

Ideas for Celebrating Parents



Collated for Parents' Week in 2005 by the
Marriage & Family Life Project Office
Department of Christian Responsibility and Citizenship
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Prayers for Parents

Lord, help me to hear you calling
in the voice of my child.
Let me see you in the eyes that look into mine,
feel your embrace in the arms
that close around me
and know that I am loved
even as I teach my child
what it is to be loved. Amen.

Kathleen Chesto

Father in heaven, pattern of all parenthood
and lover of children, we pray for homes and
families across the world. Sustain and comfort
them in need and sorrow. In times of bitter-
ness, tension, division, draw near to heal. May
parents and children together be learners in
the school of Christ, daily increasing in mutual
respect and understanding, in tolerance and
patience, and in all-prevailing love, through
Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Timothy Dudley-Smith

Mary and Joseph, you lived your lives as
spouses and parents. You knew the monotony
of daily chores, the delight in first steps and
first words, the anguish of a missing child, the
fears and hopes, concerns and joys shared by
all families. Help us to recognise in the
simplicity of your lives the holiness of our own.
Pray with us, that we, too, might be a holy
family. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your
Son and foster-Son. Amen.

Kathleen Chesto

My Lord and Holy Companion,
I am alone in this awesome task of
making a home.
I ask Your holy help
to show me how to take on
the responsibilities
of both mother and father.
Direct my heart
so that I may dispense the qualities of
both parents,
of gentle compassion on one hand,
of firm discipline on the other;
may I transmit true tenderness coupled
with true strength.

The days are long and the nights lonely,
yet, with Your divine support,
the impossible will unfold as possible,
and our home will be more than a
house.

Edward Hays



Creator God, for years we dreamed about
'hearing the patter of tiny feet'. We took it for
granted that would be part of our life together.
Now it seems likely that our dream has
become a nightmare. Help us to be able to talk
about it honestly. Help us to share our disap-
pointments. Help us to dream new dreams.
Amen.

Andrew Body

Lord Christ,
enable us to place our trust in you,
and so to live in the present moment.
So often we forget that you never want human
suffering, but peace in our hearts.
Christ Jesus, by your Spirit you dwell in us.
More still, you pray in us.
Your miracle within us is accomplished
through the trust we have in you
and your continual forgiveness.

Brother Roger

Loving God,
I come to you like a child
before a caring parent,
I open my hands to
whatever you have for me today,
I kneel (or sit) with confidence,
for you hold me in your presence,
you listen to my fumbling words,
you even hear
the movement of my heart without words.
Renew in me
the simple faith of a child,
a sense of wonder at all creation,
an attitude of gratitude for all that is,
a peaceful spirit in times of trouble,
a joyful heart in times of goodness.
Send your spirit to pray in me
as I raise my heart and mind to you. Amen.

Mary Jo Pedersen

Turn to me and be gracious to me,
For I am lonely and afflicted.
The troubles of my heart have multiplied;
Free me from my anguish.

Psalms 25:16

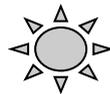
Parents' Joys



Being together. Celebrations of landmarks and achievements.

Simple things that happen when we've snatched some relaxing time together, chatting, watching the children at play...

Being loved and loving in return



Days out as a family. BBQ's, reading stories, bath time, family breakfast and tea times. General conversation with the children and their infectious enthusiasm.

Incredible love generated between us. Watching children growing up and being together. Seeing the children's generosity and awareness. Enjoying quiet family times, walks and sitting around the fire.

The small things are best, eating, laughing, being together.



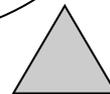
All get-togethers. Being able to buy nice things for the children. Holidays. The rough and tumble. Togetherness.

Our Down's Syndrome son is our blessing - his angelic nature, wisdom and spirituality. He is church.



The company of my children, family gatherings. Sharing life experiences with my children. Meal times and family times.

Holidays together, breakfast in bed, when your children surprise you with their achievements and kindness.



Talking it through

- 1: These are real stories but how far do they match your own joyful experience of being parents? List more joys that have not been mentioned here.
- 2: Describe a parenting moment that was especially joyful and memorable for you.
- 3: Which of all the joys you have talked about seems to be an experience common to most parents? What would you like to do during Parents Week to celebrate this?
- 4: "Being together" was described by the late Pope John Paul II as the good 'par excellence' of family life. (See his 1994 Letter to Families) How would you like your parish to celebrate this 'good' at Sunday Mass and afterwards?

Love, Families and God

When families were asked what they enjoyed most about their family life the overwhelming majority mentioned the love and sense of togetherness they enjoyed. That should come as no surprise to anyone. It is also clear evidence that families are fulfilling a fundamental God-given purpose or mission, as taught by the Church and that they really are being *holy* families.

Let's look at the purpose of family life first. In 1981 Pope John Paul II published a document called 'On the Family' or *Familiaris Consortio*. It is a very important document for families because it brings together all the Church's teaching on family life. Within its pages the family, 'founded and given life by love' is described as 'a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives.' The 'permanent power' (energy) and final goal (purpose) of family life, according to this document, is *love*. 'Without love the family is not a community of person... and cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community.' Love is fundamental to family life and the families we heard from, by and large, enjoy it in abundance.

Now to holiness. Michael Quinn, parenting 'guru' and father of five, describes the holiness of the home thus: "To be holy is simply to be like God. And God is Love. So holiness for a family is mainly about loving. That means it is about ordinary, earthy things like sex, giving birth, breastfeeding, laughing together, shedding tears, giving hugs, wiping snotty noses. They are holy things when they are living things. That does not exclude prayer, of course, but it definitely includes the messiness of daily life in a family". Sometimes its hard to see God's presence in the busyness and messiness of family life. Nevertheless God is right there – just waiting to be noticed and included.

The challenge of supporting parents should not be underestimated, especially when the means by which this can be achieved are extremely varied. We noted eight points recommended to churches interested in equipping parents for passing on faith. Four of these are relationship-centred (supporting parental harmony, effective family communication, wise parental control, parental affection) and four are faith-centred (Gospel-oriented parents, the communication of moral values, involvement in service activities, sharing of faith at home). Adopting these eight priorities as the focus for supporting parents would mean making relationship skills training for marriage and parenting much more widely available, as well as encouraging a much broader understanding and appreciation of family spirituality and enabling a deeper understanding of what it means for families to be domestic church. *Not Easy But Full of Meaning* § 203

Reflections on Teaching

"In order to love another person it is necessary to have that security that comes from having been loved. That is why the love of parents is so important for a child's personal development and growth ... It is from our first carers that we learn how to love ourselves and how to love others in the right way."

(Cherishing Life § 98)

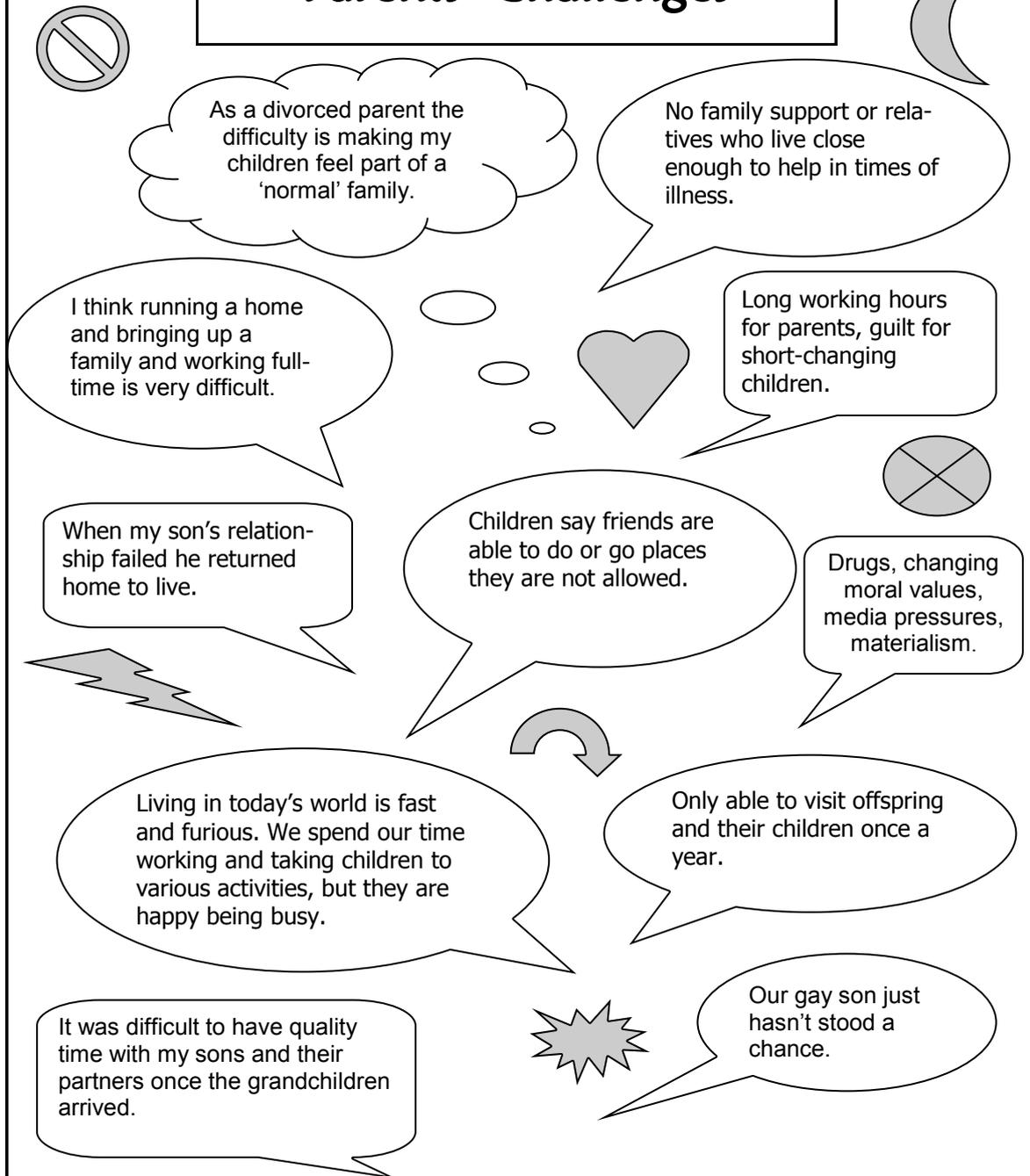
- ◆ What did you learn from those who cared for you as a child? What did they teach you about loving others?
- ◆ How well do you love yourself? Do you really believe in the beauty of God's creation where your own self is concerned?
- ◆ What helps you to feel loved and appreciated, both at home and in the church?
- ◆ As a parent when have you seen your children show that they learned about love from your example?

"Parenthood is of immense significance theologically, personally and for society as a whole. This is true of family and marriage as profound human realities whatever the couple's religious beliefs."

(Cherishing Life § 118)

- ◆ What sign does your parish give of the religious significance of parents and grandparents? What signs are important to you?
- ◆ Inter-church and inter-faith families face particular challenges in their spiritual lives. What do you think these might be and what could your parish do to help?
- ◆ Make a list of all the ways that parents and grandparents are important for their children and for other family members.

Parents' Challenges



Talking it through

- 1: These are real stories but how far do they match your own experience of being parents? Can you identify other challenges that have not been mentioned here?
- 2: Describe a parenting moment that was especially challenging to you. How did you cope?
- 3: Which of all the challenges you have talked about seems to be an experience shared by most parents? What could you do this Parents' Week to support each other?
- 4: Cross and resurrection are two themes of family spirituality identified by the late Pope John Paul II. As a parent how have you seen these themes played out at home? How can your parish help you, when the cross is uppermost, to move towards resurrection?

Pearls of Great Price

The light of God, deeply rooted in each one of us, combines with the struggles and pressures that we face in life, to help us become the people God wants us to be - true images of God and true reflections to each other of His great love - human pearls of great price.

Reading: Drawn By the Light

The oyster was lodged in the sandy sea-bed, moving aimlessly in the mud at the bottom of the ocean. But one night there was a full moon and its brilliant light penetrated even those dark depths. The oyster was profoundly attracted by the mysterious glow and drawn, as if by a magnet, to the surface of the water and the source of the light. As she broke the surface, she was overcome by the glory of the light — a light that invited her to open herself to its overwhelming presence. Her tough outer shell loosened under its spell, just enough to trap a fragment of the moonlight within her innermost self for all eternity.

She was a mortal creature and her vision could only last for a fleeting moment. Soon, the waves drew her back down to the sea-bed. But the pearl had begun to form within her, conceived in the heavenly encounter, and it would grow slowly and imperceptibly through all her years, until the One who knew what she contained, would take her between his fingers, open the shell and gaze with love upon the pearl that He had made.

Reflection: *The legend of the pearl can help us take hold of the truth that in each of us there is a unique fragment of the Being we call God. Take a few minutes to think about ways you have experienced the light of God in your own person. Think about the person you are. What are your particular personal gifts? Be aware of them. Recognise them as that special fragment of God, unique to you. Be glad of them.*

Reading: The Grit - Essential Not An Optional Extra

The legend of the pearl reveals a spiritual truth. Science gives us another “take” on the mystery of the pearl. From science we learn that pearls are formed as a reaction by the oyster to the presence of an irritant grain of sand in its tender inner parts, a grain of sand, which it tries to coat with a substance, which gradually creates the pearl. So too, perhaps, the beauty that is within us, is the fruit of the grit in our lives that we would sometimes do anything to be rid of. Our worst pain may be creating that deep beauty, which is becoming a reflection of God himself

Reflection: *What is the particular grit in your life... at the present moment or during your life time? What are the particular difficulties and pressures you have to cope with? Face them and acknowledge them. Name them to the Lord in the quiet of your own heart.*

Reflections on Teaching

"Children now are often brought up by one parent or in a mixed family with children from previous relationships. Wherever and however parents take responsibility, as best they can, for their children's upbringing, they should be affirmed in this."

(Cherishing Life § 144)

- ◆ How do you feel about changing family structures? What are your worries about this?
- ◆ 'Where charity and love are there is God.' How can these words of St John help your parish to affirm non-traditional family types?
- ◆ What do you think are the main challenges of single-parent, blending or step-families? What can your parish do to help? What can the church as a whole do to affirm these families?
- ◆ Christian families are participants in the priestly, prophetic and kingly mission of the baptised. How can this understanding of the sacrament help in affirming those who are separated or divorced?

Gospel Reading

In the world you will have troubles
But be of good courage
I have overcome the world
John 16 v33

Reflection: *That word “overcoming” doesn’t mean “squash down or repress” but rather “go right down deep inside the trouble, struggle with it, push and fight your way through”. Sometimes we might wonder if we will ever come through the other side.....but Jesus’ words are encouraging . . . He has overcome.. . through the deep bleak darkness of the Cross and come through...*

These readings were used in a Parents' Week service in Liverpool in 2004. Perhaps you can use them in your home or parish for an evening or afternoon of recollection for parents? The readings are from Margaret Silf's *Wayfaring: A Gospel Journey into Life*. Music suggestions include Philip Chapman's *Keeper of Dreams* or Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* or Taizé music.

Supporting Parents

Parenting programmes, marriage preparation, parent and toddler groups and healing ministries such as Rainbows were all identified as key opportunities for supporting the personal development of parents to further enable them to be first teachers of their children.

Home needs joining up with church much more and the value of what parents are actually doing needs recognising, especially the parents' foundational experiences of love. That's how we start to bring kids up in the faith - by showing them love.

Maybe there should be more home groups of different kinds, which can often be more flexible and offer both spiritual and community involvement. This would indicate a need for more support packs, helping each other to develop the skills necessary to organise successful groups.

With the right vision and some empowering and supporting, parish families could organise family retreat days, parent and toddler groups, youth groups and programmes of support for marriage partners, all of which would build up a family spirituality and help develop strong, healthy Catholic family life, and this would spill over into the whole parish.

People are under pressure and are doing their best to stay normal - they find it hard to come to talks and sessions - they say they want these things but when they are provided their diaries are already full. Is catechesis being done in the right places? Maybe we need to take it to people not expect them to come to us.

Talking it through

1. These suggestions came from participants in Listening 2004. They identified programmes and ways of working that would help family life. Which of these ideas do you like best? Suggest some ideas of your own.
2. We are not a 'one-size-fits-all' community. Therefore a range of ideas is better than just one or two. Which ideas would best fit the need in your parish?
3. Supporting families can look like (and be!) hard work. How can the burden be shared or lightened?
4. Virtually no family encouragement or support can take place without established relationships of trust and respect. How can these be strengthened in your parish?

Building a Family-Friendly Church:

An ecumenical resource for parishes

Families today seem to come in more shapes and sizes than ever before. There are:

- Single people who have never married
- Single people who have been divorced, and possibly share the care of their children
- Couples without children
- Widows and widowers of all ages
- Lone-parent families
- Two-parent families
- Families with one or more disabled children
- Extended families
- Adoptive families
- Friends living together
- Foster families
- Blended families
- Families from different cultural backgrounds
- Mixed-faith or inter-church families
- Carers and their elderly or disabled relatives

And probably many more. Any church wanting to reach out into its community, and become friendly to families of all kinds, faces an exciting challenge. Churches Together for Families have designed a pack to help churches explore the broad definition of 'family-friendly', take a few more steps along the road in that direction and make some changes that will impact not only the current congregation but also the community in which they worship. Family-friendly is more than being child-friendly. It is about creating a church where everybody feels welcome and comfortable, and knows that their individual needs have been considered and met wherever possible.

It is not intended to be a full-blown course on how to be a family-friendly church, containing every detail from A-Z and qualifying parishes for a government charter in family-friendliness. Rather the pack is more of an appetiser, an introductory resource to share and to reflect upon together. Some ideas might be adopted quickly, others might take a little longer, and some might not be appropriate for a particular church at all. The route towards increasing family-friendliness and the changes that may have to be made will be different for each church – and there are sure to be some interesting discoveries made along the way.



'Building a Family Friendly Church' is available as the Everybody's Welcome Action Pack: www.catholicfamily.org.uk

Bulletin 'bullet-points'

Cut and paste into your Sunday bulletin



“God himself
is present in
human
fatherhood
and
motherhood”

John Paul II.
Letter to Families § 9

Loving the family means
being able to appreciate its values and capabilities,
fostering them always.

Loving the family means
identifying the dangers and the evils that menace it
in order to overcome them.

Loving the family means
endeavouring to create for it
an environment favourable for its development.

Familiaris Consortio § 86

“..parents, by word and example, are the first
heralds of the faith with regard to their children..”
Lumen Gentium § 11

"To you, Families, I repeat: Be not afraid!
The Lord is calling you to become leaders
of a new season of hope
in the Christian community and the world."
John Paul II. Address to World Meeting of Families. 1994

Being a Parent

Don't be annoyed when your children ask you impos-
sible questions. Be proud they think you know the
answers.

Illustrations Unlimited. James S Hewett (ed)

If children can't trust your promises, how will they
learn to trust the promises of God?

Greg Johnson and Mike Yorkey

God is a God of laughter, as well as of prayer... a
God of singing, as well as of tears. God is at home in
the play of God's children. God loves to hear us
laugh.

Peter Marshall

Our children face such criticism and so many closed
doors in the mere act of being alive that we as
parents need to encourage them all we can.

Gayle Roper



You are not only mak-
ing memories... you
are the memories. In a
deep subconscious,
unarticulated place a
parent stays with his
or her child... forever!
Valerie Bell

Acknowledgements

Prayers: Timothy Dudley-Smith prayer appeared in *Homemade Disciples: a CFM Program*. Evansville, Indiana: Christian Family Movement, 2004; Andrew Body prayer taken from *Pocket Prayers for Marriage* compiled by Andrew & Pippa Body. Church House Publishing, 2004; Edward Hays prayer taken from *Prayers for the Domestic Church* by Edward Hays. Leavenworth, KY: Forest of Peace Publishing, 1979; Brother Roger prayer from *Praying Together in Word and Song*. Continuum Publishing, 1981; Mary Jo Pedersen prayer from *More than Meets the Eye: Finding God in the Creases and Folds of Family Life* by Mary Jo Pedersen, Thomas Greisen and Ronald Wasikowski. Winona, Minnesota, St Mary's Press, 2000; Kathleen Chesto prayers taken from *Family Prayer for Family Times*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995. James from Brentwood's prayer was published in *Prayers for my Family: A collection of children's prayers for Listening 2004*. Chelmsford: Diocese of Brentwood, 2004

Quotes & Extracts: *Not Easy But Full of Meaning: Catholic Family Life in 2004* is the report on the findings of Listening 2004. Copies are available (£3.99) from Redemptorist Publications (Tel: 01420 88222) or free of charge online at www.catholic-ew.org.uk/citizenship/mfl/familylife/Noteasy.htm

Cherishing Life is a teaching document of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. Copies are available (£4.95) from the Catholic Truth Society (Tel: 020 7640 0042) or free of charge online at www.catholic-ew.org.uk/cherishinglife/index.htm Further information about the work of Michael Quinn and the Family Caring Trust is available from www.familycaring.co.uk (The extract used is from a confirmation programme which is not advertised on the website.) *Wayfaring: A Gospel Journey into Life* by Margaret Silf is published by Darton, Longman and Todd (2001) price £9.95. The non-doctrinal quotes used in the bulletin bullet points sheet come from *601 Quotes about Marriage and Family*, compiled by William and Nancie Carmichael. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998.