indicate that an individual is experiencing a lack of self-worth? You might begin here: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Signs-of-Low-Self-Esteem.aspx>.
3. Reflect on your own experience growing up. How do you think your relationship with your parents affected the development of your self-confidence/self-acceptance? What other circumstances played a role?
4. Reflect on and ask two others the following questions:
 - “Where do I come from? Where will I go when I die? Who is God?”
 - Do you believe in God? If so, how did you learn to know him? If not, did you ever? What changed?
 - What is your perception of God--a judge, a father, a brother, a savior? Other?

- Does your perception of God affect how you look at yourself?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. What does our perceived identity have to do with our self-esteem and self-acceptance?
2. How does one's experience of love and acceptance during childhood affect their attitude/behavior as an adult? How can negative experiences be healed?
3. How can parents and caring adults help children to understand and experience the love God has for them, empowering them and providing hope and promise.
4. Is it important to understand God's love and mercy before we can show that to others?
5. Of the four points referenced in the Baltimore Catechism as to why God made us, which ones are the least emphasized in today's society? In the Church? Or in your own daily walk? How can talking about these things foster identity, purpose and fulfillment?
6. What happens when people don't feel love and security? How can this lead to self-deprecation or maybe even suicide?

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

Ideally ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Identify and reach out to someone who needs to know love.
2. Learn about or get involved in suicide prevention or support for those who have lost a loved one due to suicide.
3. How can you as an individual or as a CFM group help others to know God's love and mercy?

4. Get more comfortable talking about and asking questions like those asked in Observe 4, going even deeper.
5. Women/daughters watch/share this video: “Who You Are: A Message to All Women,” by Jon Jorgenson
www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWi5iXnguTU.
6. Men/sons watch/share this video: “Who You Are: A Message to All Men,” by Jon Jorgenson,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTAn-tk2pDA
Search “Who you are a message to all men/women”

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - For use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

1. Make a family banner to show how God loves us - You might include these words from Genesis chapter 1: “God created...and saw that it was good.” Discussion starters: Have you ever made anything and been so happy with how it came out that you just stand back and delight in it? Well, that is how it is with God and you. He is like an artist admiring his handiwork. He delights in you, his child. You are special to him! Our response is to simply say “YES” to his love. He cannot control our response.
2. Play this game of encouragement - Sit in a circle and give everyone a piece of paper and pen. Each person should write their name at the top of the piece of paper, then pass it to the person on their left. Each person then writes one or two (or more) positive characteristics about the person whose name is at the top of the paper. After 30-60 seconds, everyone passes the pieces of paper around to their left again. This continues until everyone has written on everyone else's paper. If one of the members of the family is too young to write, they can say with words what they appreciate.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. What are some ways you experience God's love? Do you question God's love? Our love?
2. Do you know children who don't feel safe or loved or are neglected or abused?
3. How can we help each other know we are loved? How can sacrifice be an expression of love?
4. Why did you think God made you and me?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date_____Time_____Place_____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I can't fathom why you chose to make me! To be your child! I have nothing that makes me worthy of this great lineage. Your love pours down upon me, satiating my thirst for acceptance and security. Your constant watchfulness brings an overwhelming peace to my soul. I am content in your presence. I want for nothing. Your steadfast love gives me confidence. I fear nothing with you at my side. You are my everlasting Father. I will be your everlasting child. Your mercy is boundless and my desire is to be pleasing to you. In my smallness, you have forgiven me and raised me to the privilege of being your beloved child. May I know you, love you and follow you all the days of my life and dwell with you for eternity!

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

TWO

Begotten of a Man: I Am a Child of a Father

GATHER

The host may choose another way to welcome the group and set the tone for the meeting. Listen to “Good, Good Father,” by Casting Crowns, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRvuk9XU-KM.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, your commandments teach us “Honor thy father and mother.” We pray that all fathers may be filled with integrity, faith, and trustworthiness. May they serve as role models for their sons and daughters to live lives of Christian love and service. Help them to focus on making positive life choices that will leave their children with happy memories to shape their lives. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

Recall your actions in response to discussion at the last meeting and take a few moments to report on the outcomes and any insights you gained from the experience.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Then he said, ‘A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’ So, the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need.

“So, he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”’ So, he got up and went back to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But his father ordered his servants, ‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.

“Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, ‘Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

“He said to his father in reply, ‘Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’ He said to him, ‘My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’”

- *Luke 15:11-32*

“Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, ‘This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.’”

- *Mark 9:7*

1. What can we learn from the encounter of the elder son with his father in this account of paternal mercy?
2. How does the father’s love for both of his sons compare with God’s love for us?
3. What can be learned about fatherhood from God’s support of his Son, as revealed in the story of the Transfiguration in Mark, above and also the story of the Baptism in the Jordan (Mt 3:17)?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Pope Francis has addressed the topic of fatherhood in general audiences on several occasions: “‘Father’ is a term familiar to everyone, a universal word. It indicates a fundamental relationship. Today, however, one has reached the point of claiming that our society is a ‘society without fathers.’...Sometimes it seems that fathers don’t know what their role in the family is or how to raise their children.”

- *General Audience, Jan. 28, 2015*

“In fact, according to God’s plan, being son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another, original and new, human being....May Jesus, the eternal Son, who in the fullness of time became a child, help us find the path of a new radiation of this so great and so simple a human experience of being God’s children....

“There is a close link between the hope of a people and the harmony among generations. The joy of children causes the parents’ hearts to open and reopens the future. Children are the joy of the family and of society.... Children are a gift. Each one is

unique and irreplaceable, and at the same time unmistakably linked to his/her roots.” - *Pope Francis, General Audience, February 11, 2015*

“The war against fatherhood is one in which men themselves are complicit. Many men have vacated their responsibility to fulfill this lifelong role for their children. They are not fathers in real sense but impregnators, performing the basic organic requirements of fatherhood, then disappearing. ...The positive effects fathers have on their children are mostly seen by looking at cases where fathers are absent:

- 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes.
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.
- 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.
- 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes.
- 85% of all youths sitting in prison come from fatherless homes.
- Fatherless children average higher in teen suicides, illegitimate birthrates, incarceration, and unemployment.”
- *Larry Nolte, “The Attack on Fatherhood”*

A child is doubly blessed when his father is a spiritual leader and a witness of adult Christian life, modeling a living experience with Christ and the Church. But children have no control over whether they live with their fathers or not. Neither do they have control whether their fathers are model ones or not. As each of us is a child of a father, we can revel and find comfort in the Scriptures. Psalm 68:6 proclaims, “God is the Father of the fatherless,” and John 14:18 promises, “I will not leave you orphans. I will come to you.”

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. What characteristics do you think make an ideal father?

2. Share a prominent memory of your father or a time when you particularly missed having one.
3. Was there someone who served as a father figure in your life?
4. List the resources available in your church and community that support the role of fatherhood.

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. How do you picture the role of fatherhood in today's society?
2. In what ways are you like/different from your father?
3. How are children today following in the steps of their fathers? In what ways are their lives very different?
4. How can we help children with absent or struggling fathers come to know God as their perfect and merciful father?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Write a letter of thankfulness or forgiveness to your father (living or deceased). Prayer will help you decide whether to send or not send.
2. Identify a young person without a father figure in their lives. Pray about what you as an individual or as a CFM group might be able to do to help provide paternal support for them.
3. What can our CFM group do to help promote responsible fatherhood? Consider inviting nationally known speakers on fatherhood or listen to a recording (Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers, Matthew Kelly, etc.).

4. Explore *FathersforGood.org*, an initiative of the Knights of Columbus, www.fathersforgood.org/ffg/en/other/about.html. See the article, "Fathers on a Mission."

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - *for use with families meeting together or can be modified for those caring for children while the adults are meeting:*

Search the web for "prodigal son games and activities."

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. How do we "see" God as our Father when we pray the Lord's Prayer?
2. What is the role (place) of the father in the family?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Join together in saying the Lord's Prayer and the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover

THREE

Born of A Woman

GATHER

The host of the meeting may choose a song or video to share with the group.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you are the creator of the universe. You sent your only begotten son as the blessed fruit of Mary's womb. In your infinite wisdom you have also chosen for us to enter this world nurtured and protected in our mother's womb. Help us to reflect and understand how the effect of having been born of a woman is an integral part of your plan of salvation. Amen

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"You have been my guide since I was first formed, my security at my mother's breast. To you I was committed at birth, from my mother's womb you are my God."- *Psalm 22:10-11, New American Bible*

"Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home."
- *John 19:25-27*

"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."

- *Isaiah 66:13*

1. How do you see God giving confidence to his children from stories recounted by their mothers from before they were born?
2. How did Jesus provide comfort for his loved ones even in his last moments of agony on the cross?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

“The first and most immediate human relationship we experience is with our mothers. Through their cooperation with God, together with our fathers, they gave us life. In an ongoing commitment that nurtures the family and provides a context for our life, our mothers devote their time, energy, resources and love so we can grow, develop and mature.”

- Cardinal Donald Wuerl, *“Eternally connected by the Bond of Love”*

“John Paul writes that women exercise ‘an affective, cultural and spiritual motherhood, which has inestimable value for the development of individuals and the future of society’. He also highlights maternity, biological and spiritual: ‘Woman is endowed with a particular capacity for accepting the human being in his concrete form’...’This singular feature -- which prepares her for motherhood, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually -- is inherent in the plan of God, who entrusted the human being to women in an altogether special way.’”

- Mary Jo Anderson, *“Feminine Genius”*

There are varied reasons that a mother may not be present either physically and/or emotionally in a child’s life. Obvious reasons are sickness and death. In addition, the last century has seen a diversification of family structures.

In an article on maternal absence, Denise Vallance lists among these changes an increase in non-marital cohabitation or common-law relations (including same-sex couples), an increase in

the divorce rate, and an increase in the prevalence of reproductive technology. “In the last 100 years, blended- and lone-parent families have replaced the nuclear family as the most common family structures in North America, Europe, and Australia.”

Vallance lists times of war and political unrest, economic policies and the demand for cheap labor leading mothers at times to part from their children. “Some mothers lose their legal rights to parent due to incarceration, institutionalization, abandonment, allegations of abuse, or history of substance abuse or addiction. Others may be separated from their children because their ex-partners engage in maternal alienation, in which the ex-partner refuses to let the mother see her children.

“Other mothers may relinquish their children for the purpose of adoption due to emotional, relational, or social circumstances that will not allow for adequate care of their child. Military service, study, work, adventure, and personal growth are other reasons that some mothers leave their children in the care of others.”

- Denise Vallance, “*Maternal Absence*”

“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”

- *Isaiah 49:15*

“Why did God arrange it so that every human person would come into the world through a mother? There must be a reason... A mother not only gives birth, but she is also given by God so that she might nurture, feed, teach, guide, and protect her child. God entrusts her with these tasks. In the human family, a mother is not optional. So too, in the spiritual family of the Mystical Body of Christ, Mary, our Mother is not optional.”

- Grace D. MacKinnon, “*Mary is Our Mother*”

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. In what ways has mothering changed in your lifetime? What effects do you see these changes having on children and families?

2. When you were young, who were the women in your life who mothered you besides your own mother and how did this influence your life?
3. What was the role of your mother in your journey of faith?
4. What resources/support systems are available in your church/community to support women in the role of motherhood?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. How are children affected by the absence of a mother, i.e., security, confidence, etc.?
2. How could our CFM group help a struggling mother to remain with her child/children?
3. How can/do mothers impart their faith to children?
4. If you are a parent, has parenthood changed your relationship with your own mother? If so, how has it changed and why do you think that might be?
5. How does God provide comfort for those with absent or imperfect mothers?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally, ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. On nice stationery, write a letter of thankfulness or forgiveness to your mother (living or deceased). Prayer will help you decide whether to send or not send.
2. As a group, select a prayer to pray together for your mothers/grandmothers, remembering them by name.

3. Identify a mom who could use your support: Write a note, speak a word of encouragement, offer to help watch her children, cook a meal, etc. This might be a nice group action.
4. Read St. John Paul II's apostolic letter, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* or Edith Stein's *Essays on Woman*.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - *for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:*

Share baby pictures of yourself and your children. Talk to your children about the pregnancy, the day they were born - how you felt, who came to visit them, etc.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. Ask your children if they know of any friends who are struggling because their mother is absent in some way. Brainstorm ways your family can help these friends.
2. Read Isaiah 49:15 with your children and discuss it.
3. Dads: Talk with your family about the ways you believe God has equipped your wife to be a great mom. How have you seen her make sacrifices for the good of the family? Ask your children to thank and honor their mother by drawing or writing about something special their mother has done for them.
4. Moms: Talk with your children about your experience as a mom. "My favorite thing about being your mom is....", "Sometimes it's hard for me to be your mom when...."

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father in Heaven, you called us when we were in our mother's womb. You have guided and tenderly loved us. You have said you will never forget us. Help us to be as babes in our mothers' arms to hear your call and respond to your voice. Help us to understand the depths of your unconditional love for us. Help us to understand who we are as your children, born of a mother. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

CFM in ACTION

An Ann Arbor, Michigan, CFM group assisted a single mother who was struggling with poverty and addiction. A refrigerator was purchased. Food, Christmas decorations, and gifts were brought to the family. During the visit, several women taught and helped the young daughters in the family to clean their home despite the lack of a working sink. Rooms were decorated for the holidays and gifts placed under the tree. The group maintained regular contact with this family, providing monetary assistance for food, clothing and annual Christmas gifts for the family.

FOUR

The Heart of a Man: Loving and Being Loved by Our Brothers

*“...How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell together as one!”
– Psalm 133:1*

GATHER

Light a candle to signify that the light of Christ is among you.

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we come to you this evening to not only engage in fellowship but also to call to mind and truly appreciate the gift you have given to us: love. For it is through this gift that we come to know you. Grant that we, as Christian men and women, can be bold enough to model true Christian love to each other and throughout our society.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

Recall your actions from last meeting and take a few moments to report on your experiences.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I shall not eat it [again] until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you [that] from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And

likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.’”

- *Luke 22: 14-20*

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’ He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me.’”

- *Matthew 26:36-38*

1. Why do you suppose Jesus desired to surround himself with his closest companions prior to his great suffering?
2. In what ways (if any) were the apostles able to offer some sense of comfort to our Lord and to each other in what would ultimately become a time of great suffering?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

When Jesus began his ministry on earth, he called men to join Him who became his apostles. As Jesus approached the last supper and his agony in the garden, we see him open his heart to them. Scripture says that Jesus “eagerly desired” to be with them as he fulfilled his mission here on earth. This account of sharing, sacrifice and brotherly fellowship between these called men provides a powerful portrayal of male companionship.

The Bible provides many examples illustrating the importance of male companionship built on love, while demonstrating its importance in strengthening one’s relationship with God. We read in the Old Testament how Jonathon, son of King Saul, became “bound up with David’s life” and “Jonathon and David made a covenant, because Jonathon loved him as his very self” (1 Samuel 18:1;3). We further read that upon their ultimate departure, Jonathon proclaims, “Go in peace, in keeping with what the two of us have sworn by the name of the Lord: ‘The Lord shall be

between you and me, and between your offspring and mine forever” (1 Samuel 20:42).

Men desire companionship of fellow men after their own hearts. As C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves*, friendship may not be a biological necessity for survival, but as long as men have walked the earth, men have known they need to do things together.

“Long before history began we men have got together apart from women and done things. We had to. And to like doing what must be done is a characteristic that has survival value. We not only had to do things, we had to talk about them. ... We enjoyed one another’s society greatly: we braves, we hunters, all bound together by shared skill, shared dangers and hardships, esoteric jokes -- apart from women and children.”

- C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

In his message to men, Bishop Thomas Olmstead shows how understanding the uniqueness of Christian masculinity can truly deepen our appreciation for male companionship.

“Only in Jesus Christ can we find the highest display of masculine virtue and strength that we need in our personal lives and in society itself. ... The Father sent his Son to reveal what it means to be a man, and the fullness of this revelation becomes evident on the Cross. He tells us that it was for this reason that He came into the world, that it is his earnest desire to give himself totally to us....

“Looking to what the secular world holds up as “manly” is in fact to look at shadows – or even at outright counterfeits of masculinity. No athlete, ... no political leader, ... no performer, business man, or celebrity, no physical attribute or muscle mass, no intelligence or talent, no prizes or achievements can bestow masculinity on a man. ... We can only build a certain foundation for masculinity on the rock, Jesus Christ.”

- Bishop Thomas J. Olmstead, *“Into the Breach”*

Male companionship, as described above, demonstrates the importance of a God centered existence while also demonstrating

the unconditional love, sacrifice and admission of one's vulnerability to each other. Ongoing male companionship with upright Christian men is a great support in learning to live out true masculinity in brotherly love. These relationships can provide inspiration and examples for each other as well as provide role models for sons and other young men and boys to follow. Christian fathers can help their sons to develop these spiritual companionships from an early age.

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. What is society's view of masculinity? What is your view of masculinity? Do they differ?
2. Name some positive characteristics of men you know.
3. What types of friendships do you see among men? What brings them together? Are these the friends called upon in a crisis?
4. What organizations and activities are available in your parish/community that provide positive masculine role models and interaction for men?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. What may prevent men/boys from cultivating deep friendships?
2. Does the possibility of being considered 'homosexual' inhibit men/boys from expressing themselves to other men/boys? If so, how?
3. How can women contribute to supporting the value of male friendships?

4. What does it mean to love our brother? How can we support our brother in his masculinity and nurture his Christ centered mission?

ACT, as a group or individually, based on your discussion:

1. Organize the men of your CFM group to attend a parish or diocesan men's conference or retreat together.
2. Encourage your husband to enjoy a night out or weekend away with his friends. Pray for him while he is away.
3. Identify a male formation program for young men and work to bring it to your area if one does not already exist. Encourage participation by your sons (examples: Conquest Youth Ministry or National Catholic Committee on Scouting Religious Activities).
4. Consider participating in a men's group or forming one.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Plan a father and son experience with other male friends. Ask the boys for suggestions of what they would like to do together.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. Name your best friends. Why are they best?
2. Who are two men you admire and why?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, let Your Kingdom come and Your will be done in the lives of our men on earth as it is in heaven. By faith, we call our men saved, sanctified, and filled with Your Spirit. Your Word instructs that faith without works is dead and useless, so we confess that our men will work to develop and demonstrate their Christian faith, daily.

We declare that they will be priestly providers and protectors of their families. We confess that as they submit to Your Word, they will be transformed into new people by changing the way they think. Lord, we decree that their belief systems and behavior patterns will reflect Your righteousness in their personal and professional lives.

We declare that the light of Jesus will be reflected by their actions. As they fellowship with one another; others will see their good works and praise You, our Father in heaven. Lord, we confess that Your favor surrounds them like a shield.

We confess that they will earn, save, spend and invest money in obedience to Your perfect plan for their lives and families. ...Lord, because we realize that the food we put in our bodies can impact our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual capabilities, we declare that our men will practice healthy eating practices.

Above all, we confess that they are victorious in everything they do, because Your future for them is filled with hope, good and not evil.

- *Excerpted from "A Prayer for Men." (Permission granted)*

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

FIVE

The Heart of a Woman: Loving and Being Loved by Our Sisters

GATHER

The hosts of the meeting may wish to select a song or video to share with the group.

OPENING PRAYER

God, thank you for another day. How we look forward to what you have prepared. Help us to see the signs you lay before us, for we believe that is how we hear your voice. We continue to look for you in others, that they may see you in us. If we know someone is struggling today, may we be willing to come to their aid. Help us especially today to understand the unique relationship that exists with our sisters in Christ. May we be given the grace to understand the nature and gift of women and support them in their vocation. This we pray through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“During those days, Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.... Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.” - *Luke 1:39-40,56*

“On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ [And] Jesus said to her, ‘Woman,

how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servers, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” - *John 2:1-5*

“Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him “Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.”

- *Matthew 1:18-24*

1. How does Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, as well as her concern for the hosts of the wedding at Cana, exemplify the heart of a woman?
2. How does Joseph enable Mary to live out the call and mission revealed by the angel? What qualities did Joseph possess that made him a support to Mary?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

St. Edith Stein, who perished in the Holocaust, wrote about the vocation of women. “[Using] Genesis 2:18, Edith Stein describes the ultimate original duty of women, namely contributing their female spirit wherever private, professional or other reasons may reveal a need. This spirit is able to truly perceive others and to sense individual needs.”

- *Katharina Westerhorstmann, Pro-existence and Self-realization*

“Women are generally not indifferent to what happens to the people in their environment. In the majority of cases, they are the first to notice if a member of their family or somebody at the workplace has problems... [Stein] expresses it in the following way, ‘It is her gift and her happiness to share the life of another human being, namely by taking part in everything that concerns him: in big and small matters, in joy and suffering, and also in tasks and problems.’” - *Westerhorstmann, quoting Edith Stein*

God created women and it is to the benefit of mankind to understand their nature and support the development of their vocation. Men, independent of marital status, can protect and foster the dignity and the development of this vocation.

Pope Paul VI addressed women at the close of the Second Vatican Council: “And now it is to you that we address ourselves, women of all states—girls, wives, mothers and widows, to you also, consecrated virgins and women living alone -- you constitute half of the immense human family.

“...At this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do much to aid mankind in not falling. Wives, mothers of families, the first educators of the human race in the intimacy of the family circle, pass on to your sons and daughters the traditions of your fathers at the same time that you prepare them for an unsearchable future.... Always remember that by her children a mother belongs to that future which perhaps she will not see.

“And you, women living alone, realize what you can accomplish through your dedicated vocation. Society is appealing to you on all sides. Not even families can live without the help of those who have no families. Especially you, consecrated virgins, in a world where egoism and the search for pleasure would become law, be the guardians of purity, unselfishness and piety. Jesus who has given to conjugal love all its plenitudes, has also exalted the renouncement of human love when this is for the sake of divine love and for the service of all.

“Lastly, women in trial, who stand upright at the foot the cross like Mary, you who so often in history have given to men the strength to battle unto the very end and to give witness to the point of martyrdom, aid them now still once more to retain courage in their great undertakings, while at the same time maintaining patience and an esteem for humble beginnings.”

– *Pope Blessed Paul VI, Address to Women*

To know the beauty of female friendship and what it adds to our lives is a miracle in the form of another person. Women need sisters, too. “We need [those] people who will listen to our stories and be there for us as we go through heartbreak and joy and figure out all that life throws our way... someone in your life who can look into your eyes and ask if you’re okay when she already knows you’re not. We all have times when our faith falters and we need someone to remind us of all the ways God has been faithful in the past. [We need] friends who share our love for Christ,... friends [who] give us the ability to take off our masks, knowing they won’t share our heartaches and struggles with the world....Life can be hard, and it can be full of joy. That’s why we need friends who can hold our hand, laugh with us until we cry, pick up our kids from school, deliver a home-cooked meal, or take us shopping for a new pair of shoes to cheer us up. Nothing can replace the people in our life who will actually show up and hug us tight.”

- *Melanie Shankle, “5 Reasons Women Need Deeper Friendships”*

Women need to learn how to form friendships, friendships that go beyond the superficial “friending” of our global, high tech world. They need men who recognize and support this effort. Together, women can learn how to be godly women. Together they can train younger women and raise girls who understand their God-given dignity, helping them to discern their role in the world.

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. List some of the things that girls/females uniquely contribute to the family.
2. Name some female role models in society. In the Church. What makes them role models?
3. Name an important woman, or women in your life. What do you appreciate about them?
4. How are women's friendships portrayed in secular media? What values are expressed by this imagery?
5. What is unique about the friendships formed between women? How do they differ from friendships between men and women or friendships between men?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. Does society recognize the value of femininity? Is there a difference between femininity and feminism?
2. Where can positive feminine formation/role modeling be found? How can we support families in this?
3. Do women need other women as friends? If so, how can we support and encourage the establishment or the strengthening of Godly sister to sister/woman to woman friendships?
4. How can we bring the image of love, evidenced by strong woman to woman friendships into the public square?
5. How can men support women in their unique vocation as women?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Within your family group, if there are strained relationships with a sister, seek ways to help bring about reconciliation (talk on the phone, write a letter, visit them).
2. Together, as women in your CFM group, participate in or establish a women's group (prayer group, Bible study, social justice group, etc.) or attend a women's conference or retreat together. Or just plan a fun "women's night out".
3. Befriend an elderly woman in your parish or faith community and make it a point to visit her regularly.
4. Research organizations that assist at risk females and volunteer or support their work.
5. Men: encourage and support the Act chosen by the women in the group, i.e., watch the children so she can go to a women's group or conference, etc.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Plan a mother/daughter experience with other female friends. Ask the girls for ideas of things they would enjoy doing together.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. During a family meal, ask each member to share their hopes and dreams for the future.
2. Who are two women you admire and why?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date_____Time_____Place_____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, as night draws near we are thankful for your many blessings. Allow us always to see your light and remember that we are never alone. You continue to refresh us in spirit for another day. Help us to lift up and support our sisters in Christ. We praise you always for being our strength when we are weak. Keep us always on the path you have laid before us. This we pray through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

SIX

Brothers and Sisters Teaching Us How to Get Along with Others

GATHER

Choose a hymn or song that calls to mind the manner in which we are all called together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

- Suggestions: “Servant Song” or “Psalm 33: Behold How Good and Pleasant It Is.”

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for giving me brothers and sisters. I thank you for the love and friendship I experience in these relationships. I thank you for their talents and the gifts that they offer to my life. Thank you for teaching me to see another point of view so that I might learn that we are collectively stronger than when we are alone. Lord, help me to be patient when I disagree with my brothers and sisters. Help me to offer forgiveness when I have been wronged. Help me to give support when they are in need. Help me to see you in them. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor.”

- *Romans 12:10*

“Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.”

- *Galatians 5:26*

1. The quotation from Romans is at times translated as “outdo” one another in showing honor. How does this look in comparison to other things at which we humans compete?
2. In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul tells us some things to avoid. Why is it important to focus on breaking bad habits as well as developing good ones? How can we help ourselves and our families to implement these words of wisdom?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

It may seem strange, but our most common relationship is that of being brothers and sisters. All the rest of our relationships probably number less than ten to twenty people (our parents, a spouse if married and possibly several children). The realization that such a great number of our relationships in the Christian family are characterized as brother and sister should inspire us to learn more about this important part of our lives.

“In the family, we learn how to live as one. Perhaps we do not always think about this, but the family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society.”

- *Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, 194*

“Having a brother, a sister, who loves you is a deep, precious, and unique experience. Children need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers and sisters. This training, at times quite demanding, is a true school of socialization...When it has been possible to have only one child, ways have to be found to ensure that he or she does not grow up alone or isolated.”

- *Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, 195*

“We know that...when the relationship between siblings is destroyed, the road is open to painful experiences of conflict, of

betrayal, of hate. The biblical account of Cain and Abel is an example of this negative outcome. After the killing of Abel, God asks Cain: ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ (Gen 4:9a). It is a question that the Lord continues to repeat to every generation. And unfortunately, in every generation, Cain’s dramatic answer never fails to be repeated: ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’

“The rupture of the bond between siblings is a nasty, bad thing for humanity. In the family, too, how many siblings quarrel over little things, or over an inheritance, and then they no longer speak to each other, they no longer greet one another. This is terrible! Brotherhood is a great thing, when we consider that all our brothers and sisters lived in the womb of the same mother for nine months, came from the mother’s flesh! ...Brotherhood must not be broken and when it breaks, what happened to Cain and Abel occurs.

“Should the bond of fraternity which forms in the family between children arise in an educational atmosphere of openness to others, it is the great school of freedom and peace. In the family, among siblings, human coexistence is learned, how one must live in society....

“The blessing that God, in Jesus Christ, pours out on this bond of fraternity, expands in an unimaginable way. He renders it capable of overcoming all differences of nationality, language, culture and even religion.”

- *Pope Francis, General audience, February 18, 2015*

“Relating as brothers and sisters teaches us many things. In order to know oneself well and develop harmoniously, a human being needs the reciprocity of man and woman.”

- *Pope Francis, General audience April 15, 2015*

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. Tell a little about your life growing up. Did interpersonal relationships with siblings get easier or harder as you grew older?

2. Can you share an experience when you really appreciated having a brother or a sister?
3. If you are an only child, tell about that experience. Did you have cousins or family friends who were like siblings to you?
4. Why is it important to have male and female relationships in our youth as well as when we get older?
5. We all know families that have divided siblings. What kinds of things cause division among siblings?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. What are some of the typical ways that brothers find to annoy their sisters? What are some of the typical ways that sisters find to annoy their brothers? Do you think this is a natural part of healthy sibling relationships? How so?
2. How can prayer, attitudes and techniques be used to heal relationships (attitudes of forgiveness and gratitude, humble requests for assistance, etc.)?
3. How can a family foster an attitude of respect? What rules do you have in your home that foster respect, i.e., honoring personal spaces, belongings, opinions, speaking patterns, etc.?
4. How can learned respect among siblings spill over into society? How else do sibling relationships prepare us for relationships outside of the family?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally, ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Spend time with or contact a sibling. If there is tension, pray and seek guidance for reconciliation and take a step toward it.
2. Foster an attitude of service so that children are not focused only on themselves, i.e., deliver something to a neighbor or do a service for them.
3. Look for and provide a private space where siblings can have some time alone.
4. Come up with ideas to teach children to work together on a task or project. Pair an older sibling with a younger one to teach them a task or help them with basic care.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Create a game to help each other “outdo” one another in showing love and respect (Romans 12:10). Provide everyone with a chart. Discuss acts of kindness that could be done in the family. Each child could write down a few ideas on the chart. At home, kids or parents can put a mark in the box when the children are caught doing the good deed.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. Ask your children what things irritate them about their siblings? Have them come up with ideas how to resolve those irritations. What do they value about each other?
2. Consider instituting a weekly family meeting.
3. Discuss personal space with your children. Help them find time/places for this.

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date_____Time_____Place_____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, I thank you for making us male and female. I thank you for the ways that we can help each other, working together. May we bring out the best in each other and respect our differences. Show us your divine plan of fraternal love. May your words ring true: How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together as one!

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the back inside cover.

CFM in Action

CFM families in Torrance, CA spent time at Whispering Winds family camp where they imitated Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Each family had their own bucket of water and sponge. Every family member took a turn washing the feet of their family. While washing each person's feet, they told that person something they admired or liked about them.

SEVEN

Complementarity: Family the First Model

GATHER

Recount a time when you saw “boys being boys” or “girls being girls” in a funny or delightful way.

OPENING PRAYER

“[Lord,] you formed me in my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother’s womb.
I praise you because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works! My very self you know.
How precious to me are your designs, O God;
How vast the sum of them!”
Amen.

- *Psalm 139: 13-14, 17*

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“[T]he LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being....The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it....The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him....The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man. So, the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

The LORD God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, the man said: ‘This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.’”

- *Genesis 2: 7, 15, 18, 20-23*

The ‘mythical’ language of the creation account is at times misunderstood as a literal account of historical facts and at others as a fairy tale to be dismissed. St John Paul II, however, calls it "the most ancient description and record of man’s self-knowledge." - *Pope John Paul II, General Audience, September 19, 1979*

1. How do you understand this account of the creation of man and woman? What did God want us to learn?
2. How do you understand the term “helper” in this story of creation?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

“To reflect upon complementarity is but to ponder the dynamic harmonies which lie at the heart of all creation.”

- *Pope Francis, Colloquium on the Complementarity of Man and Woman*

Reflecting on the creation story in Genesis chapter 2, St. John Paul II teaches us that “masculinity and femininity...are two ways of ‘being a body’ and at the same time a [human being], which complete each other. They are two complementary dimensions of self-consciousness and self-determination and, at the same time, two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body.... Precisely the function of sex, which is in a sense, ‘a constituent part of the person’ (not just ‘an attribute of the person’), proves how deeply man...is constituted by the body as ‘he’ or ‘she.’” - *Pope John Paul II, General Audience on Nov. 21, 1979*

This complementarity of the sexes allows us to reflect the inner nature of God as a communion of divine persons, as Pope Francis explains, “...sexual difference is present in so many forms of life, on the great scale of living beings. But man and woman alone are

made in the image and likeness of God: the biblical text repeats it three times. ...This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God.

“Experience teaches us: in order to know oneself well and develop harmoniously, a human being needs the reciprocity of man and woman. When that is lacking, one can see the consequences. We are made to listen to one another and help one another. We can say that without the mutual enrichment of this relationship--in thought and in action, in affection and in work, as well as in faith--the two cannot even understand the depth of what it means to be man and woman.

“Modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths in order to enrich the understanding of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much skepticism. For example, I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.

“Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution. In order to resolve the problems in their relationships, men and women need to speak to one another more, listen to each other more, get to know one another better, love one another more. They must treat each other with respect and cooperate in friendship.”

- Pope Francis, *General Audience, April 15, 2015*

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis talks about the challenge “posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that ‘denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programs and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from

the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time.”

- *Amoris Laetitia*, 56

Pope Francis speaks of listening to one another more and getting to know one another better as a solution for resolving problems in relationships. Deborah Tannen, linguistics professor and author of *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, believes that men and women differ in the focus, or driving force, behind their communication. According to Tannen, “men converse with a focus on achieving social status and avoiding failure, while women focus on achieving personal connection and avoiding social isolation. Men want to report, women want rapport. Not that men don't value involvement or women status, but these aren't as important for either.... Neither focus is better or more correct than the other. It's just the underlying motives that differ.”

- Lauren Stewart, “*Male and Female Communication*”

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. What do you understand the complementarity of the sexes to be? Ask friends or family how their views have changed over time. In what ways have the relations between the sexes evolved in your lifetime?
2. How do you think relationships between men and women can reflect the communion of Persons of the Holy Trinity? How has your spouse inspired you to more fully live your vocation?
3. Bring an article or relate a recent news story regarding the topic of gender. How does it seem to view gender, sex differences, and complementarity?
4. “What differences have you experienced in communicating with the opposite sex?”

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. How are gender roles the same/different in your own family as opposed to your family of origin? How have these changes been beneficial/detrimental to your family life.
2. How do you see the complementarity of the sexes expressed in your own personal relationships or the lives of others?
3. How can you become a better conversation partner for your spouse? Why might it be helpful to understand how the opposite sex is “wired” (their driving force, focus, underlying motives, etc.)?
4. What effects do you see/anticipate on children based on decisions (legislative, educational, or other) currently being made regarding the matter of gender? How can parents foster a forum or safe place where children/others can discuss gender issues?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Learn more about this subject:
 - Read *On The Meaning Of Sex*, by J. Budziszewski.
 - Read “Equal ≠ The Same: Sex Differences in the Human Brain” by Larry Cahill, Ph.D. in *Cerebrum*, April 2014.
 - View “A Tale of Two Brains” by Mark Gungor on YouTube (humorous but insightful).
 - Google “Equipping Parents to Respond to Gender...” for a helpful resource for parents from Focus on the Family.
 - Read or take a class on the *Theology of the Body*.
2. Write a note of appreciation to your spouse or a friend of the opposite sex, praising what you see as their best qualities.

3. With your spouse, go on a date doing something that one of you prefers. Then switch and go on another date doing something that the other likes.
4. Find out what gender policies are being proposed locally in your town and schools. Let your representatives know how you feel about these policies. As a group, pray for those who make decisions regarding gender policy.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Clip pictures from magazines, newspapers, etc. showing men and women pursuing activities that demonstrate how men and women can complement each other. Make a collage from the clippings; or play a game, listing things that work together for a purpose (fork & knife; soap & water; washer & dryer, etc.).

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. How are girls and boys different? In what ways are they the same?
2. If God made boys and girls different so that they could help each other to care for the world, how are we to treat each other at school and at play?
3. Some girls like rough-and-tumble play; they may not like to wear dresses or play with dolls. Some boys like to play house and wear make-up. Does this mean that there are no real differences between boys and girls? (Create an environment where kids can safely discuss gender concerns.)

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, you made us to reflect the beauty of your Divine Life, to form communities of love rooted in the complementarity of woman and man. Help us in the confusion of our times to live in the truth of your Creation, to respect and celebrate our differences and build a better world for all. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

CFM in Action

A CFM group in Michigan celebrates marriage every year by hosting a Valentine's Dance for their parish. The evening begins with a Marriage blessing by the Pastor, followed by dinner, including wedding cake for dessert. A few humorous relationship videos are shown after dinner and then couples are invited to participate in one or two games. The evening is topped off with dancing. Each couple is given a gift to take home, as a memorial of the event.

EIGHT

Intimacy in Our Relationships

GATHER

The host may choose a song or video for the group.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Father, we gather together in asking for your grace today as we reflect on your Word and discuss your plan for our relationships. Help us to discern your desire for our marriages, to understand when to open more fully and when to retain proper boundaries. Give us hearts to love and trust and grow in faith and wisdom. Bless our time today and bless our families as we seek to embrace your will for us as spouses, as parents, as disciples. Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“They shall be my people, and I will be their God.” - *Jeremiah 32:38*

- How does “being someone’s” reflect a relationship of intimacy?

“For as a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”
- *Isaiah 62:5*

“For your husband is your Maker; the LORD of hosts is his name, Your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, called God of all the earth.”
- *Isaiah 54:5*

- How do these latter two Scriptures show the depth of relationship that God desires to have with us?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

There are times throughout our lives where we despair for the lack of intimate relationships, even in marriage. So many times, in so many relationships we look for fulfillment through human love, only to be disappointed. What is it that is so elusive? Where can we find it? One image that is used to portray the Christian marital relationship is an equilateral triangle with God at the apex and each spouse at the base. As husband and wife strive to grow closer to God, they are drawn closer to one another. God gifts us with human relationships (and even uses them to personify Himself), but they will never be all they are meant to be until we recognize God's love and attempt to respond to it. God is waiting for us, hoping we will catch a glimpse of His love and in that moment, recognize that he is everything our hearts long for. He loved us first, so all we need to do is surrender. When we do this, our human relationships will begin to fall in place.

“Love is a gift of God, nourished by and expressed in the encounter of man and woman. Love is thus a positive force directed towards their growth and maturity as persons. Love is also a precious source for the self-giving which all men and women are called to make for their own self-realization and happiness. In fact, man is called to love as an incarnate spirit, that is, soul and body in the unity of the person. Human love hence embraces the body, and the body also expresses spiritual love...realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.”

- *Pope St. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 11*

“Intimacy should not be equated with sex. In fact, chances are, if you aren't intimate in the other areas of your life your sexual intimacy will be one of the first things to suffer.”

- *Sheila W. Gregoire, “Marriage Life, Intimacy is a Marathon not a Sprint”*

“To be truly intimate with another person is to share every aspect of yourself with another person. We have to be willing to take off our masks and let down our guard, to set aside our pretenses and to share what is shaping us and directing our lives. This is the greatest gift we can give to another human being: to allow him or her to simply see us for who we are, with our strengths and weaknesses, faults, failings, flaws, defects, talents, abilities, achievements, and potential.

“Intimacy requires that we allow another person into our heart, mind, body, and soul. In its purest form, it is complete and unrestrained sharing of self. Not all relationships are worthy of such a complete intimacy, but our primary relationship should be.

“What is intimacy? It is the process of mutual self-revelation that inspires us to give ourselves completely to another person in the mystery we call love.”

- *Matthew Kelly, The Seven Levels of Intimacy*

“The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses’ community of persons, which embraces their entire life: ‘so they are no longer two, but one flesh.’ They ‘are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.’ This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.”

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1644*

“What greater thing is there for two human souls, than to feel that they are joined for life—to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting?”

- *George Eliot*

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. What does intimacy mean? What helps build intimacy?

2. What does society think intimacy means? Ask three people their definition.
3. Share any stories of how growth in your relationship with God has affected your human relationships,
4. Share the different characteristics of intimacy you experience with your friends versus those experienced with your spouse and those with your children.

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. How does God fulfill our need for intimacy? Do people in all stages and walks of life need to experience intimate human relationships in addition to their relationship with God?
2. What can we do to foster intimate relationships? What can we do to strengthen intimacy with our spouse? What can we do to strengthen intimacy within our families?
3. How do sexual relations impact intimacy?
4. How does exclusivity and permanence improve the ability to deepen intimacy in a spousal relationship?
5. Is there a correlation between the level of intimacy and the amount of pain experienced due to broken trust in a relationship?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally, ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion.

The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. With your spouse, set aside a time to pray for your family each day this week.

2. Schedule some time alone with your spouse without an agenda (see Matthew Kelly's "carefree timelessness"). Then try it with each member of your family.
3. Hold a family meeting and share dreams for the next year for the family.
4. Schedule a special date night with your spouse to remember and relive a special shared memory or experience.
5. Build habits using your senses to communicate love. Choose a suggestion below and practice it two times each day.
 - Touch: a hug, holding one's hand, a gentle touch to the cheek, arm or shoulder, stroking their hair
 - Action: Offer practical assistance and service.
 - Speech: positive words, affirming the positive and downplaying the negative traits, saying "I love you," "I am sorry," and "Please forgive me"
 - Hearing: empathetic listening, but also respecting the other's need to be alone or not to speak.
 - Taste, Smell and Vision: Think of ways you can gift your loved ones with things they like to eat, that smell nice or are beautiful, be attentive to your appearance.
 - Heart: Choose the other person's desires over your own.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Build a gratitude tree, using construction paper or wood scraps. Create leaves out of construction paper and have group or family members write specific "thank you's" for something someone did for them. Hang the leaves on the tree with glue or thumb tacks.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

1. Share with your children the reasons your spouse is so special to you.
2. What does it mean to love someone? Is it the same as loving something?
3. What makes you feel loved in our family?
4. How can you show or express your love for other family members?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

Take a look at the Observes for the next meeting to see what needs to be done in preparation

Date_____Time_____Place_____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Trinity, perfect model of intimate communion, fully open to each other in all things, indissolubly united as one, teach us to choose wisely in our relationships. Guide us to deep trust and sacrificial love for our families and to create appropriate boundaries in our other relationships. Embolden us to love lavishly and generously, as you love us. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

NINE

Love in the Extended Family

GATHER

Talk about family naming traditions. For example, in some traditions the first-born son is named after the father and the mother's maiden name is added as a middle name. How does your name reflect your family history?

OPENING PRAYER

Father in Heaven, we praise you for giving us your Son to be our Savior and Lord. Bless us all as we gather here today, and let us live happily in your love. Hear our prayer, loving Father, we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him.

“After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.’ And he

said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.”

- *Luke 2:41-52*

“Jesus entered the house of Peter, and saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, the fever left her, and she rose and waited on him.”

- *Matthew 8:14-15*

1. In the passage from Luke, Jesus’ parents didn’t immediately realize that Jesus wasn’t among those returning from Jerusalem. Given that they “looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances,” how were family and extended family viewed in this passage?
2. “How can Peter’s care for his mother-in-law serve as an example for us today?”

SOCIAL INQUIRY

"Nearly one-in-five Americans lives in a multigenerational household. ...Multigenerational family living, defined as a household that includes two or more adult generations, or one that includes grandparents and grandchildren, is growing among nearly all U.S. racial groups, as well as Hispanics, among all age groups and among both men and women.”

- *Pew Research Center*

“Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families, because there are cultures which, ‘especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the elderly aside in unacceptable ways.’ The elderly help us to appreciate ‘the continuity of the generations,’ by their ‘charism of bridging the gap.’ Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the

most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and ‘many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents.’ Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are.”

- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 192

“In addition to the small circle of the couple and their children, there is the larger family, which cannot be overlooked. Indeed, ‘the love between husband and wife,...between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household, is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion. ...Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith.

“This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace ‘even those who have made shipwreck of their lives.’

“This wider family can help make up for the shortcomings of parents, detect and report possible situations in which children suffer violence and even abuse, and provide wholesome love and family stability in cases when parents prove incapable of this.”

- *Amoris Laetitia* 196-197

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. Share your experience growing up. Were you in close proximity to grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other extended family? Compare with your current situation.

2. Ask two friends whether extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) influenced their moral formation and if so, how?
3. Ask your parents or other parents you know, “What does “honor” mean in the context of honoring your father, mother, uncle, or aunt?”
4. *Compadre* and *comadre* are Spanish words that indicate someone with whom you are sharing the spiritual upbringing of your children. The terms can be used for godparents, but also for mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law. How have godparents or parents-in-law served in this capacity for you?

In light of Christ’s teachings, JUDGE:

1. Why might people choose to live in a multi-generational household? What are the blessings and challenges which might be encountered?
2. How can your family honor and stay connected to the extended family, especially with challenges such as distance, both physical and spiritual?
3. What can *comadres* and *compadres* do to assist in the spiritual upbringing of godchildren? What can they do to assist in the spiritual upbringing of their adult sons/daughters-in-law?
4. What can be done by adult children to honor their father/mother-in-law?
5. How can one honor an elder that isn't a good example? What can be done to bridge the gap with family members who aren't interested in staying connected or make it difficult to do so?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion.

The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Visit/contact your grandfather, grandmother, or another elderly relative. If possible, bring one of your children along. Consider doing this on a regular basis.
2. Reach out to those for whom you are a *comadre/compadre*.
3. Reevaluate your patterns of communication and interaction with parents/grandparents/ grown children/grandchildren/other extended family and see if you need to make any changes.
4. Pray together each day for a particular member of your extended family or circle of friends.
5. Document family stories either by making a video of an elderly family member as she/he tells the family stories or by working with other family members to write down stories that have been told over the years.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting:

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

1. As a family project create a family tree.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. How far back can you trace your family simply by talking to older relatives?
2. Where did your ancestors come from? Do both parents' families trace back to the same region of the world?

3. How does the blend of different cultural family history impact your daily life with your family?

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

We lift up our extended family to you. There are so many people we love and appreciate. There is not enough time in a day to maintain close relationships with everyone. We pray that we would have grace and wisdom regarding spending time with our extended family. May you affirm them and give them peace. We pray a blessing for each of them and ask you to wrap them in your love, provide for their needs, fill them with your joy, and reveal yourself to them in great ways. We pray that you would help us to open our schedules so that we can spend a little more time building these relationships. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

TEN

Remembering Our Common Condition

GATHER

Listen to the song, “Children of God” by Third Day,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6jO7xhU_Pw

OPENING PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit to our gathering here! It has been a blessing to have spent this year focusing on the family you give us. I thank you for being born a child. I remain a child all my life, as I will always have biological parents, as well as you as my heavenly Father and the Blessed Virgin as my heavenly Mother. Teach me to love those you have given me to love. May our love be blessed with reciprocity, but most of all with generosity of heart. I thank you, O loving Father, who in your wisdom bring us into the world through a father and mother and form us through the interactions of family. You open the doors of love to all through the experience of being children of God! Please bless us as we strive to live out all that we have learned this year. Help us to share this good news with all we meet. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ After he placed his hands on them, he went away.”

- *Matthew 19:13-15*

“Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden

these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.”

- Luke 10: 21-22

1. What do you think Jesus means when he says “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these?”
2. Jesus stresses throughout the Gospels that he is the Son of the Father. He rejoices in his identity as the Son. He proclaims the will of the Father. What can we learn about being children through this passage in Luke?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Pope Francis said, “Children remind us that we all, in the first years of life, were completely dependent upon the care and benevolence of others. The Son of God was not spared this stage. ...Children are in and of themselves a treasure for humanity and also for the Church, for they constantly evoke that necessary condition for entering the Kingdom of God: that of not considering ourselves self-sufficient, but in need of help, of love, of forgiveness....Even if one becomes an adult, or an elderly person, even if one becomes a parent, if one occupies a position of responsibility, underneath all of this is still the identity of a child. We are all sons and daughters. And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received....

“This is the main message that children give us....They bring their way of seeing reality, with a trusting and pure gaze. A child has spontaneous trust in his father and mother; he has spontaneous trust in God, in Jesus, in Our Lady...his interior gaze is pure, not yet tainted by malice, by duplicity, by the “incrustations” of life which harden the heart....

“Furthermore, children, in their interior simplicity, bring with them the capacity to receive and give tenderness. Tenderness is having a heart ‘of flesh’ and not ‘of stone,’ ...it is ‘feeling’ things and events, not treating them as mere objects, only to use them. ...Children have the capacity to smile and to cry, ...two things which are often ‘stifled’ in grown-ups, ... often our heart is blocked and loses this capacity to smile, to cry....

“Children bring life, cheerfulness, hope, also troubles. But such is life. Certainly, they also bring worries and sometimes many problems; but better a society with these worries and these problems, than a sad, grey society because it is without children!”

- *General Audience, March 18, 2015*

Pope Francis also tells us, “From the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and future. There are those who dare to say, as if to justify themselves, that it was a mistake to bring these children into the world.... Children are never a ‘mistake.’ Their hunger is not a mistake, nor is their poverty, their vulnerability, their abandonment ...and neither is their ignorance or their helplessness.... If anything, these should be reasons to love them all the more, with greater generosity.

“Those who have the task of governing, of educating, but I would say all adults, we are responsible for children and for doing what we can to change this situation. I am referring to ‘the passion’ of children. Every child who is marginalized, abandoned, who lives on the street begging with every kind of trick, without schooling, without medical care, is a cry that rises up to God and denounces the system that we adults have set in place....

“In every case, their childhood is violated in body and soul. But none of these children are forgotten by the Father who is in heaven! Not one of their tears is lost! Neither is our responsibility lost, the social responsibility of people, of each one of us, and of countries.... When it comes to the children who come into the world, no sacrifice on the part of adults is too costly or too great, to ensure that no child believe he or she was a mistake, is worthless or is abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men.”

From your own experience, OBSERVE

1. Describe your experience as a child. What are some of the differences you see in a child's experience today?
2. Tell about a situation you have observed, in person or in the news, of dilemmas parents have because they affect their children, i.e., choices about jobs, moving, schools, etc.
3. What are the God-given rights of children? Research the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC). It is a document that has been signed but not ratified by the United States. Also, see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2211.
4. What is happening in other countries in regards to children's rights? Read about the widening concept of "parent" in Canada and Bill 28, recently passed by the legislature of Ontario.

In the light of Christ's teaching, JUDGE

1. God chose to bring us into the world as a child instead of as an adult? What do you suppose he wanted us to learn?
2. How does the presence of a child affect us emotionally? How does the presence of a dependent child affect us practically?
3. How can we promote the dignity of children as well as the value that raising them brings to mankind?
4. What makes a child feel secure? Should the government be involved in the rights of children?

5. How can what is happening in the international community educate us?

ACT, as a group or individually:

Ideally, ACTs are inspired and identified through your discussion. The list below contains ideas that may be appropriate.

1. Volunteer to tutor children at an afterschool program or shelter; organize meals for a new mom; or offer free babysitting.
2. Consider sponsoring a child from a third-world country. Consider what you can do for a child in your own community that could benefit from your intentional attention/support.
3. Research what is required to become a Big Brother or Big Sister or a foster parent.
4. With your children, go through your DVDs and video games and donate some to a children's hospital or to KidFlicks, an organization that sets up movie libraries in the children's ward of hospitals.
5. Based on what you have learned about the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) or what is happening in Canada, choose an appropriate action.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY - for use with families meeting together or by those caring for children while the adults are meeting:

Let the wonder and joy of a child touch your heart. Take the time to experience with a child something in nature that they have never seen before and share the mystery with them, i.e., take them to a farm, look at the stars, play in the water or snow, do an experiment together.

AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY:

Share with your child one of the joys that they have brought to your life, recount a memory, give them a hug, do something that they want to do.

LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING:

Date _____ Time _____ Place _____

1. Phone or email host if you cannot attend
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father God, we thank you for adopting us as your children, making us your own. We delight in the fact that you chose to have Jesus share our experience of being born as a child into the world. Help us to remember our vulnerability and that you alone are our sustenance. Help us to keep in mind that all children are our responsibility and help us not to grow cold of heart or selfish when we see a child in need. May we always be sensitive to the plight of children over our own desires. Help us to always desire to do the will of the Father and teach our children to do the same. Teach us obedience, and through it give us your joy and peace. We delight in your love, O Father God! Amen!

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement, found on the inside back cover.

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About the Christian Family Movement

When families join the Christian Family Movement, they become part of the national lay movement that is CFM-USA. CFM is a movement because it has a constituency that subscribes to its philosophy, methodology, and theology.

The mission of the Christian Family Movement is to promote Christian marriage and family life, to help people to live the Christian faith in everyday life, and to improve society through actions of love, service, education and example. This is our mission. If we accept this mission, we will support it with our time, talent, and donations.

Membership entitles a family to receive program books and a subscription to ACT, the national newsletter, and supports the development of the Christian Family Movement around the world.

THE COMMUNITY OF CFM

People group together by accident, choice or design, but community is more than this. Members are united in mutual respect (even when they disagree), and they are willing to be honest about how they think and feel.

As people get to know each other, trust and openness seem to develop around a fellow member in need or for a neighborhood concern. As you work together to answer a need, community forms. Community learns how to laugh at foibles, takes time to relax, play, recreate its humanity, and evaluate its needs and direction.

CFMers look upon one another as friends and allies in the midst of their parish communities. They look to CFM as a source of continuing education, lively support and regular encouragement.

In 2019, CFM celebrates 70 years of forming families to be missionary disciples through action. CFM-USA is a member of the International Confederation of Christian Family Movements, which is active in more than 40 countries with more than 100,000 families. All the members of the ICCFM share the Observe, Judge, Act methodology. Visit www.iccfm.org to see explore CFM's worldwide activities.

On the 50th anniversary in 1999, CFM held a gala jubilee celebration at the University of Notre Dame, and the Hillenbrand Institute awarded CFM its prestigious Salt and Light Award. CFM participated in the Marriage Summit of Catholic family life organizations, conducted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2012 and 2013, and CFM leaders participated in consultations for the Synod on the Family in 2016.

The National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers presented CFM with its special-recognition award in 1993 for enhancing the quality of life for families. CFM was one of the founding members of the Families against Violence Advocacy Network, and in 1999 received FAVAN's Circles of Peace Award.

In 1987, CFM contributed to a consultation with the U.S. bishops in preparation for the synod in Rome on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World. CFM also provided input to the U.S. bishops' 1994 pastoral, *Follow the Way of Love*.

HOW CFM IS SUPPORTED

The major source of financial support for CFM comes from the annual donations of CFMers. This is the lifeblood of the Movement's continued existence. First-year members are asked to contribute \$10; for continuing members the suggested donation is \$40 per family. Many generous volunteers donate additional time, talent and treasure to make CFM available throughout the world.

Please register at www.cfm.org to belong to CFM, or you may return a membership form provided by your group leader along,

with your annual donation to CFM, so that your membership may be recorded and you can receive CFM resources. For more information about CFM, visit www.cfm.org, or contact the National Office: director@cfm.org or 800-581-9824.

NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Share your group's actions with ACT, the national electronic newsletter of the Christian Family Movement, by sending information to director@cfm.org. Photos of groups in action are always a plus.

CONNECT WITH CFM ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- www.facebook.com/ChristianFamilyMovement
- Share your group's Actions with director@cfm.org to be featured on our Facebook page.
- Twitter account @CFMACT. Please use #CFMACT when posting about your group.

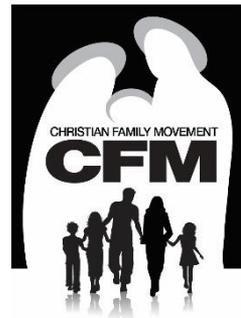
GUIDANCE FOR GROUP LEADERS

You will find leader aids at www.cfm.org. Additional assistance for group leaders is published regularly in ACT.

Contact director@cfm.org to find CFM group leaders in your area. They will be happy to speak with you on the phone to guide you and share their experience of CFM.

OUR SYMBOL

The CFM symbol shows the Holy Family in silhouette behind a modern family. The family is an active agent of evangelization, participating in the mission of Jesus. With the model of the holy family to guide them, the CFM family is moving forth to bring the message and the love of Christ to a changing world. Father, mother, sons and daughters are Christian emissaries to the world.



Group Members

Names: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Names: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____