



## TWO

*Corresponds to Page 16 in Participants' Book*

### **Forming Our Families to Be Disciples**

*Following our call to be the Domestic Church*

**Synopsis:** In the Catholic vision of the family, Christian marriage forms the foundation of the Domestic Church, a sacramental reflection of God's love and a school of prayer, forgiveness, and charity. This chapter explores how ordinary families, who struggle with the stresses of daily life together, can realize this calling, empowered by the grace of God.

**Objective:** Group members will recognize God's grace at work in their family relationships and learn ways to live a fruitful family spirituality.

#### **GATHER**

Introduce the theme of the vocation of Christian families to be a true expression of the Church in their home.

Ideas: Ask the members to bring with them a religious article that they already display in their home and give a short time to tell others about it; Ask members to share the prayer that they use in their family before meals or at bedtime; Ask members to bring a decoration that their family likes to use on Christmas or Easter

## **OPENING PRAYER**

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 our CFM connection will provide support and friendship for us to embrace our mission with our families, marriages, relationships and communities. Amen.

## **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

*Look back into the last chapter and re-read the actions together. Point out the action the group talked about most or was picked to do. Ask who has anything to report.*

*Take time to report on how you engaged in action as a result of the last meeting. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.*

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark (4: 1-9).

**Summary:** Jesus preached to a large crowd that gathered around him about how the Word of God can take root and flourish when the people are prepared to receive it. This passage, which speaks of the spreading of the gospel to create a fruitful harvest for God, is usually seen as referring to building the Church.

This Scripture was chosen to help members reflect on how their family can be a field in which disciples grow up and become the Church.

**Background:** The sower in the parable is Jesus, and the seed is the word of God (both Jesus's spoken word and today the Bible). The

**hard ground** represents someone with a hardened heart full of sin that hears the word of God but does not accept it. Satan is able to keep this person from growing at all. The **stony ground** is someone who shows interest and awareness in the Gospel, yet his heart isn't fully convicted so that when trouble comes his faith is not strong enough to stand. The **thorny ground** is a person who receives the Gospel but who has many other idols and distractions in life - worries, riches, and lusts, which take over his mind and heart and he cannot grow in the truth of God's Word. The **good soil** is someone who has heard and received the Word of God and allows it to take root and grow within his life. This person represents true salvation that bears good fruit.

“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.’”

1. Imagine sitting with the crowd on the shore and watching and listening to Jesus teach. What are you seeing, hearing, and feeling? **People lean forward, eager for a glimpse of Jesus and hanging on his words. While some are focused on listening to him, I imagine some children complaining and bickering with**

their siblings. Those who are fishermen among the crowd might be puzzled at the farming images in the parable. Some wonder what Jesus would say about them: Does he think I am rocky, thorny, or good soil? How can my soil be improved?

2. How does this scripture reading apply to family life? In family life, some days are rocky, some are thorny. Some family members are hard-headed and stubborn. Family conflicts seem to scorch our good intentions. When roots of relationships are fragile or shallow, family life struggles to reflect Good News. Families face many obstacles to living a joyful Christian life and this causes stress. It can be very hard to think of one's family as the "domestic church" if everyone is arguing and being rude. Yet, that is what the Church teaches about families: "the most beautiful image of the union" of Christ and the Church.

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

In the Catholic vision of the family, Christian marriage forms the foundation of the Domestic Church, a sacramental reflection of God's love and a school of prayer, forgiveness, and charity.

"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."

- "On the Family and Its Mission," Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, Spiritual Founder CFM, 1950

CCC 2204 -- "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church." It is a community of

faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament.”

Many people will not see themselves in this ideal, however. The two-parent, nuclear family has become less prevalent, and alternative family forms have become more common. Ministry to the family would be severely limited if we narrowly define the Domestic Church as the married couple and their children only. Just as the greater Church struggles to live up to its noble calling, so do families. As the U.S. Bishops said in their pastoral letter, *Follow the Way of Love*, “But remember, a family is holy not because it is perfect but because God’s grace is at work in it, helping it to set out anew every day on the way of love.” All kinds of families make up our parishes and our CFM groups.

“(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.”

- *Follow the Way of Love, A Pastoral Message to Families* from the U.S. Catholic Bishops for the 1994 International Year of the Family

When we welcome all kinds of families into our CFM community, we are not denying the importance of life-long marriage. Pope Francis address this question in *The Joy of Love*: “As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils,

as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 35).

“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. And above all, a love which is patient: patience is a virtue of God and he teaches us how to cultivate it in family life, how to be patient, and lovingly so, with each other. To be patient among ourselves. A patient love. God alone knows how to create harmony from differences. 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.”

- Pope Francis’ “Homily for the Family Day on the Occasion of the Year of Faith,” 2013

Members of a Christian family, because of baptism, have a special relationship: parents are also brother and sister to their children. Because of Christ, our family ties have a new dimension. CCC 2219 -- Filial respect promotes harmony in all of family life; it also concerns relationships between brothers and sisters. Respect

toward parents fills the home with light and warmth.

"Grandchildren are the crown of the aged." "With all humility and meekness, with patience, [support] one another in charity."

These Christian principles are reflected in secular terms in the research of family counselors and relationship experts. Social science research recognizes that healthy family relationships are based in love and respect among all the members. Healthy, loving families are the building blocks of strong and good societies.

Researchers across the country and around the world have found that strong families have a wide variety of qualities that contribute to a family's well-being. The first step in developing the strengths of one's family is to consider those areas in which the family is doing well and those areas in which the family members would like to improve. Below is a list of six qualities that researchers at Michigan State University identified as indicators of a strong family:

- They show each other appreciation and affection. For example, they help each other, keep promises, and show affection to each other.
- They are committed to each other. 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.
- They practice positive communication. Families that eat together regularly communicate (as long as the phones and TV's are turn off). They like to share feelings with each other and cue into each other's feelings. Putdowns and sarcasm are rare.

- They have 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 can't change.
- They have a healthy spiritual well-being. It is easy for them to share spiritual values and beliefs with each other. A positive attitude is the norm and they have a sense of peace.
- They truly enjoy spending time together. There is shared a common interest with strong families. They have lots of fun together and often laughter is plentiful. Unplanned spontaneous activities together are common.

- "Traits of a Healthy Family," Terry Clark-Jones

From your personal experience, **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.*

1. What did you learn from your parents by example? What do you hope to teach your children/grandchildren? **I learned not to cuss, to go to church, to say grace before meals, to celebrate Christmas and Easter as secular holidays, to respect my elders. I hope to teach my grandchildren to appreciate the Christian meaning of the holidays.**
2. What have you found to be the greatest help in your effort to

form a whole and holy family? Working together as a team with my spouse, being part of CFM since the children were young, being an active member of my parish, having good friends with the same values.

3. What are opposite qualities of family relationships from those listed above?

- They do not show appreciation
- They are not reliable and are controlling, squelching independence.
- They use putdowns and sarcasm. Meals together are rare and the screens are always in hand.
- When conflict arises, it is every person for themselves. Blaming others is the norm.
- Family prayer is not happening, and church is not a priority. Negativity reigns.
- Everyone does their own thing. They don't have common interests.

4. Name the ways the Christian Community helps parents and grandparents develop and nurture strong Christian families? Christian friends and ministry leaders model kindness and respect for others. Attending church together as a family teaches prayer and Scripture, and the preaching is instructive. This faith practice carries over into the home in daily activities and celebrations with family and friends.

In the light of Christ's teachings, **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.*

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?

Spending time as a family builds trust and loving relationships that are an anchor in the storms of life. Cultivating good friendships, as in CFM, helps. Family members can be refreshed and equipped to return to their daily tasks at work and school, fortified by the grace they receive in the home.

2. How does interacting with others who share your values and beliefs strengthen and support your marriage/family? You know you are not alone. Friends strengthen one another. Children realize that it is not just their parents who have those rules of behavior.

- How can families best nurture and support one another? Get together for CFM meetings; be available to listen when a friend is troubled; plan actions in which family members can serve and have fun together and with others.
- Giving positive appreciation: Researcher Dr. John Gottman, author of *The Relationship Cure* studied thousands of couples to determine what promotes or diminishes the health of their relationships. He found that ideally there needs to be 5 affirming statements to every one critical statement. This also applies to parent-child interactions and even work-related relationships. See that article, "The Positive Perspective: More on the 5:1 Ratio,"

<https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-positive-perspective-more-on-the-51-ratio/>

3. How can you help your family make Christ more a part of your everyday life? Practice a habit of daily prayer yourself. Your family will take notice.

Based on what has been discussed, **ACT:**

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--anything that everyone in the family can participate in and enjoy. Create or identify a family "celebration plate" that is given to a different family member at each meal. Everyone at the table says a special prayer for that person aloud.
3. Create a weekly time to say a 'thank you' prayer as a family. Bedtime or leaving for school or work are all good times. Have a thank you time before using screens after dinner.
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. Ask your parish to invite new parishioners to stand at Mass, then seek them out afterwards.
5. Another action idea: In the meeting ask each family to identify one stumbling block or stone that makes it difficult for their family to be receptive to the Word. It could be for

example business, conflicting goals (success in business and trying to get to heaven) or making ends meet.

More community-building action ideas at  
[https://www.cfm.org/community\\_building](https://www.cfm.org/community_building)

More family faith-enriching ideas:

- **Lent at Home Family Actions:**  
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/cfmusa/pages/91/attachments/original/1452480663/lenthome.pdf?1452480663>
- **Special Family Night Actions:**  
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/cfmusa/pages/91/attachments/original/1452480662/famnites.pdf?1452480662>

## TAKE CFM HOME

Have each family member create a collage that represents them portraying important aspects of the person's character, including their likes and dislikes. Ask each to include something they believe makes them valuable to the family. Once completed, have each family member explain their collage. Glue the collages together onto a board with the family name printed below. Hang it in a place where family members will be able to reflect upon it regularly.

## 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**

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 (found on Page 80 or inside back cover of the Participants' book).

## **WORKS CITED**

Cardijn, Cardinal Joseph, "The Family and Its Mission," in *Person, Family, and Education*, 1950,

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Clark-Jones, Terry, "Traits of a Healthy Family," Michigan State University Extension, May 5, 2016.

[http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/traits\\_of\\_a\\_healthy\\_family](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/traits_of_a_healthy_family)

Pope Francis, "Homily for the Family Day on the Occasion of the Year of Faith," Rome, October 22, 2013.