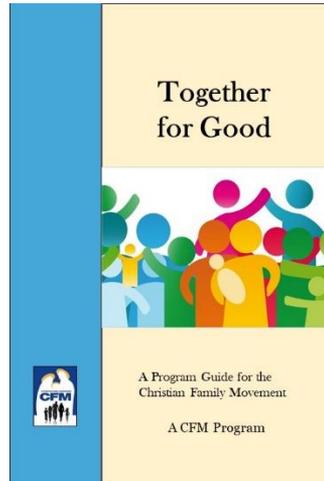


# Together for Good Leader Guide

The *Program Leader Guide* is akin to a “teacher’s edition manual,” meant to help prepare leaders to facilitate the meetings by giving them extra supplemental resources or ideas the author had while writing the chapter that might enrich the meeting.

\*Leader Guide notes and resources appear in this distinctive text color and size.



**Access the Leader Guide at  
[www.cfm.org/leader\\_guides](http://www.cfm.org/leader_guides)**

## **Leader Guide Features:**

- Explains why the Scripture passage was chosen and provides a short summary/paraphrase of reading and includes historical background, and theological definitions.
- Suggests possible responses to the Reflection, Observe, and Judge questions, to promote conversation.
- Paraphrases the Social Inquiry material for the leader, provides relevant background information, current statistics, and definitions of words, if necessary.
- Points out possible ways the conversation can get off track and provide ways to get back to the theme of the meeting.
- Adds additional reference material that may be brought up to facilitate discussion.

**CFM National Office: 800-581-9824 - [office@cfm.org](mailto:office@cfm.org)**

# Together for Good

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### Checklist for leaders:

- Before the meeting, review chapter and leader guide.
- Contact members beforehand with date & time of meeting(s).
- Challenge your members to make a commitment to CFM and to attend all meetings.
- Follow up by phone or email when members miss.
- Share leader tasks. Build up future leadership.
- Familiarize yourself with [www.cfm.org](http://www.cfm.org) and encourage your members to do so also. Help everyone to create and account.
- Get to know group members.
- Stay in touch between meetings.
- Have fun!

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# ONE

## Family as Church in the World: Living Courageously

Page 9 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** The importance of remaining intentional (purposeful and deliberate) in our vocation as family amidst the pressures and expectations placed on us by the outside world.

### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the Opening Prayer together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Send us your peace, Lord, that as families,  
We may think and act harmoniously.

Send us your grace, Lord, that as families,  
We may be content and grateful for your gifts.

Send us your strength, Lord, that as families,  
We may resist discord and dissension.

Send us your light, Lord, that as families,  
We may abolish darkness and shadow.

Send us your love, Lord, that as families,  
We may unite in love with one another and other families.  
Amen.

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"But the LORD's mercy is from age to age,  
toward those who fear him.

His salvation is for the children's children  
of those who keep his covenant,  
and remember to carry out his precepts."

- Psalm 103:17-18

"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect."

- Romans 12:1-2

1. What is the essence of the covenant proclaimed in Psalm 103?

God's love is eternal and beyond our comprehension. It never waivers, but we can only experience the full benefits of His bounty when we keep His covenant and pass its precepts onto the next generation. In other words, those who fear God and keep His commandments are promised His saving love on their "children's children." Our godly and prayerful parenting and grandparenting may have an impact on generations to come!

- Source: *Word on Fire*, Psalm 103

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/god-is-love/720/>

2. What aspects of contemporary culture must Christians resist in order to remain pleasing and good in God's eyes? How can we renew our minds to discern what is the will of God, good, pleasing and perfect as the Romans passage suggests?

Examples include: Needless rancor and hatred among peoples. Paul was addressing Christians who were arguing among themselves about whether they had to adhere to the strict precepts of the Jewish Law. He strongly advises them to not feel compelled to conform to rules that have to do with only ritual matters, but rather to focus on conforming to Christ in mind and soul, on being people of peace, generosity and love.

- Source: *Word on Fire*, Romans 12: 1-2

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/jeremiah-and-the-word-of-god/5578/>

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

As leaders of their Domestic Churches, parents and other adult relatives provide children's first encounter with the Christian vision. It is an awesome responsibility.

"The family as "domestic church" is a place of encounter with Christ within the community of a particular Christian family — a place where each member of the family has an important role. In other words, the 'mission' of the family in the task of evangelization is to be what it is called to be--that is, to live its daily life as a Christian family or as St. John Paul II said so often, 'Families become what you are!'

The family's mission to 'guard, reveal and communicate love'--like the parish community--does not exist in an ideal place. The truth and beauty of the family remains to be communicated to every Christian family, even those that are fragile, wounded or broken. These families too may read the words of St. Paul with confidence: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' (Romans 8:35). And they may find in that confidence a path of hope and healing.

During his visit to the Philippines, Pope Francis cited the need for "holy and loving families to protect the beauty and truth of the family in God's plan and to be an example for other families."

- Knights of Columbus, "*Building the Domestic Church*

The family has a mission - to nurture the faith life of the parents and children as individuals, but also as a family unit. As individuals, parents must encounter Christ and provide the opportunities for their children to encounter Christ. They help their children to discern their role in the family, in the church, in the world and then send them out. What a powerful witness of the love of parents and children for one another, and then as a family to the world!

"Single men and women live out their vocations in the world and have a unique opportunity to serve the Lord anytime, anywhere and with their whole hearts. They are like a special task force that can be sent wherever God needs them, including occupations and volunteer services that support the domestic church. "This way of life, whether temporary or lasting one's whole life, is much more than just waiting for something to happen. Single people are called by God to do great things and to become saints." This is as true for singles without children as single parents."

- John Noonan, *What Is My*

*Vocation?*

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. Describe encounters you have had with others that spoke strongly to you of what it meant to be Christian and inspired you to live your faith boldly. Ask your children who has inspired them in their faith life?

Encourage group members to reflect upon encounters within their families of origin as well as ones with teachers and other influencers in their lives. They might even think of a young person or child whose presence in their lives made them realize how important it was to be true to their Christian values.

2. Name the ways you have observed your family and other families "guard, reveal and communicate love," not only within their homes, but in public spaces as well.

Pope Francis himself is an excellent example. His actions bring touching intimacy to public encounters. He calls people close, reaches out to touch them, looks directly in their eyes, leans in to hear them and beams his bright, happy smile upon them. He is unafraid of letting his guard down.

3. What ways exist in your parish and diocese for children and adolescents to contribute to the life of the Church? Does your CFM group actively engage with these missions?

It is important for members of the CFM movement to be aware that the purpose of the group is two-fold. They come together both to support one another in their endeavor to build strong domestic churches, but they also, as a group, contribute to the faith life of their parish and the work of the Church in the community.

4. Name some of the extraordinary challenges with which some families cope.

Families in your group, parish, or immediate community, may be caring for elderly parents or children with special needs. They may be dealing with the aftermath of divorce or death or separation caused by military deployment. One or both parents may be struggling with work issues, unemployment or chronic health concerns. Sadly, the list is almost endless. Fortunately, so is our ability to courageously find the means to extend our love and care.

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. How might our cultural values of Patriotism, Nationalism, War, Individualism and Materialism be at odds with Christian family values?

Some examples might include:

**Patriotism:** Loyalty to one's homeland is a great value, but contempt of someone else's is not a Christian value. As children of God our common homeland is both earth and heaven. But our ultimate loyalty is to the Kingdom of God— a kingdom that extends freedom to all nations.

**Nationalism:** God does not choose to love any one nation over the other, nor should we. Christians believe that each person belongs to God, but sometimes gives oneself over to evil; those are the choices and that is the reality in which we live and die.

**War:** War is justified for self-defense, to resist evil, or root out evil, but not as a demonstration of power or exploitation of the weak.

**Individualism:** This value finds its end in allowing each person to be the center of his or her own universe. The gospel teaches that only God is the center, beginning and end of all.

**Materialism:** Strength and success measured by material wealth is not a Christian value. What it means for Christians to be strong is to recognize our weakness and lack and to put our trust in God.

- Source: Western Seminary blog, "American Values are Not Necessarily Christian Values."

<https://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2015/01/28/american-values-are-not-necessarily-christian-values/>

2. How can you imagine your family or your CFM group influencing cultural change? Do you see this as an important/possible mission for the Christian family?

With perseverance, patience and prayer, Christian families can avoid being overwhelmed with the inner concerns of day-to-day, year-to-year family life and take their Christian way of being into the public arena of work and citizenship. Even though it can be scary, being active, as a Christian in areas of cultural influence, is a mission to which we are all called.

3. With which gifts of the Holy Spirit has God blessed your family? How can you use them to influence society?

To identify the gifts that God has blessed your family with, it might be helpful to first be aware that everything in the universe belongs to God. Every object you own, every talent you have is a gift of God's grace.

We are granted stewardship over these gifts to contribute to the flourishing, the peace and the prosperity of God's creation, of the place where we live, our home, our city, our land, our earth. How has your family been uniquely blessed to contribute to such flourishing? Specific gifts listed in scripture include: service, hospitality, ministering, teaching, exhortation, generosity, cheerfulness, mercy, etc. (cf. Romans 12).

4. What does it mean to you to be a "domestic church"? How do you try to teach this concept to your children? How are

thriving “domestic churches” vital to the growth and health of the Church at large?

The term “Domestic Church” refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates all the way back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to “little church.” Our Early Church Fathers understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

- Source: Catholic Diocese of Cincinnati, Family Life Office.

<http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/family-life/family/parenting/what-is-a-domestic-church/>

The Christian family is formed in love and a developing sense of mutual respect that should animate the whole of the common life, and extend beyond the home into the world at large.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis published a document entitled, *Disciples Called To Witness: The New Evangelization*.

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/disciples-called-to-witness/upload/Disciples-Called-to-Witness-5-30-12.pdf>

Of *Disciples Called to Witness*, author Cornelius F. Murphy, Jr. says, "Here there is an explicit recognition of the family as a domestic church, as well as an acknowledgement that the success of the new evangelization will depend, in large measure, upon the flourishing of these churches-in-miniature.... Sunday Eucharist is indispensable, but the practice and prayer life of faith cannot be confined to the parish church one day a week. For in the days between such celebrations, the burdens and pressures, as well as the temptations that arise in the course of ordinary living, will continue to assault those who are struggling to live a Christian life. They will be increasingly subject to the powers of 'the unreal and insane world that our financial system and advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit.' Even worse, the family will be constantly tempted to assimilate the modern idolatry of money and possessions that Pope Francis has warned us to avoid."

- Source: "Families Matter: Why the domestic church is essential to the new evangelization." Cornelius F. Murphy, Jr., *America Magazine*, July 15, 2013.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/families-matter>

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

Ideally ACTs (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. If your family does not already have a regular time for prayer, bring the family members together and choose a time and a way of praying together within your home. Create a family altar and grow in your understanding of the domestic church. See this site for suggestions:  
<https://www.fisheaters.com/domesticchurch.html>

When you pray together, you are placing a covering over your family and your home. Family altar teaches your children how to pray, how to pray out loud, how to pray for problems, finances, sickness, unsaved loved ones, and how to bear one another's burdens. Family altar prepares the way for your children to see first-hand how God answers prayer, and paves the way for God's blessings, promises, and victories. Another online resource is:  
[https://www.dailyowegian.com/news/religion/the-importance-of-prayer-in-the-home/article\\_0237b560-3f4b-11e8-9951-cfaff38ce7e6.html](https://www.dailyowegian.com/news/religion/the-importance-of-prayer-in-the-home/article_0237b560-3f4b-11e8-9951-cfaff38ce7e6.html)

2. Hold a family meeting and learn about the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, described in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Peter 4:9-10, 1 Corinthians 12:8-1, Galatians 5:22-23. Ask each member to name a gift with which they have been blessed (children may need help with this). Then ask each one to name some way they think they can make their world a better place by using their gift.

The 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Many online resources can help you and your family learn more about these gifts. Here's one: <https://ministry-to-children.com/fruit-of-the-spirit-index/>

3. Establish an ongoing correspondence with a CFM group in another area of the country or in another country. Families can take turns sharing photos and family stories as well as telling each other about actions in which their CFM group is engaged. Contact the CFM national office to learn how you can get a pen pal.

This action will help families and groups to recognize their place in a broader, more universal community, where we are all one family, God's children working for His purposes. To learn more about a Hispanic CFM movement in the USA and Canada, visit [www.mfccusa.net](http://www.mfccusa.net). To learn about CFM throughout the world, visit [www.iccfm.org](http://www.iccfm.org).

4. As a group or with your family (or both), read and discuss one or all of the resources below and report at next meeting.
  - "American Values are Not Necessarily Christian Values."  
<https://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2015/01/28/american-values-are-not-necessarily-christian-values/>
  - "Families Matter: Why the domestic church is essential to the new evangelization," America Magazine, July 15, 2013. <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/families-matter>
  - "The Domestic Church: The Catholic Home,"  
<https://www.fisheaters.com/domesticchurch.html>

## OUR ACTION

### TAKE CFM HOME

How can you apply/incorporate the group's discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Ask your children what they think it means to be a Catholic Christian? There are, for this discussion no wrong answers – just ones that will enlighten you as parents.

2. Work with your children to name something they believe is wrong in the world. Again, anything goes, but you can direct the answers somewhat with questions like “Why do you think that’s true? When did you see that?”
3. Talk about how Jesus might want us to respond to these “bad things.” How can we make a difference, even if it’s just a small one?

## **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Look ahead at the “Observe” questions for the next meeting.
2. Who could you invite to join your group?

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer. Feel free to include any personal intentions anyone in the group might have.*

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Come, Holy Spirit,

Gift us with wisdom, that we may share your light with the world.

Gift us with understanding, so we may profoundly appreciate your truth.

Gift us with counsel, that we may judge your will in difficult situations.

Gift us with fortitude, that we remain firm in doing good and enduring evil.

Gift us with knowledge, that we may perceive the greatness of your love for us.

Gift us with piety, so we recognize how deeply we belong to you.

Gift us with fear of the Lord, so that we are filled with a joyful awareness of God’s grandeur, knowing that only in him will our hearts find true peace.

In Jesus’ name, we ask. Amen.

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

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## TWO

### Caregiving: The Job That Never Ends

Page 15 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** Finding a way to bring the best of ourselves to the task of caring for our loved ones so that we can be intentional in our familial caregiving. We evolve from caring for ourselves, to caring for our spouses, to caring for our children/aging parents/grandchildren. We feel torn in so many directions!

#### **GATHER**

Play and sing “The Servant Song” (recording available here):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYpH3y4608E>

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Heavenly Father,

You have given us the model of life in the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Help us, O Loving Father, to make our family another Nazareth where love, peace and joy reign.

May it be deeply contemplative, intensely Eucharistic, revived with Joy.

Help us to stay together in joy and sorrow in family prayer.

Teach us to see Jesus in the members of our families,  
especially in their distressing disguise.

May the Eucharistic heart of Jesus make our hearts humble like  
His and help us to carry out our family duties in a holy way.

May we love one another as God loves each one of us, more  
and more each day, and forgive each other's faults as You  
forgive our sins.

Help us, O Loving Father, to take whatever you give and give  
whatever you take with a big smile.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, cause of our joy: Pray for us.

St. Joseph: Pray for us.

Holy Guardian Angels, be always with us, guide and protect  
us.

Amen.

- St. Teresa of Calcutta, *Prayer for the Family*

## **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is  
encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put  
our faith into practice more intentionally.

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

"Therefore, take these words of mine into your heart and soul.  
Bind them on your arm as a sign, and let them be as a pendant  
on your forehead. Teach them to your children, speaking of  
them when you are at home and when you are away, when you  
lie down and when you get up, and write them on the doorposts  
of your houses and on your gates."

- Deuteronomy 11:18-20

The "words of mine" refer to those written in earlier verses of  
Deuteronomy 11 beginning with 11:1, "Love the LORD, your God,  
therefore, and keep his charge, statutes, ordinances, and  
commandments always."

"Those who honor their father will have joy in their own  
children, and when they pray they are heard.

Those who respect their father will live a long life;  
those who obey the Lord honor their mother.

Those who fear the Lord honor their father,  
and serve their parents as masters.  
In word and deed honor your father,  
that all blessings may come to you.  
A father's blessing gives a person firm roots,  
but a mother's curse uproots the growing plant.  
Do not glory in your father's disgrace,  
for that is no glory to you!  
A father's glory is glory also for oneself;  
they multiply sin who demean their mother.  
My son, be steadfast in honoring your father;  
do not grieve him as long as he lives.  
Even if his mind fails, be considerate of him;  
do not revile him because you are in your prime.  
Kindness to a father will not be forgotten;  
it will serve as a sin offering—it will take lasting root."  
- Sirach 3:5-14

This passage from Sirach expands on the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment to honor thy father and mother. Not only is it an obligation to care for one's parents, but also Sirach says that doing so is a sign of righteousness and will bring blessings. In the time and place that this was written, the culture was deeply family oriented, more so than our culture is today. Despite cultural differences, this passage offers powerful advice to today's readers: caring for parents creates strong family and society ties.

"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

Among Jesus' last words and actions before dying on the cross was ensuring that His beloved mother would be safe under the protection and home of the disciple whom he loved (presumed to be John). Not only does He follow the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment himself, but He shows us that this commandment goes beyond just our own biological parents

and extends to our communities. We are obligated to care for our elders and those in need.

1. How does the Old Testament instruct us to be caregivers? We are expected to care for our father and mother. Indeed, we are commanded to by God. We understand that this obligation includes grandparents and elders as a whole. We are not to discard the elderly when they cease to be functional or productive, but rather to respect and honor them as human beings who raised us, to care for them in their old age and infirmity as they have cared for us in our childhood and youth. The Scripture from Deuteronomy also instructs us to teach our children the Scriptures.

2. How did Jesus care for others in his ministry during his life and up to his death?

Jesus turned water into wine, fed the masses, cured the sick, raised the dead, and offered them and us the bread of life. He cared for his followers' physical needs when He was in His ministry, and He cares for our souls for eternity. Jesus taught the crowd that His Words were also their sustenance. His last moments in life were caring for His mother's needs, ensuring that John understood that he was to care for Mary as his own mother. His example of caring for others is a perfect example of caring without thought for His own needs, of all the ways we can care for others – physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

“Against this backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness.”

- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 28

According to the *Caregiver Action Network*:

- More than **65 million people**, 29% of the U.S. population, provide care for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member or friend during any given year and spend an average of 20 hours per week providing care for their loved one.

- Approximately **66%** of family caregivers are women. More than 37% have children or grandchildren under 18 years old living with them.
- **14%** of family caregivers care for a special needs child with an estimated **16.8 million caring for special needs children** under 18 years old. 55% of these caregivers are caring for their own children.

“The Fathers (at the Synod on the Family) also called particular attention to “families of persons with special needs, where the unexpected challenge of dealing with a disability can upset a family’s equilibrium, desires and expectations... Families who lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are greatly to be admired. They render the Church and society an invaluable witness of faithfulness to the gift of life. In these situations, the family can discover, together with the Christian community, new approaches, new ways of acting, a different way of understanding and identifying with others, by welcoming and caring for the mystery of the frailty of human life. People with disabilities are a gift for the family and an opportunity to grow in love, mutual aid and unity... If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of persons with special needs, they will be able to recognize and ensure the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities.”

- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 47

“Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.” – St. Therese de Lisieux

"Do we know the poor in our house, in our family? Perhaps they are not hungry for a piece of bread. Perhaps our children, husband, wife are not hungry, or naked, or dispossessed, but are you sure there is no one there who feels unwanted, deprived of affection?... Know the poorest of the poor among your neighbors, in your neighborhoods, in your town, in your city,

perhaps in your own family. When you know them, that will lead you to love them." – St. Teresa of Calcutta

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. Reflect on your own experiences of caregiving. In what ways are you or have you been caregivers in your family? How have you witnessed friends and family provide care?

We have all been recipients and providers of care throughout our lives. As children, we were fully dependent on the care of our parents and families. As parents, we are fully responsible for caring for our children. As members of families and communities, we are responsible for providing care to our aging parents, neighbors, fellow parishioners, and communities. The type of care we have received and witnessed influences the care we provide to others. Caregiving can include caring for children, aging parents, spouses in everyday life. It can also include caring for unborn babies and newborns who have conditions incompatible with life, critically ill children, physically and/or intellectually disabled children and adults, spouses and parents who have critical and/or chronic illnesses, dementia, or disabilities.

Encourage participants to share how they have learned from witnessing others caring for them, and how that has shaped their own caregiving practices. What do they admire about how others have cared for them? What do they want to avoid practicing in their own lives? How do they see Jesus in the caregiving of others?

2. What responsibilities do we have as parents to care for our children? What challenges do we face in raising them toward faithful adulthood?

We care for little children in every aspect of their lives: feeding them, changing their diapers, keeping them safe, giving them

medical treatment when they're sick. As they grow, our care changes to be less physical and more emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Our care turns into raising them to be saints, by teaching them the Scriptures, to pray, to do good works, and develop a relationship with Jesus.

3. Reflect on how grandparents have provided care to our families, both our own grandparents and our children's grandparents. How have they provided support and been a blessing to your family? How have aging grandparents been cared for in your family? What challenges or strains have those relationships placed on your family?

Grandparents who are close by often support their children and grandchildren by babysitting, helping in the home, and providing another role model for children.

Grandparents who live farther away visit with grandchildren and have special relationships through the phone or video calls. Other grandparent relationships can be strained due to conflicts or distance. Over time, as grandparents age, they provide less physical support and require more caregiving themselves from their children and grandchildren.

4. We often think of caregiving as taking care of children, the sick, and the elderly. Give examples of other ways that people behave as caregivers and what we learn from them.

Encourage participants to be creative and think beyond caring for the physical needs of their families for examples of caregiving in the community. For instance:

Doctors, nurses, priests, deacons, ministers, therapists, pharmacists, nursing aides, first responders, and even members of the military are all caregivers. Many religious orders have caregiving as their charism, such as the Missionaries of Charity and the Little Sisters of the Poor, among many others. Volunteer caregivers include: volunteer firefighters, members of the Red Cross, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Knights of Columbus. Others can include knitting and quilting groups who make blankets and hats for people in the hospital, and those who deliver food to neighbors when they have a sick family member. All of these people model caregiving for us by doing the small things, the hard things, with great love.

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. How can we set a model of respecting the dignity of all human life through caregiving?

By caregiving to our families and neighbors, we show everyone, especially children, the importance of doing small things with great love. We give them an example to follow in their own lives of being good parents, adult children, and members of the parish and community. Being open to life and pro-life means caring for and supporting the human person throughout every stage of their lives, even when its messy, unpleasant, scary, or seemingly pointless. By saying "yes" to caregiving, we are saying "yes" to life and "yes" to Jesus.

2. Why is it difficult to provide care? Why is it important for a caregiver to take care of himself/herself?

Caregiving is hard work. It is lonely work. It is thankless work. Society would prefer we keep the messiness of caregiving tasks hidden, or remove the people who require difficult care altogether. We turn away from people who have the burden of caregiving because we are afraid: of having a situation in our own families that requires us to be caregivers, of not knowing how to help, of taking on the burden of helping. Caregivers can feel isolated, ignored, alone, afraid, worried, exhausted, angry, bitter, resentful, etc.

3. What are the benefits/positive aspects of being a caregiver?

Being a caregiver helps us to realize that often we receive more than we give. It also presents us with opportunities to grow in grace as we rely on God to give us what we need (patience, wisdom, courage, etc.) when we feel overwhelmed by the job before us.

4. How have changes in society and to family structure affected the value of caregiving?

Families are often spread throughout the country, so taking care of

elderly or sick family members is difficult. The burden may fall to the family members who are geographically closest. As elder care has moved from the home to assisted living, personal care facilities, and nursing homes, we are less likely to see what aging and dying look like up close. Society's anti-life view of what makes life worthwhile means people choose abortion and euthanasia to speed up death rather than accompanying and caring for the dying on their way to a natural death.

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

Ideally ACTs (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Identify and reach out to someone in your parish or community who is a caregiver of aging parents, a spouse, special needs or chronically ill children, or other family members. Ask them how you can share their burden. Offer to support them by providing respite care, delivering a meal, visiting them, babysitting, or praying for them. For ideas of how to support them, check out these websites for Catholic caregivers:
  - Catholic Caregivers.com, <https://www.catholiccaregivers.com/>
  - Your Aging Parent.com, <http://www.youragingparent.com/>
  - Friends of John the Caregiver, <https://www.fsjc.org/>
  - Learn about ways that your parish can support caregivers and implement one of them at Catholic Caregivers.com: [http://www.catholiccaregivers.com/how\\_your\\_parish\\_can\\_help\\_caregivers.html](http://www.catholiccaregivers.com/how_your_parish_can_help_caregivers.html)
2. Read the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document, *The Blessings of Age*, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/blessings-of-age-english.cfm>. Reflect with your spouse or other family members: How might you and your CFM group answer the call to care for aging parents and grandparents, and to support aging

members of your community, their families and caregivers with the dignity and respect every human being deserves?

3. Identify an organization that provides caregiving services in your parish or community. Research their mission. Volunteer your time or donate money to support them. Ideas include:
  - Little Sisters of the Poor, <http://www.littlesistersofthepoor.org/>
  - St. Vincent de Paul Society, <http://www.svdpusa.org/>
  - Missionaries of Charity, <http://www.motherteresa.org/missionaries-of-charity.html>

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply or incorporate the group's discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. How do you feel cared for by your parents and your family?
2. How have your grandparents helped your family?
3. How do you care for your parents, siblings, grandparents, and family?
4. Who are the helpers or caregivers in our community?

### **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Look ahead at the "Observe" questions for the next meeting.
2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### *A Blessing for Caregivers*

May you see with tender eyes the wounds of those before you.  
May you hear with well-tuned ears the unspoken needs of those whose voices are muted.

May you hold with gentle hands the bodies and the spirits of those you care for.

May the beauty of soul, the strength of spirit, the wholeness of being lead you, inspire you and let you know your own beauty of soul, strength of spirit, wholeness of being.

May you know that, as you care for others, God cares for you, sees you, holds you tenderly.

Amen. - Sr. Juliana Casey, IHM

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

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## **THREE**

### **Intentional Communication: Affirmation and Criticism**

**Page 22 in Participants' Book**

**Focus:** In this meeting, we will explore the experience of being purposeful in our communication of affirmation and criticism in hopes of becoming better communicators at home and in the community.

(Note: “Intentional Communication” is a term that refers specifically to a building block of language development that develops in a baby between 8-10 months of age. This chapter does not explore this particular concept.)

#### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Dear Lord, we gather together to reflect on your words. We ask for your blessings as we examine the art of intentional communication. May we be graced with new understanding and insight. May we grow in our ability to be loving, truthful, just and uplifting with all we meet so that we may become a reflection of your love to the world. Amen

## REPORT ON ACTIONS

*Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.*

Remember to keep group discussion focused and be cognizant of time.

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. (And) be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” - Ephesians

4:29-32

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” - Philippians

4:8

These scripture quotes are attributed to St. Paul who wrote to the communities of Ephesus and Philippi, among others, from his prison cell in Rome. He was focused on their daily conduct, encouraging the communities to resolve their disagreements, imitate God’s love with each other and unite in their love of the Lord. This love was to influence all behavior.

- Source: *Word on Fire*,

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/peace-beyond-understanding/4508/>

1. Why did Paul encourage the Philippians to focus on excellence and praise? What role do words play for the healthy relationships in a Christian community like Ephesus or Philippi?

2. Do you think the scripture quotes above are examples of affirmation or criticism? Or both? Why?

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

Communication is the lifeblood of relationship. All relationships depend on good communication which must, if we are honest and loving, involve both affirmation and criticism. Think of all the ways we communicate with each other: verbally, written word, text messages, pictures, body language, and even silence. Sometimes when we don't say anything, our message is quite clearly received. But when communication is lax, when we are lazy and communicate poorly, our relationships can suffer. When we indiscriminately criticize, we can cause harm.

“...The Information Age is shaping generations much like the Industrial Revolution did with manufacturing and changing how humans contributed to the economy. These days, however, we are not just faced with just the innovation of a new assembly line or product. The Information Age brings with it a complete shift in the fundamental way that people communicate and interact with other persons around them; in their families, in their jobs, in their communities, as well as how they interact with the global community of people that are now all connected through the Internet.”

- Stephanie Patka, "Why the Catholic Church needs to take communications seriously"

“When I think of my closest friendships, all of them, without exception, are relationships in which we do dialogue full throttle. Knock-down, drag-out bliss, enjoying every minute of our joint journey into the Unknown. And it is in those relationships that my deepest, most impactful, challenging, meaningful, and life-changing insights emerge. Over drinks, over meals, during walks, while working on projects together we discuss difficult, fascinating, complex, banal, transcendent issues. Grimacing, pounding the table, shaking heads, nodding, laughing, modulating voice pitch—it's a wild, unruly, meandering encounter from which I always walk away

enlightened, challenged, uplifted, humbler, wiser.”

- Dr. Tom Neal, "The Art of Dialog"

“Despite what some people say, there is no such thing as constructive criticism. Criticism triggers a person to become defensive and protect themselves from an attack, which blocks the resolution of a conflict.”

- Kyle Benson, "Transforming Criticism into Wishes:  
A Recipe for Successful Conflict"

In research [on communication], the factor that made the greatest difference between the most and least successful teams was the ratio of positive comments (“I agree with that.” or “That’s a terrific idea.”) to negative comments (“I don’t agree with you” and “We shouldn’t even consider doing that.”) that the participants made to one another. The average ratio for the highest-performing teams was 5.6 (that is, nearly six positive comments for every negative one).”

- Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, "The Ideal Praise-  
to- Criticism  
Ratio"

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. Give an example of a time when you were deliberate and purposeful in your affirmation of another. Of your criticism of another.

Affirmation examples: complement the checkout clerk for efficiency; ask about the neighbor’s sick relative and offer prayers of support; or recognize a homeless person’s dignity by engaging in conversation, etc.

Criticism examples: Correcting a child's bad behavior; telling your spouse about something they did that disappointed you; giving a negative performance review to an employee.

2. In regards to question #1, how were your comments received? Would you choose to say things differently if you had the chance to do it again?

3. What are the impediments to practicing intentional affirmation and/or criticism: in the home, in the work place, or with the general public?

Examples: Time, energy to engage in an intense conversation; need for privacy; hesitancy; complacency; fear of rejection; defensive reactions or dismissal of opinion by others.

4. Tell about a time you received criticism which led to personal growth.

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. What makes criticism constructive instead of destructive?  
Do you agree with the quote in the Social Inquiry "there is no such thing as constructive criticism?"

a) Constructive criticism is defined as a recommended set of instructions that aims to collaboratively improve the overall quality of a product or service and often contains helpful and specific suggestions for positive change.

b) Criticism becomes destructive when the correction offered is self-serving or only negative in nature.

2. One child in a neighborhood playgroup was consistently misbehaving, creating havoc among the toddlers and spoiling the social aspect of the gathering for the children and the adults. Eventually, the group organizer told the parent that she and her child were no longer welcome in the group due to her son's inability to get along with others.

What, if any, intentional criticisms and/or affirmations could have been offered to the parent? To the members of the playgroup?

Possible responses should focus on encouraging the parent to watch for growth in her child, recognizing that with positive reinforcement and maturity she and her son may be able to rejoin the playgroup in the future. The remaining members should be encouraged to reach out to the mom individually for support so that she doesn't feel isolated or ostracized.

3. In the musical "Hamilton," Aaron Burr tells Alexander Hamilton to "talk less, smile more." Burr offered this constructive criticism to Hamilton whom he observed to be over-sharing his strong political opinions. When is withholding your personal beliefs sage advice?

You should hold your tongue if time and/or place are unsuitable for a meaningful discussion or if you are motivated by ego rather than a shared exchange of opinions. YOUCAT states that when conveying information, we should think of the "three sieves" of Socrates: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it helpful? Furthermore, "Everything we say must be true, but we need not say everything that is true."

- Source: *YOUCAT: Catholic Doctrine for Young People*, by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Ignatius Press, 2011, #457.

4. An author writes in his acknowledgements, "I am deeply grateful to those who read my drafts and offered 'no-holds-barred advice'--the best kind. At other times, they praised my drafts even when they didn't deserve it. Their enthusiasm was contagious and fueled my work."
  - How difficult is it to discern when to speak "no-holds-barred" and when to invest your energies as cheerleader?
  - Are you able to articulate your need for one or the other forms of advice?

- How might you become better at these skills?

Request permission to offer an observation and/or a suggestion for improvement in order to introduce a collaborative intent.

Ask the other person about their work process and their own assessment of completeness to help gauge the appropriate critique.

5. How would living and teaching the cardinal virtues--prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance--in our homes transform our ability to communicate with others?

We all want a nurturing, supportive environment in our homes and communities so that each member has the opportunity and ability to be the best that they can be. It takes energy and practice and personal scrutiny to respond to one another with their best interest at heart. Living and teaching the cardinal virtues helps us to keep our spiritual lives in good shape to meet the challenges of loving each other as God loves us.

Prudence, the “mother” of all of the virtues, is the virtue by which a person recognizes his moral duty and the good means to accomplish it. A prudent person looks at the concrete reality of a situation with a clear, honest objectivity; references and applies the moral truths (e.g. the 10 Commandments or the teachings of the Church); makes a moral judgment; and then commands an action. Moreover, prudence also seeks to accomplish the action in a good way— doing what is good in a good way.

The first duty in justice is toward God. We have the duty to pray, to worship, to obey the God who has shown such great love to each one of us and whom we must love above all things. In justice to God, we uphold vows taken to Him and make sacrifices for the sake of His love, such as accepting martyrdom rather than abandoning the faith.

The second duty in justice is toward our neighbor. A person must not only refrain from doing evil toward his neighbor, but also do what is good toward his neighbor. As such, a person must respect the rights of each person and establish relationships which promote equity among all people and build-up the common good.

Next, the virtue of fortitude enables a person to stand firm against and endure the hardships of life, and to remain steadfast in pursuing what is good. Here such steadfastness and endurance reflect the soul’s clinging onto what is good. Genuine fortitude does not entail making sacrifices or risking one’s life arbitrarily or foolishly. However, genuine fortitude is always exercised in accord

with reason, assesses the true nature and value of things (i.e. asking whether something really worth sacrificing for), and involves a just cause. Fortitude strengthens the individual's resolve to resist temptation, overcome personal weaknesses, and make sacrifices for what is good.

To have fortitude does not mean that a person is immune from fear. Instead, a person with fortitude recognizes fear, but does not allow fear to prevent him from doing what is good or, worse, to do what is evil. Think then of how important fortitude is to withstand peer pressure. Fortitude strengthens a person to conquer the fear of death or persecution, and even to make the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom.

Finally, the virtue of temperance enables a person to keep his passions and emotions under the control of reason. While temperance moderates a person's attraction to pleasures and gives balance in the use of created goods, it also involves using these goods in a good way. Here one approaches pleasures and the use of created goods in the light of faith, of reason, and of one's own vocation and circumstance of life.

- Source: Fr. William Sanders, *Catholic Straight Answers* website, <http://catholicstraightanswers.com/what-is-virtue-and-what-are-the-four-cardinal-virtues/>

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

Ideally Acts (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Be a cheerleader and leave notes of encouragement and affirmation for your spouse, child, parent or friend to find.
2. Practice intentional communication at the public level: write your local or state government official with words of affirmation and encouragement.

3. Include Psalm 19:15 in your daily prayer: “Let the words of my mouth be acceptable, the thoughts of my heart before you, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”
4. Make a commitment to say five positive things to a member of your family for one week. At the end of the week, talk with them and find out if they noticed.
5. Read about a research-based approach to relationships by Kyle Benson for ideas for “transforming criticism into wishes.” <https://www.gottman.com/blog/transforming-criticism-into-wishes-a-recipe-for-successful-conflict/>.  
Share what you learned with a family member.

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply/incorporate the group’s discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

- As a family, attend reconciliation, practicing intentional communication with God, followed by a meal of thanksgiving, where each family member offers something for which they are very thankful.
- Have your family members go around the table and ask each person to say something they like or admire about each member of the family.

### **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Look ahead at the “Observe” questions for the next meeting.
2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear Lord, help us to communicate effectively. Give us the energy, patience and wisdom needed to be intentional with our communications so that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts will be acceptable to God.  
Amen.

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

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## **FOUR**

### **Reaching Out to Do Good**

Page 28 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** This meeting explores the commission that Christian individuals and families have to model and live out an intentional love of neighbor even when the demands and needs of one's own family are great.

## **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the "Opening Prayer" together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Dear Jesus,  
Help me to spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.  
    Flood my soul with Your spirit and life.  
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly,  
    That my life may only be a radiance of Yours.  
Shine through me, and be so in me  
    That every soul I come in contact with  
May feel Your presence in my soul.  
    Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!  
Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as You shine,  
    So to shine as to be a light to others;  
The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be  
mine;  
    It will be you, shining on others through me.  
Let me thus praise You the way You love best, by shining on  
those around me.  
    Let me preach You without preaching, not by words but  
by my example,  
    By the catching force of the sympathetic influence of  
what I do,  
The evident fullness of the love my heart bears to You.  
Amen.

- Blessed John Henry Newman

## **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

*Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.*

*Remember to keep group discussion focused and be cognizant of time.*

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

- Romans 12:6-8

St. Paul wrote to the Church at Rome to urge them to reach out by donating funds to help the struggling Christians in Jerusalem. He reminded the Roman Christians to recognize all that God had done for them, giving them gifts and talents, and that they have a responsibility to care for those who are outside of their immediate relationships.

"Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'" - Matthew 25:37-40

Jesus felt deep connection and responsibility for those who are on the margins. He taught his disciples that their welfare was also their primary concern. He called them to recognize that he lives in each person, particularly in those who suffer, and taught them to reach out with love and compassion.

1. What advantages do you see in people having gifts that differ? How might these differences cause conflicts among people?

Different situations call for different responses or skills. Conflict among helpers can arise when they don't agree with how to help, or don't recognize the value of another's gifts and strengths because they are not one's own. A leader is needed to "orchestrate" the help in ways that lets everyone use their talents appropriately.

2. What could make it difficult to recognize Christ in another person who might be seeking help?

They might be angry, unattractive, challenge our beliefs, come from a strange culture, unappreciative of our help, etc.

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

These readings highlight the Christian imperative to serve generously:

From the *Catholic Stand* website:

- Why Volunteer? As part of the Mystical Body of Christ, we've each received gifts unique to our position in the Body, with graces that equip us for our work within the Church. If that's the case, why do so few Catholics volunteer to use their gifts for the benefit of the Church?
- Who's Doing All the Work? At your parish, who makes up the cadre of dedicated volunteers that keep it running smoothly? Research conducted some time ago by the Dynamic Catholic Institute revealed some startling findings: In a typical Catholic parish, 7% or less of registered parishioners generally contribute 80% or more of the financial support and 80% or more of the volunteer hours worked.
- Common Characteristics of Active Catholics - The research also identified four things that the roughly 7% of more involved Catholics do which the other 93% generally don't do as much of: prayer, study of the faith, generosity and evangelization. Those more involved Catholics have cultivated habits of daily prayer such as praying the Rosary, attending daily Mass and praying through Lectio Divina. They study the faith, continually learning more about it (and as a result seem to be less likely to complain about the positions of the Magisterium and about the Church in general). They also give more time and financial support and are enthusiastic about sharing their faith with others.

Pope Benedict XVI said that Christian volunteer efforts should not merely be “an expression of good will” but should be “based on a personal experience of Christ. He was the first to serve humanity, he freely gave his life for the good of all. That gift was not based on our merits.” He also highlighted the Catholic roots of volunteering found in Christianity’s “concern for safeguarding, without discrimination, the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God.”

- Address marking the European Union's *Year of Volunteering*

The following two readings talk about some of the challenges and rules impacting families wanting to serve together.

"Volunteering together, as a family or as a group with children, sounds great: having time together doing a positive activity and living the value of giving back to the community in some way...But the reality is that volunteering opportunities for families and groups with young children are the hardest types of volunteering to find....The quickest way to get your family or group with young children volunteering is for you to put together your own philanthropic activities that you do mostly from your own home."

- Jayne Cravens, "Family Volunteer: Volunteering by Families with Children"

"Volunteering together could be just what the doctor ordered for hectic family lives. It's like hitting the pause button: You're together and engaging with others, feeling energized—and everyone's focused on the same goal of doing good."

- *Create the Good*, "Family Volunteering"

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. Describe an experience about reaching out to others when the demands of your own family made you question your ability to do so.
2. Where do you see families reaching out today? Tell about one example. What do you notice about the families who reach out often to others?

Adopting and fostering children, aiding immigrants, demonstrating against injustice, etc.

3. Research at least one opportunity where families can get involved/serve in your parish or community. Bring the information to the meeting. You might start here:
  - Catholic Relief Services Parishioners' Initiatives, <https://www.crs.org/get-involved/parishioners>
  - "Edventures with Kids" blog, <https://www.kcedventures.com/blog/30-service-projects-rak-s-for-families-to-do-together>
  - Jayne Cravens' website, <http://www.coyotecomunications.com/stuff/family.shtml>
4. Give some examples of "random acts of kindness" you have witnessed. A RAK may be defined as a selfless act performed by kind people to either help or cheer someone up, for no reason other than to make people happier.

Examples: sincerely complimenting someone on their appearance or deeds, helping someone with a door, other common courtesies, giving your total attention to people when they are talking. Or it can be not doing something, e.g., refraining from such things as gossiping, finding fault, or making negative judgements.

5. What rules or laws limit a family's ability to do volunteer service?

Look at your parish and diocesan policies for youth volunteers. Also, see this article from the Nonprofits Alliance Insurance Group, "When Kids Volunteer: Liability Basics": <http://blueavocado.org/content/when-kids-volunteer-liability-basics>

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. How might efforts to serve others get in the way of family life? How can we do service for others (not family relations) when we have commitments at home?

Many responsibilities at home including: new babies in home, elderly parents to care for, teen activities, sports commitments,

illness in family, financial strain at home, etc. can leave us with little time for anything else. Taking on additional responsibilities may lead to a spouse or children feeling neglected, time-strain on parents, conflicts about appropriateness of the cause, political issues, safety for children helping, etc. Find ways to include meeting the needs of your own family while reaching out. Discuss and discern how and if God is calling you to serve others. Service may look very different for families depending on the stage of life they are in.

2. Why should we reach out to others beyond our families?

What unexpected good could come from it?

We are following the teaching of Jesus and the example of the saints; we may make new friends.

3. What positive impact could service to others have on the faith development of the family members? What can children learn about love when we help other people?

Children learn generosity and love of neighbor, good example of the parents speaks louder than words, people from other cultures and situations have wisdom to share, model of vocation of the laity, sparking desire to serve more, appreciation for the gifts of others, that one person can make a difference, etc.

4. What is the difference to your family's spirituality between giving money to a cause and getting personally involved?

If the family spends time discussing the cause or takes an active role in doing the fundraising, this could be valuable formative experience.

5. How can church or civil authorities assist families to help them to reach out in service to others? Who can we partner with to make action possible?

Suggest projects, provide child care when needed, organize collaboration with other church or community groups, give grants of funds for the project, supply materials, etc.

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

Ideally Acts (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Contact one of the service opportunities identified at the meeting, or a local service agency, to offer to volunteer. Such as food banks, homeless services, refugee placement, etc. See Observe 3.
2. Do a random act of kindness.  
Here are some suggestions:
  - [Random Acts of Kindness.org](https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas),  
<https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas>
  - [Australian Kindness Movement](http://www.kindness.com.au/what-is-an-act-of-kindness.html).  
<http://www.kindness.com.au/what-is-an-act-of-kindness.html>
3. Come up with your own service project that involves your whole family or group. Share about the experience in CFM's monthly newsletter, *ACT*, by writing to [director@cfm.org](mailto:director@cfm.org). Include a digital photo!

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply/incorporate the group's discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Have a family meeting to find out projects that interest your children.
2. Research volunteer opportunities at your parish, school, or community.
3. Do a random act of kindness for someone in your neighborhood.

### **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Look ahead at the "Observe" questions for chapter 5. #1 requires action before the next meeting. Before the meeting, visit, "Resolving Differences" by Kathy Beirne <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/resolving-differences/> and try one of the communication techniques.

2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.  
Amen.

-Prayer of St. Francis

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

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## FIVE

### Dealing with Conflict

Page 35 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** This meeting explores the practice of intentionally pursuing approaches and responses to “conflict” that promote growth and peace in relationships at home and in the world.

#### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

- Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

## REPORT ON ACTIONS

Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.

Remember to keep group discussion focused and be cognizant of time.

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

“If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.”

-Matthew 18:15-17

1. Why does this reading state that we should first go to our brother who has sinned against us alone and if that does not work go next with two or three brothers and then the whole Church?

Christ is teaching us to judge in context of love, not to be non-judgmental, but to do so for the good of the other. From a pastoral sense, the most likely approach to succeed in changing the heart of the sinful brother is in using the fewest number of people possible to change the heart/open the heart of our brother. Even when going to the full Church, hopefully we are going to those who love and will pray for our brother not gossip or act in a judgmental way.

2. In light of the above passage, when we come across people who are unwilling or unable to acknowledge their own wrongdoing and work toward changing their life for the better, what is the Christian way to treat them?

Jesus invites us to have a personal conversation with the person to help him/her understand the mistake. If that fails, we may take the help of

someone who can initiate the process of reconciliation. If that also fails, we can ask the Church for prayers and direction, assuming the Christian fellowship seeks to judge everything not so much in the light of right or wrong but more in the light of love. And if that fails too, then we are called to follow the spirit of Jesus who never condemned or abandoned anybody, but won them over with love and forgiveness, even tax-collectors like Mathew and Zacchaeus who became his best friends. Hence, let's not quickly understand the injunction of Jesus as to condemn someone as tax-collector or Gentile, but keep challenging ourselves to win them with the love which can touch even the hardest heart. The challenge is to love them all the way through.

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

In his book, *Seven Keys to Long-Term Relationship Success*, communication expert Preston Ni counsels:

- “It’s normal for a couple to quarrel from time to time—just part of what it means to be together. Conflicts and arguments won’t necessarily jeopardize a relationship. In fact, there are times when disagreements can actually bring a couple closer together. The key is in how you and your partner decide to handle the conflict.”
- “Couples with poor conflict resolution skills typically engage in Fight, Flight, or Freeze behaviors. They fight and stay mad, sometimes holding grudges for years. They flee and avoid important issues by sweeping them under the rug. Or, after endless arguments with no resolution in sight, they freeze emotionally and shut down. Someone who freezes in a relationship typically goes through the motions on the outside, but has stopped caring on the inside.”
- “Successful couples have the ability to solve problems and let it go. They focus on taking care of the issue rather than attacking the person. Even when angry, they find ways to be upset and stay close at the same time. Once the matter is resolved, they forgive and forget. Most importantly, successful couples have the ability to learn and grow through their interpersonal difficulties. Like fine wine, their relationship improves with age and gets better over time.”

*Beyond Blue*, an organization that provides online information about anxiety depression and suicide, has this advice for resolving family conflicts:

“Disagreements are a healthy part of family life. We’re all individuals with different ideas, personalities and ways of doing things, and we all want to control the TV remote! And while we shouldn’t expect to agree all the time, ongoing conflict and tension can cause stress and damage our relationships. Resolving family conflict effectively also teaches kids how to negotiate and reach compromises, setting them up for strong relationships throughout life.”

Cate Malik, a specialist in family conflict resolution, writes: “No matter how loving a family is, all families go through conflict. Family conflict is different from other types of conflict for several reasons. First, family members are already highly emotionally attached. These emotions can quickly intensify conflict. Second, family members are involved in long-term relationships and often are required to interact with each other daily. Finally, families are often insular, obeying their own rules and resisting outside interference. These characteristics can lead to long, tangled, painful conflicts.”

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. Before the meeting, visit “Resolving Differences” by Kathy Beirne, <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/resolving-differences/> and try one of the communication techniques. Share your experience as you feel comfortable.
2. Give an example of a “healthy” way of handling conflict within a family.

Healthy conflict involves constructive criticism rather than destructive disagreements. “Healthy” disagreements are those in which both parties try to resolve the issues; trying to understand the other person’s position, listening, would be some of the tools that could be used to have a healthy disagreement.

3. Give an example of a time you experienced a misunderstanding with another that did not result in conflict. How did you avoid conflict and resolve the situation?

Trying to place yourself in the other person’s shoes to understand their point of view, asking for clarification or “reflective listening” would all be tools to use to avoid conflict and resolve the issue.

4. Give an example of a time when family members could not successfully resolve a conflict. What tools are necessary for family members to be able to resolve conflicts successfully?

Successful resolution of a conflict might be just being civil with each other, but a true successful resolution is more likely if the family remembers grow in respect for each other and for the differences in their points of view.

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. When might we need to “take a break” from trying to resolve a conflict? Where should we seek help when someone has a hard heart or is unwilling to reconcile?

An example of hard heartedness is: one party in a dispute withdrawing and in effect becoming passively aggressive. This is not a healthy way to resolve a conflict.

2. Recall some of the techniques that struck you from the social inquiry or observes. How, when amid conflict, can we continue to show love and respect to individuals with

whom we disagree? What might a family have to gain from working through such an experience together?

An example of continuing to show love and respect for the other party might include: being polite, helping them with chores, going for a walk or similar small signs of affection.

3. If you are unwilling or unable to forgive someone, what effect does it have on you? On the other person?

If you are unwilling to forgive someone you risk becoming focused on the hurt and not growing in a loving relationship. The same may be true of the other person. If you are unwilling to forgive someone, you may justify your lack of forgiveness by turning the original offense into something much larger in your mind in order to justify your stubbornness.

4. How has God given us the perfect model for reconciliation within our homes?

Though we repeatedly sin against him, God continues to call us back into a restored relationship with him. Many of us have a Crucifix in our homes that serves as a reminder of Christ's supreme sacrifice and act of forgiveness.

5. When, if ever, is it time to separate from someone with whom you are in conflict?

If the other person is abusive and unwilling to seek help it may be appropriate to separate from them.

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

Ideally ACTs (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. If you are part of a long-simmering conflict with someone, offer forgiveness to the other person.
2. Discuss with your spouse or family member the approaches that seem most helpful in your situations of discord. Make a plan. Have it in writing, and remind one another what you both want to happen when conflict arises.

3. Talk with your spouse or family member about the proper place and timing for conflict resolution. Decide whether you want others (i.e. your children) to see the process of disagreement and resolution. Are there others that you want to teach about conflict resolution through example?
4. Discuss as spouses how you wish to handle conflict with your children, especially teenagers and adult children.

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply or incorporate the group's discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Talk as a family on how to speak when disagreeing. Teach your children how to navigate conflict between themselves and between the parent and child.
2. Use stories or examples from history or current events with your children to compare effective and growth-promoting conflict resolution with ineffective and damaging conflict provocation.

### **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Please note that the **OBSERVES** for Chapter 6 include a family meeting which is helpful to do prior to the next meeting.
2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER - St. John Paul II**

Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace,  
who are yourself our peace and reconciliation,  
who so often said, "Peace to you," grant us peace.  
Make all men and women witnesses of truth, justice, and  
brotherly love.

Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace.  
Enlighten our rulers that they may guarantee and defend the  
great gift of peace. May all peoples on the earth become as  
brothers and sisters. May longed-for peace blossom forth  
and reign always over us all.

Amen.

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

## Additional Resources for Conflict Resolution

### PEACE Process:

- **Practice:** working with, not against, each other.
- **Express** your desire to help the other person meet his or her need or intention.
- **Assert** more respectful and efficient ways to meet the need or intention.
- **Create** a plan to help each other use these new, more respectful strategies.
- **Evaluate** the results and make adjustments as needed.

Source: Gregory Popcak, Ph.D., *God Help Me! These People are Driving Me Nuts! Making peace with difficult people*. April 1, 2010.

Disagreements are common for married couples, including very happy ones. But conflicts can be approached in a variety of ways, and how couples handle disagreements may well influence their long-term happiness.

1. Destructive approaches include yelling, insulting one's spouse, bringing up things that happened long ago or demanding to have the last word. Belligerence, contempt and criticism often are said to characterize a destructive approach.
2. Constructive approaches include listening to the other's point of view, attempting to find out what one's spouse is feeling, attempting to say kind things or trying to make the other person laugh.
3. Withdrawal approaches involve disengaging from the conflict by becoming quiet and pulling away or leaving the discussion.

Source: *For Your Marriage* website, United Conference of Catholic Bishops, <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/how-do-you-and-your-spouse-handle-conflict/>

About Domestic Violence:

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/domestic-violence/>

Finding support for your marriage:

<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/find-support/>

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## SIX

### Managing Technology: Connected but not “Plugged-In” Page 41 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** This meeting is about being intentional with the use of technology. How can we balance technology with real time and screen-free experiences?

#### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

Invite everyone to take out whatever technological device(s) they have with them (probably this will primarily be cell phones but might include “Fitbits” or similar exercise devices) and put them on a center table or at their feet so all can see. Each person shares a word about how this action makes them feel (fine, nervous, curious, empty, wondering what time it is).

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Amazing God, you created the world out of nothing and made human beings as crown of creation. Each of us came into this world naked. But look how we are now. We have clothes on. We sit on chairs in a home. We smile, we laugh, we worry, and sometimes we feel pain. And we have lots of “stuff.” Some of our stuff is here on the table before us. It is made by machines

which humans have thought up, designed, and manufactured. Our stuff comes from the minerals of the earth and minds of our neighbors. Tonight, we come together to reflect on how our electronic stuff enhances our lives and distracts us. May we use the technology in our lives to help our families be *"together for good"* and to bring your Spirit more fully into our world. Amen.

## REPORT ON ACTIONS

Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

“Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves.”

- Matthew 10:16

"Shrewd means to be practical and to be given to an artful way of dealing with situations and people. To be wary is to use watchful prudence in detecting and escaping danger. ...Detect and avoid danger, while giving no provocation or offense. Be wise and harmless—always. When taken together, these instructions are a wonderful and balanced package of prudence and purity."

- Source: Pastor John McClain, "What Do You Mean Harmless?", *Beyond Today*, November 2, 2008, <https://www.ucg.org/beyond-today/what-do-you-mean-wise-and-harmless>

1. As a parent, ponder how bringing technology into your home and allowing your children access to it, is a lot like sending sheep (and myself as the shepherd) into the midst of wolves. How does this Scripture play out in the world of technology/social media?

Scripture often uses symbols from nature to make a point. Of course, your children are not animals but the stereotypes of sheep needing to be led and wolves and serpents being cunning and dangerous helps the story come alive rather than just a theoretical caution to be careful. Consider how sometimes your child may be as

guileless as a dove but other times as crafty as a serpent. Think of examples.

2. As Christ's sheep, what makes us effective and/or vulnerable as we navigate the world of technology? How can we be wise while remaining innocent when introducing and using technology in our homes?

Sheep are neither inherently sinful nor blameless. They just are. In stories they are usually depicted as lovable but clueless. Their vulnerability can be endearing and motivates us to protect and lead them. However, they can be tricked or led into danger.

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

*The Big Picture:*

- Managing technology in the home starts with assessing how we use our time as well as doing all we can to ensure the appropriate use of media, devices, and the internet.
- Once we put the *time we spend* along with the *purpose* for using various technological devices in the context of our whole family life, we can then move on to discerning adjustments we may want to make.

*Family Guidelines:*

Common practices that experts recommend for family use of technology are:

- Keep meals sacred. This goes beyond saying grace and trying to minimize squabbling. Typically, it means no media (TV or phones) during meals.
- People first. Personal presence trumps technological interruptions. If you're talking face-to-face with someone, give your full attention to that person. Resist the temptation to check email or a buzzing phone.
- Limit media time. Beyond internet use needed for a job or school, agree on time and content limits for social and recreational use.

- Keep family computers in a common area. This helps to keep everyone accountable. What's everyone searching online at home, and how much time is spent doing so?
- No phones in children's bedrooms.
- Become a media literate parent. Check out sites like [NetSmartz](https://www.netsmartz.org/internetsafety), <https://www.netsmartz.org/internetsafety>

*Impact of Technology on Relationships:*

“The Net is an opportunity to promote encounter with others, but it can also increase our self-isolation, like a web that can entrap us,” he said, noting that young people are especially susceptible to the illusion that digital connections can satisfy their need for genuine relationships. With this mentality, there is a danger of becoming “social hermits” who risk “alienating themselves completely from society,” he said, adding that the situation “reveals a serious rupture in the relational fabric of society, one we cannot ignore.”

– Pope Francis, *Message for World Communications Day*

We would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge that the use of internet pornography is destroying relationships, and is a major concern among many families in this technological age. Statistics from the organization Covenant Eyes that shed light on the use of technology to access pornography are alarming.

- Webroot Cybersecurity says: 28,258 users are watching pornography every second.
- 40 million Americans regularly visit porn sites.
- 35% of all Internet downloads are related to pornography.

This particular chapter, however, is not meant to delve into this topic. The use of internet pornography most certainly is an example of a misuse of technology, but it is a much wider issue. If your group would like to spend more time discussing the topic of pornography, consider using the CFM program guide: *Be a Light to the World: Christian Families Engage the Culture*, Chapter 3: "A Temple of the Holy Spirit: Virtuously Counteracting Over-Sexualization."

### *Benefits and Risks:*

"Many benefits flow from this new culture of communication: families are able to maintain contact across great distances; students and researchers have more immediate and easier access to documents, sources and scientific discoveries, hence they can work collaboratively from different locations; moreover, the interactive nature of many of the new media facilitates more dynamic forms of learning and communication, thereby contributing to social progress."

- Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 43rd World Communication Day

"One of the first things parents notice is that day-to-day communication with their kids is different from the way it was before the invasion of technology. Time chatting in the family room has given way to everyone in their rooms, on their laptops, until dinnertime. ...But as much as kids love their devices, they, too, feel a disconnect from parents, who often love THEIR devices too. ...Steiner-Adair believes that one of the key reasons that technology has such an impact on human relationships is the portable nature of it: 'In the old days, the phone would ring and you might be on a call for a bit ~ but the phone didn't travel with you all day in your purse or pocket, with the power to pull you away instantly, anywhere, anytime.'"

- Lynne Gonski, "How Technology Impacts Families"

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. Answer the following questions before your meeting, and come prepared to share:
  - What media devices do I currently have in my home? (TV, radio, computer, tablets, phones, VCR/DVD, etc.)
  - How much time in a typical day does each person in my family spend using a device? Specify work-related and recreational.
  - How much time in a typical day do I spend talking or recreating with my spouse or children without technology?

It's one thing to sincerely want to have a closer relationship with my spouse or child, but we humans often live in the world of wishful thinking. Observing real time interaction (maybe even charting it for a day or a week) can move you from wishful thinking to the action step of changing your habits. Has somebody lost sleep, missed a meal or a meeting, skipped a family gathering, or neglected a job because of a compulsive attachment to a TV show, checking email, a computer game?

2. Regarding technology and social media, do I consider myself to be pretty knowledgeable and shrewd, or am I more of a “techno-peasant”?

Pretty knowledgeable means I not only know how to turn on the TV, use the remote, send an email, and make a phone call, BUT that I know how to trouble shoot my devices, recognize spam, and I am familiar with parental controls. See [Free Internet Safety Resources for Parents](https://www.childnet.com/blog/free-internet-safety-resources-for-parents) from *Childnet International* for ideas, <https://www.childnet.com/blog/free-internet-safety-resources-for-parents>.

3. What are my primary news sources (newspaper, magazines, TV, radio, or online sources such as Facebook, blogs, emails, newsletters)?

Sometimes we can be blind to reality because we live in a bubble of like-minded people and news. When our sources of information are in sync with our faith and values this is good, but unless we've heard both sides of an argument, we can kid ourselves about what is right and true. Evaluating the potential bias of our news sources can help us not be fooled by a “tricky serpent” and false promises. See

[Democracy & Me](https://www.democracyandme.org/) by Cincinnati Public Radio for background,  
<https://www.democracyandme.org/>.

4. List the ways the use of technology in your home improves your quality of life. How does the misuse of technology negatively impact your home life?

Start with the positive. Consider things like a GPS keeps you from getting lost, cell phones help your students contact you in case of emergency, Googling information saves time and settles arguments, Facebook keeps you connected with friends and family, the internet can help with homework and research, etc.

Then, go on to negatives like too much focus on a device can take one's attention away from the human being next to you. Staring at a screen--TV or computer--can substitute for couple or family recreation. Opportunities for physical exercise and outdoor play can be reduced. Perhaps use [Technology Tips for Families](#) handout to explore this further. (PS: Answer to the "Trivia Question" at the top of the tips page is Pope Benedict XVI).

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. What/who should determine the devices an individual within a family should own and how it is to be used?

Consider:

- what technology to own
- time limits
- where technology is located
- content (evaluating age appropriate use)
- alternative recreation

Resources:

- [Covenant Eyes](https://www.covenanteyes.com/), <https://www.covenanteyes.com/>
- [Net Nanny](https://www.netnanny.com/), <https://www.netnanny.com/>

2. How can a family keep the proper balance between information technology, social media and personal interaction?
3. How do friends, ads and other unsolicited sources draw us into spending more time with technology than we would otherwise do?
4. How does the mix of your family's talents (including tech savviness) make for better times together? How does your family make decisions that all are willing to abide by?

To make our world a better place for all, it requires a combination of head knowledge and heart knowledge. Some people have technical know-how. Others are good at coming up with creative solutions. Still others are good at managing people.

For example, my husband is good at planning vacations; I'm better at thinking up engaging car games the kids can do when they get bored. One of our older sons can figure out how to hook up the cords and paraphernalia for watching a movie or YouTube in the car. All the tech gadgets in the world will not make for a happy road trip if the movies we brought are boring or not age appropriate. We need to combine our natural gifts. Who brings the humor? Who holds the crying baby? How do you decide on a restaurant?

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

Ideally ACTs (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Find some quiet time this month to reflect upon the following questions. Pray for God's Wisdom. Consider journaling your answers.
  - What are the most satisfying and enjoyable activities I do with my spouse or children? What brings us the most joy when we are together?

When considering adjustments in the way I spend my time on technology, it is useful to take stock of what really brings me joy and contributes to our family bonding.

- What would an ideal day look like for me? How many hours would I spend sleeping, eating, at my job, with my spouse, with my children? What gets in the way of making this a reality?

- What adjustments could I make regarding the amount of time I spend with technology that would help bring a better balance to my life? Consider the personal rhythm of my life, how I balance home vs. work, time for prayer, exercise, sleep, etc.

This question is geared to personal self-assessment since any family adjustments would need to be congruent with the parent's lifestyle. If a parent does not model a balanced life, other family members will not take any decisions seriously.

- What adjustments could I make regarding the amount of time I spend with my spouse, my children and family, and my community?

For married couples, the spouse is always the first priority even though it's tempting to put children first. If the spousal relationship is not primary, it will eventually weaken any parent/child relationship.

Next, assess whether adjustments need to be made in how the whole family spends time with technology and social media. Common rules for families: No media (TV, phones, etc.) during meals; no phones in children's bedroom; no interrupting a face-to-face human interaction to talk on the phone or respond to email.

2. Depending on the needs of your family, learn more about one of the following topics at the links provided:

- By family life minister and coach Susan Vogt:

“Technology Tips & Traps for Couples.”

<http://www.susanvogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm#technologyinmarriage>

“Technology Tips for Families.”

<http://www.susanvogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm#TechnologyTipsforFamilies>

“Cell Phones & Kids,”

<http://www.susanvogt.net/EnrichmentEx.htm#CelPphonesAndKids>

- By *Childnet International*:  
“[Free Internet Safety Resources for Parents](https://www.childnet.com/blog/free-internet-safety-resources-for-parents)”  
<https://www.childnet.com/blog/free-internet-safety-resources-for-parents>

3. If overuse of technology and social media is a problem in your family, devise a plan that addresses time limits, where and when devices can be used, how to counter peer pressure, phone etiquette, etc.

If your kids are old enough to object to or complain about parental media restrictions, parents can ask them to research the pros and cons of various approaches.

4. Decide what safeguards are needed in your home, and learn about parental controls.

Read “[How to Use Parental Controls on a Smart Phone,](https://www.consumerreports.org/smartphones/how-to-use-parental-controls-on-a-smartphone/)” by Bree Fowler, *Consumer Reports*, March, 2018

<https://www.consumerreports.org/smartphones/how-to-use-parental-controls-on-a-smartphone/>

Check out [www.faihandsafety.org](http://www.faihandsafety.org), resources on technology from the Catholic Communications Campaign.

5. If use of technology is keeping you or your family from physical activity or sufficient family time, develop an exercise plan, fun outside or active recreational times, both alone and together.

Read *Just Family Nights: 60 Activities to Keep Your Family Together in a World Falling Apart*, Susan Vogt, 1994, for ideas.

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply/incorporate the group’s discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Hold a family meeting to evaluate how balanced and satisfied you are with what technology is in your home and how it is used.

If a family has not had a custom of family meetings, it's important to clarify how a decision will be made. In general, it's best to listen to all members suggestions. The family can vote but parents should retain veto power if something is too expensive, outlandish, or immoral.

2. Decide if any devices are stealing time from family interaction time, sleep, work or school commitments. Is there anything to let go of?

If an easy consensus cannot be reached on use of various kinds of technology or social media, one strategy is to try one option for a period of time – maybe a week or two to see how it feels and works. Another approach is to attach use of a device to ability to pay, as in “You can have a smart phone with data when you can pay for it.”

## **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Place:

Time:

1. Look ahead at the “Observe” questions for Chapter 7. Notice that Observe 1 requires action before the next meeting. In preparation for the next CFM meeting, hold a family meeting to reflect upon your family's spirituality. Directions are provided in Chapter 8.

2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Dear God, we put our families in your hands. Help us not only to be smart about technology but wise in its use. May our use of technology and social media bring our marriages and our families closer to each other and to You.

Amen.

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

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## SEVEN

### Family Spirituality

Page 49 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** This chapter is about being intentional in creating opportunities to grow in our relationship with God when a free quiet moment can seem impossible to come by. Children need to have silence/time to develop their personal relationship with God just as the parents do. A communal family prayer time is just as important.

#### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Dear God, thank you for the opportunity we have as families to grow together as your sons and daughters. We ask you to open our hearts to the ways you call us each day to love you and one another more fully through Jesus Christ, your son. It is not always easy for us to center our family life on Christ, and we ask for an ever-deepening desire to do so. We know it is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we fulfill this desire. We ask for a greater awareness of the work of your Spirit so that your love is reflected in our homes and in all that we do. May we support one another in a joyous family spirituality that builds your Kingdom. Amen.

## REPORT ON ACTIONS

Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally.

Remember to keep group discussion focused and be cognizant of time.

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

"Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates."

- Deuteronomy 6:5-9

"Deuteronomy concludes the 5-book section of the Old Testament known as the Pentateuch, which traces God's relationship with humanity from the story of creation all the way to their arrival at the Promised Land. As we arrive at this 5th book, we are right on the doorstep to the Promised Land, but the people are not yet spiritually prepared to enter it. Moses here reviews for them what it means to be God's people." Source:

<http://www.peaceofchristparish.org/resources/bible#Deuteronomy>

"Is God indeed to dwell on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built! Regard kindly the prayer and petition of your servant, LORD, my God, and listen to the cry of supplication which I, your servant, utter before you this day. May your eyes be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there; listen to the prayer your servant makes toward this place.'"

- 1 Kings 8:27-29

Chapter 8 begins with Solomon's dedication of the Temple before all the people of Israel. These verses are part of his long dedicatory prayer. Finally, Solomon intends this as a place for God to *yashab*, but the Hebrew word *yashab* can mean "to dwell" or "to sit." In other words, the Temple can be understood both as a place where God resides and as the earthly foundation of God's heavenly throne. - Source: New American Bible online, notes to 1 Kings Chapter 8, <http://www.usccb.org/bible/1kings/8>

1. In what ways do you teach and "keep repeating" the commandment to love God in your home?

Deuteronomy enjoins parents to find myriads of ways to express the commandment to love God. We are to teach children to love God with our whole heart, our whole being, our whole strength. The best way to teach our children to do that is to do it ourselves. If we don't, they won't. How do we love God in that way? How do we express it to Him? If we are loving God in that fullest of ways, it will be visible to those around us. Spiritual expressions might be prayer, Mass attendance, regular reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, conversion of our lives/attitudes/actions.

2. How do you show the value of God's presence in your home- Physically? Spiritually?

Some examples might be a crucifix on the wall of your family room, religious pictures, framed Scripture passages, religious jewelry, Bible and religious books in prominent places, praying in public places like restaurants or spontaneously when people are in need, making the sign of the cross, genuflecting, using a rosary, and not being afraid to thank God or speak of His actions in your daily life.

3. Are there favorite traditional prayers that come to mind as you reflect upon the ways your family asks for God's favor?

For example, the "Hail Mary" or the traditional "Prayer Before Meals"

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

In “Family Life as Spiritual Practice: Spiritual Disciplines of the Domestic Church,” Wendy Wright shares:

“For me, the spiritual art of negotiating the busyness of family life has been twofold. First, I have in some sense surrendered to the fact that my life is essentially one of availability. When our children were young, I felt this most intensely in the twenty-four-hour-a-day, mom-on-call experience. . . . The availability I’m talking about is not the doormat variety; it is a more profound willingness, in things essential, to be present to others in the family, to carry their deepest interests always in your mind, to attend thoughtfully to their genuine needs, and to have the contours of your own heart stretched by the unexpected, inexplicable particularity of each of those persons you have been given to love. In this lies the beginning of our being able to love as God has loved us.

She continues, “The crucial discipline to be exercised, and the one I am constantly called to practice again and again, is found in distinguishing true availability from all the demands that claim us. Americans today live in what is perhaps the most speeded up society ever to exist on earth. We are barraged by multitudinous, simultaneous instant messages about all the things we must have and must do. We overschedule our children so that they might be the best soccer, baseball, or football players, the most outstanding ballerinas, pianists, computer programmers, rocket scientists—or whatever. We overschedule ourselves so that we might have the best career, house, wardrobe, muscle tone, garden, or résumé. In our drive to have and do everything—immediately—we often seem to have forgotten that frenetic busyness is not synonymous with conscious and attentive care for each other.”

“The second spiritual art of a busy family life, next to genuine availability, is the art of cultivating our sense of the silence that undergirds it all. One might call this art Sabbath keeping. The idea of Sabbath keeping is, of course, embedded in the Jewish and Christian faiths. And where a family’s religious observance encourages it to honor the Sabbath in traditional

ways, it can be wonderful. The traditional Jewish Sabbath takes place from just before sundown Friday to just after sundown Saturday. Prohibitions from work and travel allow family relationships to become the center of focus for this most holy of days. Similarly, some Christian denominations have held Sunday (not simply the Sunday service) as a day set apart, during which faith and family are emphasized. But Sabbath keeping is not only the observance of a day. It is also about the cultivation of a certain quality of time. Sabbath time is gracious and still. It is spacious and restorative. It is not merely “time off” to refuel or run errands and is certainly not to be confused with noisy entertainment or frantic recreational activity.

Wright concludes, "Any time can be Sabbath time if it allows deep, rhythmic rest and rejuvenation to occur. Time set aside for gentle prayer or retreats, walks by the seashore, in a garden, or through the woods, quiet afternoon moments sipping a cup of tea or reading a poem before a warming fire—all these and many more moments can be Sabbath time. They honor the stillness and silence that sustain our lives. What is perhaps most difficult for us is resisting the habit of automatically filling time with activity or filling space with noise. We race from commitment to commitment. Radios and televisions blare while we do housework and homework. We chat on our cell phones while we drive and walk. There are, of course, occasions on which such things are necessary. But I am convinced that the conscious cultivation of Sabbath time is essential to our being able to recognize those graced snapshot moments that continually occur in the midst of our busy family lives."

- Excerpted from the article, "Family Life as Spiritual Practice: Spiritual Disciplines of the Domestic Church"

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. In preparation for this CFM meeting, hold a family meeting to reflect upon your family spirituality. You might discuss the following questions together:
  - a. Are there regular times of prayer for individual family members at home? What does the rest of the family know about your regular times of prayer? What would you like them to know?
  - b. Are there regular times of prayer for your gathered family at home, such as at meal times? How do these times together make you feel? How do you feel when they are missed?
  - c. Are there other ways your family expresses and deepens its spirituality?

For example, through service or participation in groups such as CFM

- d. Are there less-formal ways that you grow together as a Christian family?

Examples: through family meals, spending time outdoors together, or around shared activity

- e. How do these experiences bring you closer to God?

Many contemporary Catholic families struggle to include regular spiritual practice in their family life, despite their sincere desire to grow as a community of disciples. There is no “perfect answer” to how and when families pray or engage in other practices.

Participants should be encouraged to assess their family spirituality with an eye toward growth – not in competition with other families or achievement of an ideal. Consider using this discussion as a way to share ideas that have worked for other families and you might consider incorporating into your family life. Our goal as Christians is conversion, the ongoing process of turning toward God. There is much work for us to do as we grow in discipleship. However, we must also allow God to work in us and through us as we try our best to follow Christ, trusting in the Holy Spirit. Our God of abundance calls us to see, judge, and act in the space and time of our everyday family life, bringing the intention of spiritual growth to our relationships with one another and so with God.

2. Think back to your growing up years. What prayers and other spiritual practices were a part of your family life?
3. What are the specific challenges to your family's spiritual practice that you can name?
4. Can you think of a time when you were "surprised by grace" in the midst of daily family life?

Examples: an unexpected opportunity for a much-needed conversation with your spouse, a child making a challenging decision with apparent ease, or even a rained-out baseball game or cancelled meeting that finds everyone available for dinner together

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. Are there ways that you would like to expand upon or strengthen your family spirituality? Be as specific as you can.

An example of a way that families might strengthen their spirituality might be to commit to a specified time for family prayer if that is judged to be a place for growth. This prayer could take many forms, and the "commitment" might allow for a "test run" of a few weeks to see what adjustments would make honoring time for family prayer most achievable.

2. Are there any adjustments that could be made in your family schedule or home environment which might allow you to more fully welcome God into your day-to-day family life?

One adjustment that your family may make might be to schedule spaces of quiet or even silence into your day or week. Perhaps you might lessen your focus on activities and entertainment in order to open time up differently to God's voice and action in your family life.

3. What fruits or benefits of family prayer have you experienced?

Perhaps your family has noticed that family prayer is a time for re-connection to one another amidst the busyness of daily life or that it offers an opportunity for reconciliation/forgiveness or that shared decisions come more easily.

4. What other resources might your family use to try to increase your spirituality?

For instance, your family may try going on retreat together, using a spiritual book, Lectio Divina, experiencing a Labyrinth, etc.

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

Ideally Acts (actions) are inspired and identified through your group's discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring 'action' that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Hold a follow-up family meeting to develop a family "spiritual growth plan." Name individual and family goals for prayer and other spiritual practice.
2. Consider elevating a fruitful family spiritual practice to "tradition," embracing it more faithfully.
3. Choose one way that you have identified to expand upon or strengthen your family spirituality and focus on that growth opportunity.
4. Choose one challenge to family spiritual practice where you can bring about change and commit to this change.
5. Consider reading Wendy M. Wright's, "Family Life as Spiritual Practice: Spiritual Disciplines of the Domestic Church."
6. Try one of the activities described below in "TAKE CFM HOME."

**OUR ACTION:**

**TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply/incorporate the group’s discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Share stories of family prayer and other spiritual growth experiences from your childhood (even young children might have a story to share!). You could do this over dessert and include extended family members or close family friends.
2. Compose a “family prayer.” This might be for everyday or a special occasion.
3. Create a place to gather family prayer intentions. Each member can write on a slip of paper a personal prayer intention – for themselves, someone else, the family, etc. (younger children might need help with this). You could place these in a box, jar, or basket and share them at mealtime or another moment when you praying as a family.
4. Try out brief periods of meditative silence as a family. You could plan to arrive at Mass five minutes earlier than usual, spend a moment in silence before your family meal prayer, or even dedicate a short period of regular time in the car to quiet contemplation.

## **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

1. Look ahead at the “Observe” questions for the next meeting.

2. Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Prayer to the Holy Family*

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate

the splendor of true love;  
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again experience  
violence, rejection and division;  
may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make us once more mindful  
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.  
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
Graciously hear our prayer. Amen.

- Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*

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

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## EIGHT

### Family Fun & Adventure: Un-busy-ing Ourselves for What Matters Page 57 in Participants' Book

**Focus:** This meeting is about being intentionally “recreated” by making time for leisure and recreation for oneself and one’s family. How can we become “more” by doing less of what we’ve filled our lives up with?

#### **GATHER**

Begin by welcoming members to the group and encouraging open dialogue. Remember to set ground rules for the group and be ready to re-direct tangential discussion when dialogue strays off topic. It is a good idea to keep track of the time to ensure your group time is able to discuss the entire chapter. Many successful groups do not allow participants to refill drinks or snacks during group discussion. Be sure your group space is free and clear from any distractions like background noise.

Recount a time when you felt rejuvenated as a result of spending quality time with your family and/or spouse. Stories can range in topics from a quiet evening to a full vacation/getaway. Hone in on why the time was so beneficial to the individual.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Many groups pray the “Opening Prayer” together. This is a great way to foster unity within the group and build group cohesion. In other situations, especially when the host couple rotates, the host may lead this prayer.

Lord, we thank you for bringing us together today and for helping us take time out of our busy days to reflect on how we choose to fill up our lives. Each day is a precious gift and opportunity from you. Help us to recognize the fun and adventure we can create when we take time to un-busy

ourselves and focus on what really matters to us. Help us become more by doing less. Amen.

## **REPORT ON ACTIONS**

Take time to report on how you engaged in action recently. It is encouraging to hear what others are doing and prompts us to put our faith into practice more intentionally. Remember to keep group discussion focused and be cognizant of time.

## **SCRIPTURE REFLECTION**

“Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what does not satisfy? Only listen to me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.” - Isaiah 55:2

The scripture passage from Isaiah was chosen because it allows us to examine what we currently spend our resources on and how satisfied we are with this spending. Then it gives us clues about how we might be able to shift our focuses in order to find more fulfillment in life. In this passage, God (through the prophet Isaiah) asks us why we spend our money on things that don't satisfy us. Then he invites us to find ultimate satisfaction by listening to him. This passage appears in Isaiah chapter 55. At this point in history, the Babylonians have defeated Assyria, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled all the people. The people Isaiah is speaking to have experienced much and he sets a tone of comfort, hope by bringing God's word to console the people.

- Source: *Word on Fire*,

<https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/going-beyond-a-mercenary-love-for-god/4496/>

“Observe the sabbath day - keep it holy, as the LORD, your God, commanded you. Six days may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not do any work, either you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or donkey or any work animal, or the resident alien within your gates so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you too were once slaves in the land of Egypt, and the LORD,

your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. That is why the LORD, your GOD, has commanded you to observe the sabbath day. -

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

The scripture passage from Deuteronomy takes place near the end of Moses' life. In this book, he takes time to admonish and instruct the people before his death telling them what really matters in life and encouraging them to choose how they live carefully and well. It was chosen because in it all people (sons, daughters, slaves regardless of gender, etc.) are called to set aside time for rest and rejuvenation. This passage allows us to examine how and when we actually observe this calling.

Based on your scripture reflection, what “more” can we experience when we commit ourselves to doing “less” of what we’ve filled our lives up with?

## **SOCIAL INQUIRY**

“Without the Lord and without the day that belongs to him, life does not flourish. Sunday has been transformed in our Western societies into the week-end, into leisure time. Leisure time is something good and necessary, especially amid the mad rush of the modern world; each of us knows this. Yet if leisure time lacks an inner focus, an overall sense of direction, then ultimately it becomes wasted time that neither strengthens nor build us up. Leisure time requires focus -- the encounter with him who is our origin and goal.”

- Pope Benedict XVI

[Pope Benedict tells us here why taking time for leisure is so important especially in our current world, and how important it is to make sure our leisure time is focused with a sense of purpose. It is important to be intentional even in our leisure time.](#)

“...Marriage is about adventure...You’re gaining someone to go on adventures with, someone to explore the world with, someone who’s up for stepping out into the unknown with you...How you see your marriage has extraordinary power to

shape how you experience marriage. Shared experiences are held by the two of you...they connect you to each other; they create the knowing glances, the inside jokes, the phrases that only you know what they mean.

- *The Zimzum of Love: A New Way of Understanding Marriage*, Rob and Kristen Bell, 2014

In Rob and Kristen's book, they explain how your marriage is exclusive - there's no other relationship you can have like it. Making time for adventure and exploring the world together is essential to creating the exclusivity that makes your relationship unique and fulfilling.

“...Where do we find time for such activities...? We make time, just as we make time for lunch and dinner. Why? Because it is just as essential to our marriage as meals are to our health. Is it difficult? Does it take careful planning? Yes. Does it mean we have to give up some individual activities? Perhaps. Does it mean we do something we don't particularly enjoy? Certainly. Is it worth it? Without a doubt. What's in it for me? The pleasure of living with a spouse who feels loved and knowing that I have learned to speak his or her love language fluently.

- Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts*

One of the 5 Love Languages that Gary Chapman explores in his book is Quality Time. Here he explains why making time for quality time in marriage is so important and acknowledges the inherent challenge of it but also the great reward.

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. Describe your daily, weekly, monthly routines over the past three months. Other than work, what do you spend the most time doing? Did you find time to relax and enjoy yourself?

These should be patterns in behavior, not a recap of activities done in the last three months. Think about things that take up chunks of time. It could be time spent organizing schedules, taking care of children, household chores. The intention is to understand how we actually spend our time. It is important to have individual interests and relaxation as well as with the spouse and family.

2. Think about some couples or single parents in your life that you know well. What do they do with their families or with each other for leisure?

This isn't just what is shared on social media. It should be centered around how other couples spend time connecting with each other or relaxing? Do they read, have shared hobbies, travel?

3. Growing up, how did your family make time for leisure and recreation?

For example, were there game nights, reading times "side by side," time spent camping, yearly summer vacations, activities with other families, or other members of the extended family?

In 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 as well as a sincere effort to determine the teaching of Jesus.

1. Do you feel you spend your money and time on things that satisfy you? Think about the things that do or don't bring you joy - how do they differ?

Possessions that might bring them joy might be a musical instrument, a trinket given to them by a loved one, a photograph, a book. Possessions that don't bring them joy could also be similar things. It depends on how the possession makes them feel. What memories are evoked by the item?

2. Why might we not set aside down time? How are our families impacted when there is a lack of downtime?

Many of us are inherently busy given the nature of our lives as parents, ambitious workers, spouses, and family members.

3. How in control of your time do you feel? How might we gain better control of our time?

While setting aside downtime might feel like an insurmountable feat, one direction to take might be to focus on bringing joy to what we choose to do.

4. Who should be included in the setting aside of downtime and how? Is leisure and recreation best experienced as an individual, a couple, the whole immediate family, your extended family, or all at the same time? Are some forms of downtime better suited for one or more of these groups?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Each person might have a different viewpoint on what “downtime” means and who should be included in the planning of it. The more varied the answers, the livelier and more insightful the conversation may become. Make sure the group does not begin to judge answers as “right” or “wrong”.

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

Ideally Acts (actions) are inspired and identified through your group’s discussion. The list below contains some additional ideas that may be appropriate. Consider a recurring ‘action’ that can be an ongoing experience for your group that lasts throughout the season/year.

1. Write out a list of activities that matter to you and work towards un-busy-ing yourself for them.

It might be helpful to set aside time on your calendar and be committed to spending that time for yourself.

2. Make a list of the many barriers that have kept you from un-busy-ing yourself. For every item listed, think of a solution that will allow time for leisure.

Being busy is a choice. So is making time for leisure. Look for patterns in what you are writing regarding barriers.

3. Talk with another couple and/or family whose ability to un-busy themselves you admire. Have an open discussion seeking their insights and advice.

The intention here is to share ideas and inspiration on how to bring fun, adventure, leisure, and recreation into focus in our lives.

4. As a CFM group, plan a fun family activity for your group to do together to celebrate the end of the year – picnic, hike, movie night, bowling, pool party, beach day, camping trip, etc.

## **OUR ACTION:**

### **TAKE CFM HOME**

How can you apply/incorporate the group's discussion to your family? Remember, we are called to make disciples and be a domestic church for our children.

1. Talk with your family members about the pros and cons of a busy life. Work together to actively plan to set aside time for leisure, recreation, fun, and adventure. Find a cadence that works best for you individually and as a unit.

This can be on a regular basis (i.e., once a week, once a month) or a one-time event (i.e., family vacation or summer family reunion).

2. Look through your house together and donate or throw away possessions that don't bring you joy.

Pope Francis says, "If you hoard material possessions, they will rob you of your soul." Donating items also serves as a way to give to others in need. Removing clutter in your home can also serve to un-busy yourself.

### **LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING**

Date:

Time:

Place:

Who could you invite to join your group?

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

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Father, you have given us 24 hours in each day to spend as we see fit. Open our eyes to the possibilities each new day holds for us. Let us see it truly as an opportunity and not as a burden. Allow us to set aside time for leisure and fun to strengthen our relationships with our loved ones and you. Help us to declutter our lives and minds in order to bring into view the people and experiences that matter to us most. Bestow on us a sense of control over our lives that allows us to truly experience each minute of every day to its fullest.

Amen.

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