

## **2007 FAMILY LIFE THEME “CHILDREN, GIVE THEM LOVE” PROJECT OVERVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The African Synod of 1994 gave us the image **CHURCH AS FAMILY** as appropriate for the African Church. This demands that we look at the reality of family life and ask ourselves what we can do to build strong families in order to build a strong Church. The **2000 Pastoral Forum** identified **“strengthening family relationships”** as one of the priorities for the local Church. The **Bishops’ 2006 Pastoral letter** too stresses how important it is to support family life and search for ways to address the needs that exist. Different ways for doing this exist. The Family Life Desk has chosen the approach of **PARISH FAMILY MINISTRY**. This is ideally aimed at all families in all parishes through the regular diocesan and parish structures.

Having looked at parents and marriage over the last few years the subject of children in the family is the 2007 basic theme for family life education and enrichment of family relationships. Family ministry is always firstly a form of evangelization, i.e. sharing the Good News of God’s love, experienced here in the family as the domestic church, while at the same time creating awareness in the parish and finding ways to respond to families’ more practical needs.

The basic theme will be developed with monthly subthemes looking at particular aspects of children’s needs. All this is built into the liturgical year together with national and other special days being used too.

### **GENERAL OVER VIEW AND SUGGESTIONS**

All involved in ministry to families of any kind are invited to use this theme and materials in their activities as suits them best. This includes dioceses, parishes, family life movements, sodalities, youth leaders, catechists and liturgy teams, prayer groups and families themselves as the primary educators. Family catechesis is the ideal. Below are some ideas that will hopefully be helpful.

An A2 poster calendar list the various themes and liturgical information for the year. More material will be provided in different formats during the year. Some will be for adult caregivers, while there will be materials for children too. The diversity of families and multicultural nature of the SA Church are factors to be kept in mind.

The reflections below could be put into church bulletins and bidding prayers at Masses can take these monthly themes into consideration.

Activities by and for children including outreach programmes should be the general aim for the year.

**A special CHILDREN’S DAY  
will be celebrated on or around  
1<sup>st</sup> November 2007.**

#### **January. Love Gives Life.**

God, the Creator, has planned that parents through their sexual, loving self-giving should be co-creators with him of their children. Ideally this is the love of husband and wife. In reality this is not always so. However, children need to experience the love that gave them life and continues to nurture and sustain them for their fullest human development.

Responsible Parenthood is the calling of all parents and Natural Family Planning is the method approved by the Catholic Church. These should be promoted and taught to adults and teenagers in preparation for life-giving parenthood.

Abortion is anti-life and destroys the life of an unborn baby. Young people especially need to be taught that while this is legal in SA it is not moral.

#### **February. Love cares for Children’s Needs.**

According to *Familiaris Consortio* one of the tasks of families is to nurture life from conception to natural death. Nurturing involves caring for children’s health and wellbeing, their physical and emotional needs and their education. Parents are primary educators and are directly responsible for spiritual and moral education. Others may take over as primary carers.

There are many children with special needs and thousands of orphaned children in our country, cared for by relatives, foster families, children’s homes or in child-headed households. Their needs are the responsibility of the whole community. Children too can do their bit to care for other children.

#### **March. Love respects Children’s Rights.**

The SA Constitution and various laws protect children in society and even within their own families. The criterion always is that what is best for the child should be done. But children’s rights are not absolute and must be balanced with the common good and family rights. Children may never be abused or exploited, but must also be disciplined and formed into being well-functioning future citizens.

#### **April. Love brings Children to God.**

Easter is a special time to bring children to God. Over a short period the whole Paschal mystery, with its glory, its sadness and joy is relived in the liturgy and can also be related to life experience. Not all the services are appropriate for young children but the



season is a wonderful opportunity to consider how “God so loved the world” and how Jesus lived and died and rose again and is still our friend and brother.

**May. Mother-love nurtures life.**

One of the most basic psychological needs of children is for a mother-figure. Mothering is a natural attribute and involves giving life, giving birth, nurturing and caring for another person over many years. Ideally motherhood and fatherhood are balanced.

May is also the month of Mary, the mother of Jesus, our spiritual mother and a model of motherhood too. Devotion to Mary is a special gift for children.

**June. Father-love supports life.**

Everyone has an image of what an ideal father is, whether we have one or not. We look to God as the ideal father one who would most likely be supportive, strong and protective, a provider, carer and friend.

June is also Youth Month and youth, boys and girls, could consider themselves as parents which some already are. What would your child expect from you, and what could you be offering to your child?

**July. Love builds a family across generations.**

Many children are brought up by grandparents or live in a three generational home with grandmother, mother and children. It is good for children to have and to give love and support across the generations. The elders might not be as strong and capable as before. It is not our usefulness that makes us valued, but the bond that exists for both.

**August. Love is fair to girls and boys.**

August is Women’s month in SA but we want to keep a healthy balance and not discriminate against either boys or girls. Both should be allowed to play with the toys or the sport and games they prefer and to have equal access to education at all levels. Traditional roles and expectations of boys and girls in the family also need to be reconsidered.

**September. Love celebrates traditions.**

Family traditions give children roots, a sense of belonging and a sense of their uniqueness and that of their family. Traditions are inherited or can be created from an early age. Older children become more influenced by peer pressure or they might look down on or reject their own culture and heritage. Family traditions are simple like grace at mealtimes, how birthdays are celebrated or what is done at Christmas or more structured as in some African practices. All these are valuable if they are not in direct conflict with Christian beliefs.

**October. Love gives children goals.**

Childhood is a time for growing, developing, learning and achieving goals. Career and life choices are important as children grow into teenagers. All this builds a healthy self-image. Parents and caregivers need to give encouragement and praise as well as the necessary amount of discipline. Goal attainment is not easy but a skill to be developed during childhood.

It is also Mission month and is traditionally about caring for others. One of the Pontifical Mission societies, the Holy Childhood society can be supported through small sacrifices for others less fortunate than we are.

**November. Love heals children’s hurts.**

“Kiss it better with a bandaid.” This is a helpful slogan and implies concern, care and practical help.

In the course of normal life children are often and easily hurt by their friends and family members saying or doing hurtful things. Many children also experience much deeper hurts such as the loss of one or both parents through death or divorce. Helping them to be healed, to forgive or be forgiven are important tasks in the family. Help may be needed to deal with this.

**December. Give them love.**

Just as love is a gift, so children are gifts too, gifts of love and gifts to love. Pope John Paul II writing on for the Jubilee of Families in 2000 spoke of children as “the springtime of the church and society.” He wrote of the mystery of the Incarnation and Jesus’ childhood “between the hospitable walls of the house of Nazareth.” He added, “this mystery teaches every family to beget and raise its own children, marvelously co-operating with the Creator’s work and giving the world in every child a new smile.” That is our evangelizing mission, the task of the Church as Family and Family as Church.

**MATERIALS**

2007 Family Life liturgical calendar produced by MARFAM for the FL Desk. Other MARFAM books throughout the year, *Marriage and Family Living* magazine and *Family Matters* the free monthly e-newsletter, booklets for family spirituality for the Christmas and Easter seasons and monthly family reflections, also in various languages.

*PARISH FAMILY MINISTRY MANUAL* materials from the Family Life Desk.

**PRIMARY RESOURCE DOCUMENTS:**

Scripture, the liturgical calendar, Catechism of the Catholic Church and documents *Gaudium et Spes* (V II), *Familiaris Consortio*. (JPII1981) *Ecclesia in Africa*- African Synod and Pope Benedict XVI work. *2006 SACBC Pastoral letter* on Marriage and Family Life.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Parish catechetical programmes. SPRED in JHB. Parenting Skill programmes e.g. Basic Parenting Relationship Growth Programme, Cape Town FAMSAs, Girls’ and Boys’ Town. The various Family Life Movements directly or indirectly support children. Info Leaflet available., Programmes such as “Education for Life,” “Love Matters” YES, youth groups, e.g. Masolenyana. Schools and community counselling centres. Special support groups for specific needs. Childline etc.