

## **Forming Our Families to Be True Disciples of Jesus**

*Families are essential elements in our lives. They come in a variety of types and sizes, each with its own warts and moments of true joy and beauty. Come explore the wide variety of qualities that enhance a family's well-being and try practical actions that can strengthen your family and community.*

### **GATHERING and OPENING PRAYER**

*The leader thanks all for coming, and everyone introduces themselves. Communal prayer moves group members out of their busy lives and toward the subject matter of the meeting.*

Heavenly Father, we gather in love and friendship to explore the family's identity and mission. Help us to observe wisely, to judge prayerfully and to take action that will lead to positive change. We pray that our time together will be fruitful and that we will support one another as we embrace our mission to love our families, marriages, relationships and communities. Amen.

### **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

*During a typical CFM meeting, group members share about the actions they decided upon at the previous meeting.*

### **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

*Reflection on God's Word moves members to focus on the upcoming inquiry from a Christian perspective.*

“On another occasion he began to teach by the sea. A very large crowd gathered around him so that he got into a boat on the sea and sat down. And the whole crowd was beside the sea on land. And he taught them in length in parables, and in the course of his instruction he said to them, ‘Hear this! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was scorched and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no grain. And some seed fell on rich soil and produced fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.’ He added, ‘Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.’”

- Mark 4: 1-9 (NABRE)

- Imagine sitting with the crowd on the shore and watching and listening to Jesus teach. What are you seeing, hearing, and feeling?
- How does this Scripture reading apply to family life?

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

*The Observe, Judge, Act Method of social inquiry structures the CFM meeting and, ultimately, the way of life for CFM members. Each CFM meeting includes short readings on the subject matter of the meeting.*

Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, whose teaching was the spiritual foundation of CFM's Observe, Judge, Act Method, recognized that a family's spiritual strength builds up the whole church: "The family is almost the most beautiful image of the union uniting Christ and the Church. The union of Christ with the Church makes the Church fruitful and makes the Church increase. It is true of every family, whether black or yellow or white; and it is not merely true of Christian families but of any family."

In their pastoral message, *Follow the Way of Love*, the U.S. Catholic bishops say to families, "...we know you face obstacles as you try to maintain strong family ties and to follow your calling as a church of the home. The rapid pace of social change; the religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our society; the revolution of values within our culture; the intrusion of mass media; the impact of political and economic conditions: all these place families under considerable stress."

Pope Francis encourages family members to treasure the gift they are to one another: "Dear families, you know very well that the true joy which we experience in the family is not superficial; it does not come from material objects, from the fact that everything seems to be going well. ...True joy comes from a profound harmony between persons, something which we all feel in our hearts and which makes us experience the beauty of togetherness, of mutual support along life's journey. But the basis of this feeling of deep joy is the presence of God, the presence of God in the family and his love, which is welcoming, merciful, and respectful towards all. ...But if God's love is lacking, the family loses its harmony, self-centeredness prevails and joy fades. But the family which experiences the joy of faith communicates it naturally. That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is the leaven of society as a whole."

Terry Clark-Jones from Michigan State University Extension lists six qualities that researchers have identified as indicators of a strong family in "Traits of a Healthy Family":

- “Appreciation and affection - They help each other, keep promises, and show affection to each other.
- Committed - Strong families are very loyal to each other, share responsibilities, make decisions together, allow members to make their own decisions with support, and find it easy to trust one another.
- Positive communication - Families that eat together regularly communicate (as long as the phones and TVs are turned off). They like to share feelings with each other and cue into each other’s feelings. Put downs and sarcasm is rare.
- Strong coping skills - Families with healthy well-being tend to be resilient. Crisis brings them closer together and they are supportive of one another. They look for something good from a bad situation and tend to accept the things they cannot change.
- Healthy spiritual well-being - It is easy for them to share spiritual values and beliefs with each other. Positive attitude is the norm and they have a sense of peace.
- Spending time together -There is shared common interest with strong families. They have lots of fun together and often laughter is plentiful. Unplanned spontaneous activities together are common.”

From your personal experience, **OBSERVE:**

*The importance of the observe portion of the meeting cannot be over-emphasized. Members should look ahead and come prepared. The observe portion is researching and reporting only. Facts and information are gathered from news sources, your own experience and that of others.*

1. What did you learn from your parents by example? What do you hope to teach your children/grandchildren?
2. What have you found to be the greatest help in your effort to form a whole and holy family?
3. What are opposite qualities of family relationships from those in the list of traits, above?
4. Name the ways the Christian community helps parents and grandparents develop and nurture strong Christian families?

In the light of Christ's teachings, **JUDGE:**

*For CFMers, to judge is to compare how things are with how things should be, in accord with Gospel values. It is not assessing people, but rather circumstances. To make such a comparison requires objective observation as well as a sincere effort to understand the teachings of Jesus.*

1. What steps or methods can Christian parents take to help their family deal with rapid social change, the diverse religious ethnic and cultural aspects of our society and the revolution of values within our culture?
2. How does interacting with others who share your values and beliefs strengthen and support your marriage and/or family?
3. How can families best nurture and support one another?
4. How can you help your family make Christ more a part of your everyday life?

From what has been discussed, **ACT:**

*Based on the discussion, members choose an action to bring about positive change. Actions can be as an individual, family, or group. Actions listed here are suggestions only. The best actions come from the group as a result of the discussion. Group members occasionally choosing the same act increases unity and impact.*

1. Identify a new family in your neighborhood and welcome them to the community. Invite them to join you for a family gathering.
2. Establish one time every week as your regular time to celebrate your family. If you have children, let them help decide and plan the activity that everyone in the family can participate in and enjoy.
3. Create a weekly time to say a "thank you" prayer as a family.
4. Ask a family new to your parish to sit with you at Mass for one Sunday and to join you for a meal afterward.

### **AT HOME/DISCUSS AS A FAMILY**

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

1. Plan a family meeting. Ask your children what they see as the strengths of your family. Allow them also to suggest areas for growth and improvement. Ask them if there are things that are challenging at school or with their friends.
2. Plan a "Family Appreciation Day" complete with family prayer time. Encourage each member to participate as they are able.
3. Talk with your children about some of the challenges facing many families today.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*A closing prayer is supplied for each meeting. This is also a good time to offer prayers for the intentions of the group.*

Jesus, you humbled yourself by becoming one of us. Because you lived in a family, you experienced the joys and sorrows of family life. Please walk with us on our journey as a family. Help us to meet the challenges ahead. Give us a loving commitment, a caring nature and a strong sense of family spirit. Guide us to make wise and careful decisions in our work, our study and our play. Grant us a sense of hospitality and service to others. May your peace be with us, may we do your will in all that we say and do and may you be the heart of our home. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement:

Holy Trinity, you are a family. We believe you wish our families to reflect your heavenly community. Jesus has called us to family ministry and asked his heavenly Father not to take us from the world, but to deliver us from evil. And so, we pray for the Christian Family Movement, that present members may grow in grace and that new families may join us. Through good example and prayer, may our homes become that which you desire them to be: true domestic churches, temples of your glory, and schools of humanity, ushering in the reign of God. Amen.



## **NEXT STEPS**

Hopefully, in this meeting you have seen how discussing a topic through the lens of family can help you grow faith and friendship. We invite you and your friends to join CFM and continue the journey together. Please contact our National Office to receive guidance on the next steps in starting your action group and to register as members of the Christian Family Movement.

## **CFM NATIONAL OFFICE**

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## WORKS CITED

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