

MARFAM - MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE RENEWAL MINISTRY -

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2018 FAMILY YEAR PLANNER CALENDAR.

Theme: UBUNTU - FAMILIES DO MATTER

This overview can be downloaded from www.marfam.org.za under 2018 Calendar. Also see monthly and daily reflections.

General overview:

What is the matter with family life these days? A question with no easy answers. We have chosen to apply the well-known South African concept *UBUNTU* to families and family life. Humanity, recognising the personhood of people, hospitality and compassion explain this concept.

We get our identity but also our way of being and our values first of all from those in our families, the small and extended family, ancestors and living members. Families in some form have always existed amongst human beings and even in nature there are interrelationships and interactions that build the world as our common home. Our families therefore do matter and need to be taken seriously, supported but also need to be challenged. The unconditional love that is found in the intimacy of family relationships is a most powerful resource in spite of the faults and failings that exist. No family is perfect. We are all on the way, becoming persons, together with others and with God.

Clearly there is much that matters in building strong and healthy families. At the same time there are matters that contribute to conflict and breakdown. Month by month this can be unpacked, shared and discussed in homes, communities and churches.

2018 is an important year in the Catholic Church. The 9th World Meeting of Families takes place in Ireland, from 21-26 August. May it attract the attention of the world. *Amoris Laetitia* the 2016 encyclical of Pope Francis will be explored and discussed. We, in our different countries, dioceses, parishes and families can do so too. As before there can be a stronger focus on marriage and family life during the weeks 26 August to 7 October (weeks 21 - 27 in Ordinary Time) ending with a celebration of MARRIAGE DAY on 7 October.

January: Good Beginnings matter.

When does a family begin? One cannot be a family alone. When there are two people a new small family has begun. It can be defined as "an intimate community of life and love bonded together for life by blood, marriage or adoption" (St John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*). There are different forms and types of family today, small and larger units, but a sacramental marriage is still seen as the ideal foundation. A good start for a new family involves decision-making and preparation for a new way of life. Families change over time and regular times to review and make a new start can strengthen families on their journey. Each New Year is a good time for such a new beginning. *Pope Francis encourages us by recommending a simple way of acting that preserves and fosters love in the family by saying "Please, Can I? May I?", "Thank you" and "I'm sorry" and never allowing the sun to set on a quarrel or misunderstanding.*

There is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities with all their joys, hopes and problems. We should not be trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments but rather seek new forms of missionary creativity. AL 57.

February: Love does Matter.

There is a saying, "Love wasn't put in your heart to stay – love isn't love till you give it away." Love is a feeling but much more than that, it is a decision. It does include the Valentine view

of romantic love of the young, but this romance should be a part of mature relationships too. The intimacy of marriage in good times and in bad and the patient and enduring love in all families in times of difficulty all require decisions. Love in its different forms is what matters and is the foundation for all relationships within families and beyond.

This is my commandment. Love one another as I have loved you. John 15:11-12. Against a backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family another virtue is often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships, it is tenderness. AL 28

March: Family Rights do Matter.

The Church's Charter of Family Rights promotes the right to life, to marry, have children, work, shelter and more. In our world which is becoming more individualistic note that not only individuals but families have rights. Providing these rights is the responsibility of governments. However, it cannot be left only to them to pass laws and protect us, but we are expected to pursue our rights and live out our responsibilities too. This is no easy task and demands commitment from everyone.

The family is much more than a mere legal, social and economic unit, but is a community of love and solidarity. It is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society. Charter of Family Rights. E.

April: God does Matter in Families.

The joyful Easter season is a special celebration of faith and life with God, lived out in our human lives. It begins with a renewal of our baptismal promises. Baptism is the initiation into the life of faith. Confirmation invites us to a deeper commitment. Their marriage is for married people a fulfilment of their baptismal promises. A family is a growing and developing system, from childhood to old age. Every age group and every phase of life uniquely forms part of one's journey in faith.

Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness." Pope Francis, Lumen Fidei 53.

May: Parents do Matter.

"Where would you be without your parents?" This rather obvious question shows us how throughout life parents matter. Becoming a parent involves co-creation with God of a new life that is eternal. This is an act that can never be undone. It requires a permanent commitment to the wellbeing of that child from the moment of conception. This should ideally apply to mothers and to fathers too, although very many children live much of their lives without their fathers being present to them. Many families also include stepchildren or foster children.

Choose life, so that you and your children may live, loving the Lord, obeying his voice and cleaving to him. Deut 30:19-20.

I urge all future mothers: keep happy and let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness. AL 171. A father helps the child to perceive the

limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world and to see the need for hard work. AL175

June: Youth do Matter.

Around half of our population consists of young people under the age of 21. Their wellbeing is a matter of great importance. Their needs for love, care, support, education and meaningful employment as they set out to form their own future families demand commitment and skill from their families. Commitment from both sides, adults and youth is needed while being aware that family relationships often go through a difficult time during adolescence.

Children obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord. Parents do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer every one. Col 3:20-21.4:6. Children once born begin to receive along with nourishment and care the spiritual gift of knowing with certainty that they are loved. This is shown to them through the gift of their personal name, the sharing of language, looks of love and the brightness of a smile. They learn that the beauty of human relationships touches our soul, seeks our freedom, accepts the difference of others, recognises and respects them as a partner in dialogue. Such is love, and it contains a spark of God's love. AL 172.

July: Grandparents do Matter.

There is a growing proportion of older persons in our society due to improved healthcare and nutrition. The grandparent generation continues to contribute in valuable ways to the wellbeing of their families but eventually they are often the ones that need care and support. Neglect, exploitation and abuse of the elderly shows they no longer seem to matter. *Our elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. How I would like a Church that challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old. AL192.*

August - October: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. A marriage focus from 26 August to 7 October can highlight the special couple relationships and the need to build and strengthen them. As a couple they are a Sacrament of the Church and so a matter of concern for all of us. Sunday readings for weeks 21 – 27 can be used for reflection for couples and about marriage for others. See the special separate programme. 27th Sunday can be celebrated as MARRIAGE DAY by all for and with our couples.

August. Sexuality does Matter to All.

Everyone is a sexual being throughout their lives. Good sexual relationships of family members of all ages are important. Parents should relate to and treat boys and girls equally and guide them with care in their developing identity as future adult members of society, so that then they can relate to one another as equals too. Much work is needed for greater equality and tolerance. Oppression and abuse is mostly experienced by women but men may be alienated and can be abused too. People with differing sexual orientations are particularly vulnerable.

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21 (Week 21) God himself created sexuality which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. Sexuality is not a means of gratification or entertainment it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity. AL 151.

September: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY do Matter & Heritage.

It is said that marriage may be made in heaven but requires maintenance here on earth. Marriage is the most important

relationship of adult men and women and is lived in many different circumstances. Marriage and family life are very important parts of our cultural heritage with their different practices and traditions. Just as our spiritual heritage of a relationship with God continues to grow and develop so should a marriage. A spirituality of marriage should be nurtured and supported in order to deepen the commitment in good times and in bad.

God who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world the Lord of life, who loves us so much is always present. Laudato Si 245

“Marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa.” Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. AL70

October: MARRIAGE AND FAMILY do Matter & Mission.

Being committed to one's marriage is the core of the mission of couples. Marriage is our Sacrament as lay people. It is a gift for personal wellbeing, for the procreation of children and growing the family of God from the domestic church to the larger church as a “family of families.” An essential part of the mission of the Church is to support and promote healthy families whatever their reality is.

Christ the Lord “comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony. Through his Spirit, he enables them to make their love permeate every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity. A bride and groom are consecrated and through his grace they build up the Body of Christ and are a domestic Church. The Church looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way. God has given the family the job of “domesticating the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters. AL 183

November: Life and Death do Matter.

Loss is inevitable and comes in many different forms, death, divorce or in less traumatic ways. Dealing with serious losses such as a death is a process that takes time. We may cope well or we may be overwhelmed by grief. Families owe it to one another and beyond that to other families to offer care and support at times of loss.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. Ps 34:18. Although the certainty of death saddens us we are consoled by the promise of future immortality, for the life of those who believe in you Lord is not ended but changed. Our loved ones are not lost in the shades of nothingness; hope assures us that they are in the good strong hands of God. AL 256

December: Families Do Matter to All.

Imagine how the Church and society would benefit if everyone was willing and able to live up to their commitments and take responsibility for what matters. If spouses were faithful and parents concerned for children's welfare it would go a long way to building a healthy society. If all family members worked at their communication, kept their promises, looked after their health and made the decision to love even when they did not feel loving we would show that is what matters to us. Good fortune and misfortune can and do happen but at all times our faith in God's love and mercy calls us to an attitude of thankfulness.

Although you have no need of our praise, our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness, but profit us for salvation through Christ our Lord. From Common Preface of the Mass IV.

What really matters is not what you can do for me or what I can do for you but who we are together and with God. TR