

Volume 3/Issue 7 - Christmas 2018

The Family Apostolate

Where Faith and Family Meet

*And a Little Child
Shall Lead Them*

Get-togethers
and
Family Fun

HOW THE
Sacraments
MAKE GREAT FAMILIES



Bonding & Family Connections

Stay Strong,
Singles

Forgiveness
& Healing



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COVER PAGE PHOTO
IKEME FAMILY
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The Family Apostolate provides pastoral care, promotes the critical need for family prayer and regular reception of the sacraments, imparts catechesis, offers opportunities for family get-togethers, and builds bridges between individual families and the larger church community. Through offering diverse spiritual and psychological resources, the Family Apostolate seeks to bring the merciful presence of Christ to families in an increasingly difficult world.



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Family Apostolate *Activities*

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First Saturday Mass and Breakfast

Held every first Saturday morning of the month. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass honors our Blessed Mother, Queen of the Family Apostolate. Anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions are also recognized and blessed. Mass is followed by breakfast in the Holy Trinity hall. Begins with 8:30 am mass. For more information, contact Marlene Lauer - graysoxmom@msn.com

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Home Blessings

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Contact
Fr. Vin or Patti Rubin -
fathervinarisukwu@familypriest.com **or**
pattirubin@familypriest.com



Fr. Angel Marrero on a home blessing visit



Fr. Isaac and volunteers of the FA during a home blessing visit

Special Events/Prayer Requests

The FA sponsors special events throughout the year such as retreats, healing masses and group celebrations. Our prayer teams also pray for your special needs and requests. For more information, contact Patti Sadler - pattisadler7@gmail.com



Elizabeth and her kids Grace and Eden praying with the FA team during a home blessing.

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Do you have any questions on faith, marriage, family, or catechism?

Send your questions to us at fathervinarisukwu@familypriest.com

Editorial

In the wake of Christmas

Did Paul not say to the Roman Church, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15)? Paul knew that the challenges of family warrant, sometimes, rejoicing and at other times, weeping. What makes the difference? It is the role that family members play at those critical moments. I'll go back to my memories growing up as captured in the editorial of our summer edition. As family, we had our moments of rejoicing and weeping but we had been taught by our parents that interdependency is a great tool to overcome such challenges. The experiences of sadness such as sickness, death, accident, or any other couldn't shatter the peace and serenity of our family bonding. For instance, we didn't expect mom's death when it happened. So, what could we do? Stay connected, stay supportive of one another. We found peace in our family connection.

Several families build their connections around family rituals. They set aside special events to come together to celebrate- dinner, holidays, church, sports, and sometimes just sitting to watch movies and television. Those rituals may seem little but they play significant roles in strengthening the family chain. There are three intertwining perspectives to the impact of family connections: physical, psychological, and spiritual. My physical contact with my siblings brings great excitement. Each time they see me, they feel satisfied. It is different from phone conversations. We enjoy each other's warmth, share stories and experiences. We feel a deeper connection. The physical presence elicits a feeling of psychological connection, a tangible expression of the emotional bond. Psychologically, negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, frustration, and depression are overcome by the positive energy that we bring into each other's life. For instance, that we gathered together to talk and console each other at mom's death helped to cushion the sadness, anxiety and feelings of loss. Then, the psychological effect connects us with the spiritual where we feel a sacred space of hope and healing. Families that meet physically feel connected emotionally. They find it easy to forgive, be compassionate, encourage, and generally love. Such is the depth of family bonding.

In this edition of the FA magazine, our theme is *Bonding and Family Connections*. Christmas offers a special time to discuss bonding within the family. It is a time to experience the love of Christ, the Word Incarnate who took our human nature. The incarnation makes us appreciate the privilege of our physical, psychological, and spiritual connections in family life because in Christ we find peace, joy, truth, and compassion. In him we find hope, healing, mercy, and love. Our articles for this Christmas edition contain materials that would strengthen our desire to be family. The family's sacramental life, how to cope with the empty nest, dealing with the inevitable rivalries among siblings, managing the emotional aspect of couples' relationships, the need for forgiveness. We analyzed how social media could be positively adapted in family settings and the power of resilience in adversity. We have great words for singles who sometimes feel excluded in conversations about family life. And we have our youth writer explain the beauty of family gatherings.

Again, as Paul would say, “Make my joy complete by being a single mind, one love, one heart and one mind” (Phil. 2:2). Is there any perfect family? Can there be one? Aren't we all a work in progress? Exactly. That is the message from the Rubeling family who discover their family connection through volunteering. Sit, read and relax. Enjoy a fun-filled, family-knit Christmas.



V Arisukwu

Letters to the Editor



Dear editor,
The edition on Parenting and Presence was supercool with perfectly knitted articles and inspiring graphic images. The interview which treated parental attention to children with special needs and the challenges of vulnerability captured my time so well. It is true that while we do not choose our families, we do not also choose the condition we find ourselves at birth. When a child is born with a medical condition, it's not the child's fault and attention to such a child shouldn't be like a favor. I will see the purpose-driven circumstance rather as an occasion for a united family duty that leverages on the growth of any special child. Indeed, the more vulnerable we are, the more attention we require.

Dear Fr. Vincent, I encourage you to keep doing what I know you've always done well. More grease to you and your team's efforts.

Chimaraoke Offurum
St. John the Evangelist, San Diego, California.

Dear editor:
I am writing to thank you sincerely for the inspirational article entitled "When is Parenting NOT Hard". To call this article "inspirational" is a severe understatement to say the least. My husband George and I have always had a special place in our hearts for the Traverson Family. Over the years, we have seen them many times in church and have been so touched that we quite naturally created a special place in our hearts for them without even knowing their names. We have always been taken aback by the quiet display of intense love and devotion that the family

shows for one another and, especially the TLC they all shower on Alex. Without ever knowing any of the medical details on Alex' health, it has always been very obvious that the family collectively adores Alex and puts his special needs above all else. There aren't enough words to adequately express how, as sideline observers, we continue to be deeply touched by how God has used Alex' health challenges and his family's devotion as an overwhelming blessing to all of us. Reading this very special detailed article brings even more blessings into light knowing how the family collectively has faced overwhelming challenges with love, kindness and Faith. God bless the Traverson Family for showing us one of the greatest examples of the unconditional love of a devoted and loving Faith filled family. And, God bless you and your "staff" for bringing this beautiful love story to the rest of us.

With warmest regards and gratitude,
Christine and George Kaufman
Glen Burnie, Maryland

Dear editor,
It is with joy that I receive your periodic magazine- The Family Apostolate. Even though I have come to understand your attention to the family as a ministry, reading The Family Apostolate has helped to strengthen my family journey. The diverse views and experiences of the contributors do a good job helping to learn new ways of living the family life, interpreting God's will, and purpose in the family. Family prayers have been key to both patience,

perseverance, acceptance and gratitude in my family as a unique gift. The Summer 2018 edition on Parenting and Presence has been particularly reinforcing, inspiring and opened new ways to reflect on what I am doing as a parent, to continue the part of being a parent and role model for my kids. I see work as a very good example of how to be a role model and teach my kids that work has a divine purpose. It is a form of gratitude to God. Thank you immensely for what you do through The Family Apostolate. Continually pray for the family as we also pray for you and this unique ministry. Happy Christmas.

Ugo. Nwabueze
Florida, USA

Dear editor,
I have become an ardent reader of the Family Apostolate Magazine. I must confess that the magazines are so wonderful and very rich in information about family and other vital teachings about Catholic faith. I was particularly fascinated about the information on mercy killing (euthanasia) as a negative option for Christians. Each edition has helped to educate, strengthen and build family life in particular ways. I thank you for the good work. I have learn so much from the FA magazine. I believe it will be a great inspiration especially to many young families that will come in contact with this super magazine.

Sr. Stella Ogonnia Kanu, OSP
Baltimore, Maryland

THE EUCHARIST

The Hope of Family Unity

By Anthony Adawu

“In the Eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”: by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body”



The Invitation and the Reason

The purpose of this article is to encourage families to adopt Eucharistic spirituality as a way of life. It is an invitation to see in the Eucharist the hope that transforms them and the love that unites them. The invitation is to families, who by God's grace are persevering in faith and thriving in their bond of love. It is also to families shaken and torn apart by different challenging circumstances. It is to young couples who are beginning their own family journey and to those who have been on the journey awhile. It is also to the many people who, without a family, find themselves alone in this world, that they might find a home in the Church-family.

Eucharistic spirituality calls for a re-orientation of family life – a way of seeing our lives and family through the lens of the Lord's presence in the Eucharist. Eucharistic spirituality deepens our love for the Lord through frequent and worthy reception of the Eucharist, not as a duty, but as an embrace of a mature faith, a constant renewal of love and, as St. Peter Julian Eymard teaches, “a preparation for Heaven” (2000, p. 41). Eucharistic spirituality also cultivates in us true charity, so that as families and individuals we can reach out in solidarity to our brothers and sisters who suffer greatly, especially the poor, sick and vulnerable.

Inviting the family to adopt Eucharistic Spirituality is important because central to God's plan of salvation, the family needs all the bountiful sources of grace that allows it to play its role. Second, there is a profound connection between the family and the Eucharist, to the extent that one does not properly talk about either of them without keeping the other in mind. Eucharist. Communion. Family. Church. All are inextricably related in manifesting and making possible the gift of salvation.

The Family and God's Plan of Salvation

The words of St. John Paul II come to mind in this regard: “*The future of humanity passes by way of the family*” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86). This is true both in terms of humanity's temporary existence and of its eternal future – in terms of the kind of society we become as well as what our final end will be. John Paul II also states, “The well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family” (*FC*, 3). His observation is not an exaggeration because healthy homes give us a healthy society. To be human is to be family. The Creator does not intend it in any other way; nor does nature present any alternative,

regardless of how hard we work at manipulating the natural order through ideologies and actions rooted in extreme forms of individualism. There is in the heart of every human a deep desire to be united with others – to love and to be loved. God, who is a Communion of Persons, created humanity in the same image; namely, that humanity will be a community of persons united in the bond of family love rooted in the conjugal love between a man and a woman. The family, then, is the foundation upon which our relationship with God and with others is established in the society.

The Family and the Eucharist

The second reason for the invitation to adopt Eucharistic spirituality is that the family and the Eucharist are profoundly connected. Here is what John Paul II has to say about the connection between the family and the Eucharist:

In the Eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”: by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body



of Christ that is “given up” and in His Blood that is “shed” becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family (FC, 57).

In other words, families that unite themselves to Christ in the Eucharist will have their bond of love continuously renewed and will continue to discover the richness of their mission as members of Christ's Body. who work in the Church and in society for the salvation of all.

Benefits of Eucharistic Spirituality

Drawing on the teachings of Saint Peter Julian Eymard, I outline three great benefits from adopting the Eucharist spirituality:

Eucharistic spirituality helps families grow in virtue. St. Eymard teaches that the love of Christ reaches its highest perfection in the “ineffable union. He contracts with the soul in Holy Communion” (Eymard, 2000, p. 5). In this sense, families that adopt Eucharistic spirituality receive the grace to enable them to direct all their desires and actions toward their union with Christ. Families will benefit more from the union with Christ in the Eucharist “than by all other means of sanctification” (p.5).

Eucharistic spirituality reminds families to trust in God's providence. During Eucharistic Adoration we chant, “You have given them bread from heaven – Having in it the

sweetness of every taste.” This prayer, taken from the book of Wisdom (16:20), teaches about God's fidelity in providing for the needs of His people. The pages of Scripture are filled with such Providence. The manna in the desert is a classic example. In the Holy Eucharist, prefigured in the manna, God provides “a remedy for our spiritual infirmities, strength for our daily weaknesses and a source of peace, joy, and happiness” (Eymard, p.11).

Eucharistic spirituality restores the dignity of the family and that of every human person. By his Death and Resurrection, and by giving Himself to us in the Eucharist, Christ “awakens us to our own dignity and to that of others. The Eucharist is our incomparable dignity as human persons” (USCCB, 2013, p. 7). St. John Paul II sums it up very well in the following words:

The Eucharist educates [... and] shows us, in fact, what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine. If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbor (*Dominicae Cena*e, 6).

A Decision to Make

There is great joy when families unite to go to Mass or visit the Blessed Sacrament together as a unit. The joy of being family is at such moments made most evident in the love of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. Growing up as a child and finding myself in a mission church where the priest visited once in several weeks, we did not always have the Eucharist. But every time we did, the joy in my family and in the community as a whole were unmistakable. We found strength and support in Christ as family and community. I believe young families feel such joy and strength. I'm convinced too, that experienced families live daily in the hope of their relationship with Christ. As families go through the challenges of living in a combative society with numerous challenges and obligations, they discover that reliance on Christ provides special zeal as well as the tonic to overcome every other challenge. This, I call the Eucharistic spirituality, which all families need to experience and embrace.

Chances are that you already have a relationship with the Lord in the Eucharist – or in some other significant way. Chances are also that you desire more for yourself and for those in your life – more of God's grace, to be united with Him and to grow in perfect charity toward others. Or maybe your relationship with the Lord in the Eucharist can benefit from some encouragement. Regardless of the situation of your faith at this point, the decision to embrace and grow in Eucharistic spirituality is a decision to grow in a deeper relationship with Christ, the Hope and Healer of the family. It is my prayer that every step you take toward union with Christ in the Eucharist brings peace to your family and to families everywhere in the world.



Fr. Tony is a chaplain and member of the teaching faculty at Mount Mercy University, Cedar Rapids, and a priest of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, Ghana. Prior to his assignment in Cedar Rapids, Fr. Tony served for almost eight years in the cluster of churches that now constitute Christ the King parish.

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Holy SACRAMENTS

By Michael Deaschanis

HOW THE SACRAMENTS MAKE GREAT FAMILIES!

God invented the human family. From the beginning of His creation he realized “it was not good for man to be alone.” He created men and women to complement one another, different but equal. He then put an attraction into our soul, that we would desire to come and live together, and have children together. And he put into us an instinct to bind ourselves to one another by a marriage promise, “until death do us part.” God’s intention was that humans would live together in a family, a husband and wife with children.

At a certain moment in history, 2018 years ago, God the Son, Jesus, came to earth to help the human race. Since the fundamental experience of human life is family, we might say that He came to earth to help families. And he created the Catholic Church to continue to help families once He returned to heaven. How? Primarily through the Sacraments. Jesus taught us 7 new ways of praying that we call Sacraments. When we say those 7 prayers we receive grace from God, his presence in our soul to strengthen us. We might have expected Him to give us one Sacrament, that we could turn to whenever in need of extra strength, but instead He gave us 7. But if we consider those 7, we realize the brilliance of the Catholic religion! The Sacraments help us in different ways at different stages of our lives, when we are most in need. It turns out that God knows exactly what we need and when we need it!

Let’s consider the effects of the Sacraments on family.

Jesus made marriage a Sacrament. Marriage existed before Jesus in different forms, but he reaffirmed that it is a permanent bond between a man and woman. He also gave us help in living it out by making it a Sacrament, the Sacrament of **Holy Matrimony**. When a baptized man and woman get married through the Catholic Church, Jesus gives them grace to help them keep their promises. Thus, He begins family life with a Sacrament. The married couple must continue to seek grace through daily prayer and Sunday Mass throughout their lives, but the grace they received on their wedding day will also continue to affect them and open their minds and hearts to God.

When a married couple has a child, Jesus gives us another Sacrament, **Baptism**, which gives grace to the child. The child’s soul becomes filled with grace, the presence of the Holy Spirit. The human family is not simply a biological reality but also a spiritual one. Parents are not only to care for the material needs of their children but also their spiritual needs. The child is part of a human family, but in Baptism they also become part of God’s family. Baptism connects them to God, making them adopted children of God. The more a human family realizes they are part of God’s family, the more meaning and direction they will have in life, and the more joy!

When the child arrives at the age of reason, around seven years old, and begins to know the difference between right and wrong, Jesus gives us two more Sacraments to assist us. He gives **Holy Communion** to strengthen our will to be good, and **Confession** to forgive us when we choose to be bad. These two Sacraments help us to live well within our family. What two sins are most confessed by children? “I fought with my brother and disobeyed my parents.” What sin is most confessed by couples? “I argued with my spouse”. The Sacraments help us resist these temptations and love each other well.

Confession also helps married couples. If every married couple went to Confession once a month and sincerely examined how they treated one another the past few weeks, their marriage could not fail! They would be more considerate and forgiving of one another. At a time when we experience a fifty percent divorce rate in the United States, Jesus offers us a remedy – Confession. Will we accept that remedy?

As children grow and arrive at their teenage years they begin to develop sexual desires. They also begin to experience stronger peer pressures. Jesus gives us another Sacrament to help when we need it most, **Confirmation**. Confirmation is usually administered to teenagers, to strengthen them and inspire them to give good example of Catholic living to their peers.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion, mentioned earlier, strengthens us not only individually but also as a whole family. Consider, when a family comes to Mass together on a Sunday morning, they are experiencing a moment of deep unity. Many families today do not spend significant time together; they are on the run from one activity to another. The hour spent at Mass can be an hour of power for the family. Together we put our lives under someone bigger than ourselves, under God. Together we pray for one another. Together we receive grace in Holy Communion to love one another better in the week ahead. It is said that the family that prays together stays together. This is especially true of prayer together at Mass.

The sixth Sacrament is **Anointing of the Sick**. When we are seriously ill or are in the process of dying, Jesus offers us another Sacrament. The Sacrament of Anointing helps us to deal with suffering and also prepares us to face the awesomeness of death. It is usually received in the presence of family. As a priest, many times I have joined families around the death bed of their loved ones, whether in their home or in the hospital. It is a privileged opportunity to help the family say farewell to the one they love. While we enjoy family life here on earth, we remember that we are preparing for another kind of family life in heaven, where we will encounter God our Father.

The last of the Sacraments we consider is **Holy Orders**, by which a man is ordained a priest. One might wonder what possible connection there is between this Sacrament and families. After all, the Catholic priest promises celibacy, giving up the possibility of marriage and family for himself. Yet, he is at the service of families. The Catholic parish exists to serve families. The parish is itself considered a spiritual family. Parishioners do not refer to their priest as “boss” but rather as “Father”. We begin life in the parish through Baptism, we enter marriage at the parish on our wedding day, we form our children through religious education in the parish, and ultimately we bury our family members through the parish. And of course, it is the priest who brings us the Sacraments at these pivotal moments of life.

In conclusion, we see that the Sacraments do indeed make great families!



Fr. Michael DeAscanis is a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, ordained in 2004. His seminary studies specialized in bioethics and medical ethics. He currently serves as pastor of St. Philip Neri and St. Clement parishes. He also serves as chaplain of the Catholic Medical Association in Baltimore, giving spiritual and ethical support to physicians and medical students.



• John and Heather after their wedding at Holy Trinity Church on Saturday Nov. 10th 2018



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FORGIVENESS HEALING

In Family Relationships

By Patti Rubin

Several years ago, I worked with a man whose daughter was brutally murdered. She had graduated from college and landed her dream job in Boston. One night as she left work, a man met her in the parking garage and killed her. The anguish that my coworker and his family were plunged into is unimaginable. Adding insult to injury, they spent months in a courtroom with the murderer enduring a long, drawn-out trial. He was eventually sentenced to life in prison for his crime but that was little consolation. Nothing would bring their daughter back. How in the world do you go about forgiving someone like that?

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” the Lord instructs us in the Scriptures. And again, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:13). Our Lord doesn't say “as we forgive *some* who trespass against us” or “I desire mercy *in certain situations*.” How do we forgive when life gets messy and hurtful, even devastatingly so? Past injuries, interior wounds and painful memories discourage us. Discouragement is one of the principal tools of the devil because it chips away at faith and hope. Instead of treating those who have hurt us with mercy, discouragement views our situation as our unlucky lot in life. “Why bother? This is the alcoholic family I was born into” or “This is just the way I am. I have an angry temperament.” Negativity attracts negativity. Some turn to prayer but often the problems don't resolve no matter how many Masses we attend or Holy Communions we receive. We might pray many rosaries or novenas but with little change in our circumstances. Is God deaf? Is He listening at all? Then discouragement sets in. But the Lord has given us the healing

prescription to our problems, if only we will follow it.

I once had a falling out with a family member and viewed the offense by this person as so egregious that I couldn't imagine how the relationship would ever heal. The more time that passed during the estrangement, the more awkward, uncomfortable and negative the situation became. I considered my position to be completely in the 'right' and maybe it was but I was no better for it. My need to be 'right' led me to sadness, isolation and discouragement. A friend suggested that I attend a weekend retreat conducted by a priest known for the charismatic gift of healing. Thankfully, I was just miserable enough to go. The remedy? Go to Sacramental Confession, forgive the family member from my heart then fully open my soul to God. I had to participate in my own healing. To my shock, God came powerfully (I daresay miraculously) into my life. He healed wounds in my soul that I didn't even know were there. I felt a freedom as never before and a deep peace permeated me in a way that no human words can describe. It was a life altering experience and I was never the same again. Some months later, I realized that God didn't heal only me. The change in me caused healing to spread through my family like a beautiful fragrance, breathing mercy and compassion into our relationships. The broken relationship healed quickly. Forgiveness is the hinge that brings healing into our lives which is why the Divine Physician so strongly insists on it.

In the 12 step programs, one of the most critical of the recovery steps is Step 4 - *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves* (page 42). In this step, the

recovering person essentially makes a life confession. While many in 12 step programs aren't Catholic and don't go to sacramental Confession, the wisdom of the confessional is evident and they must work through confession with a sponsor. A sponsor is someone who walks with them through their recovery process. The recovering person honestly admits their wrongs to another human being. The step requires them to ask for forgiveness and to forgive those who have hurt them. “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned” (Prayer of St. Francis).

Interestingly, this step is so crucial that the recovering person risks their sobriety if they do not honestly confess and ask forgiveness of God and others. Anger and unforgiveness will eventually lead them back to active addiction. That's a powerful witness. Forgiveness literally heals from the inside out. So how do we forgive (practically speaking) especially someone who has deeply hurt us? Perhaps it would be good to look at a few thoughts on what forgiveness is and is not.

• Forgiveness is not an emotion.

We don't have to feel in a loving or friendly manner toward the other person. My coworker will never sit down and have a nice dinner with his daughter's murderer. Forgiveness is a decision, an act of the will. We decide to forgive for ourselves and God, regardless of the other person's contrition. The other person might not be sorry at all.

• Forgiveness is not forgetting.

That's denial. Short of God suspending our memory, we don't forget what happened. Rather, we let go and let God do the heavy lifting to heal our wounds.

We don't dwell on what happened, replaying it over and over in our minds.

• Forgiveness isn't excusing or condoning bad behavior.

It also doesn't mean the behavior doesn't matter. It only acknowledges that we all have struggles and with God's grace will overcome our faults and failings. We keep trying and encourage others to keep trying as well.

• Forgiveness leaves justice up to God.

We can trust that God will take care of the situation. We don't have to continue to be 'right' or justify our position. We leave the details to God.

Forgiveness attracts God like a magnet. It heals. Jesus once told St. Faustina this, “*I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself but radiates them to other souls*” (1074 – paragraph 4). Grace will radiate to our family members and loved ones. Jesus instructs us on forgiveness because it leads to freedom and happiness. He is the God of joy!

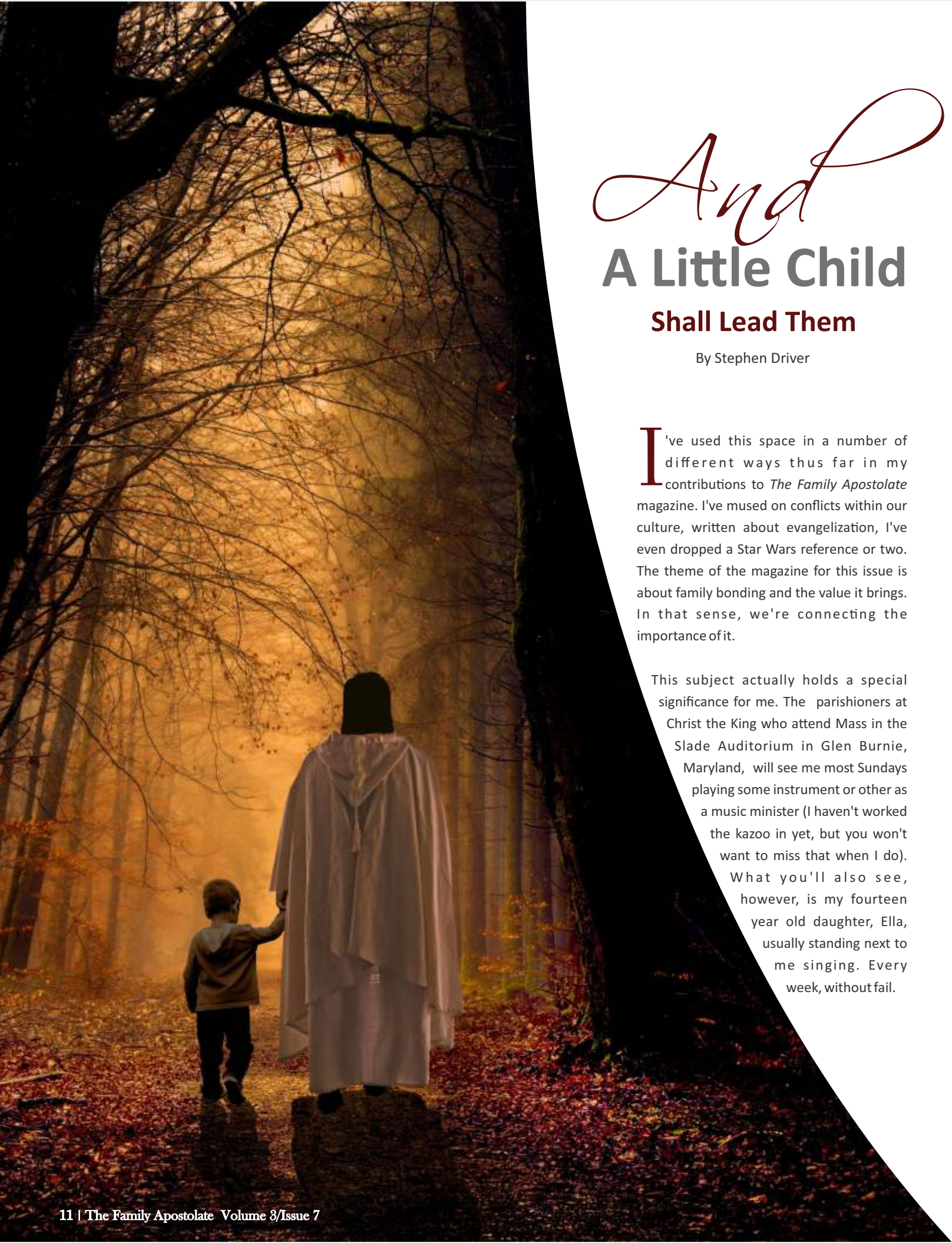
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Patti Rubin is a cradle Catholic who lives in Maryland with her family. She is the administrator of the Family Apostolate.

“I am Love and Mercy itself. When a soul approaches Me with trust, I fill it with such an abundance of graces that it cannot contain them within itself but radiates them to other souls”



And

A Little Child

Shall Lead Them

By Stephen Driver

I've used this space in a number of different ways thus far in my contributions to *The Family Apostolate* magazine. I've mused on conflicts within our culture, written about evangelization, I've even dropped a Star Wars reference or two. The theme of the magazine for this issue is about family bonding and the value it brings. In that sense, we're connecting the importance of it.

This subject actually holds a special significance for me. The parishioners at Christ the King who attend Mass in the Slade Auditorium in Glen Burnie, Maryland, will see me most Sundays playing some instrument or other as a music minister (I haven't worked the kazoo in yet, but you won't want to miss that when I do). What you'll also see, however, is my fourteen year old daughter, Ella, usually standing next to me singing. Every week, without fail.

She's never missed a day that I was there.

Now she's fourteen, and like any fourteen year-old, we must attend practice at times she doesn't want to, I have to urge her to be more organized and get her music together, make sure she's done her homework, fed the dog -- all the same things all of us do with our children. But on Sundays, she chooses to be there. I've never made her go to Mass. I haven't had to.

Now, before anyone goes patting me on the back, I didn't recruit her to be a music minister. She recruited me. I grew up playing music and have been doing so since I was fifteen. I certainly didn't start playing religious music, though. I can bust out some Lynyrd Skynyrd, Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and even drop some Metallica riffs if you asked nicely. But, "Christ, Be Our Light" and "Eye Has Not Seen," no. Liturgical composer Marty Haugen wasn't in my repertoire.

That changed when a few years back, our parish was looking for young people for a youth choir. My family was sitting in the congregation at the time, half paying attention to the announcements (sorry guys!), and Ella whispered in my ear that she might be interested in singing. After Mass, we met the music minister. Ella expressed her interest and they began talking. At one point, the music minister told Ella that if she knew anyone else who could sing or play an instrument to ask them if they wanted to join. Ella looked at me and blurted out, "My dad plays."

I'd be lying if I said, "And I was so excited, I jumped right in and the rest is history." It never occurred to me to play in front of a congregation. It was actually a little intimidating (and still is sometimes). It carries quite a bit of pressure, standing in front of everyone and trying to lead them in song, particularly if few people want to sing

along—I see you just moving your lips!

I've written before about how God and the Holy Spirit seldom act in our lives with burning bushes, raining frogs (thankfully) and the like anymore. The movements are more subtle and they flow through us and the people around us. In this case, I'm convinced the Holy Spirit was moving me through my daughter that day when she drafted me to become a music minister. I couldn't look her in the eye when she was giving something of herself to the congregation and simply say no.

Sure, I was busy; I have a lot of demands on my time, such as satisfying my editor at the FA magazine. But she wanted this. Those family moments spent together and how doing so actually helps to evangelize the people

Again, she's a teenager and I fully expected her to eventually move on to something else. But she's stayed with it, and in doing so she's kept me in it too. We both feel this responsibility to each other because of the music we play together.

closest to us.

Ella sings and plays piano. She has done so since she was eight years old. Music in general is important in our house and my wife will attest to how guitars, mandolins, pianos, keyboards and sheet music will take over whole rooms. But Ella and I are from different generations and she likes different music from me. I sometimes get her to play some songs I like, and I will occasionally join in with something she's playing, but we seldom play

together at home. Creative differences. That's okay. She has her muse, and she expresses herself her way in the music she chooses. But in that moment after church, with her looking up at me enthusiastically, of course I said yes. I wasn't sure where it was going to take us at the time. Again, she's a teenager and I fully expected her to eventually move on to something else. But she's stayed with it, and in doing so she's kept me in it too. We both feel this responsibility to each other because of the music we play together.

We all, parents and children, have a lot of demands on our time. As I write this, school has just started, Ella's entered her freshman year of high school and has a workload that, frankly, intimidates *me*. So I can only imagine what it's doing to her. Homework, singing practice, piano practice, theater, sports, and throw in the games, phones, and other devices we've become so attached to, and it all becomes a mosaic of distraction. It's not easy to sift through because at the time it all feels so important. In some respects, it *is* important. These can be the moments that make us who we are as people since they help to form our lives. Our task is to avoid allowing all of these things to turn into a collection of obligations. It's not about suppressing the desire to engage in activities, participate in events, or enjoy the things that bring us happiness. However, it *is* about directing those energies to something good. It's about using those moments to connect. It's about being present in the moment with the people around you. It's about sharing those interests with your family. And you never know when you'll be volunteered for something that brings you closer together with the people around you and with God.

Stephen Driver is an editor in the Washington, D.C. area. He has been a part of Holy Trinity Parish in Glen Burnie since he was old enough to walk. He's still working toward being a better Catholic.





Social Media and the Family

By Vincent Arisukwu

*The good,
the bad,
and
the ugly*

There are lots of positive contributions that social media offers to family life. However, scuffles abound from its influence. Here, we are focusing on the various aspects of social media's impact, what we are calling the good, the bad, and the ugly. The questions we intend to address in this article include: How has the family adapted to the evolution of the media? How much does the media influence the family? How does the family retain its values while accommodating social media? How does the partnership between social media and the family enhance bonding?

From an evolutionary perspective, communication has been an intrinsic part of creation. When God declared, "Let there be," he set the communication wheels in motion. The universe came into existence by divine proclamation. Having made man, God instructed, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth" (Gen. 1:28). Further, Scripture maintains, "The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven, and all the wild animals" (Gen. 2:20). Then, God gave to the man a companion, a "suitable helper," thereby perfecting human communication at the time of creation, "The Lord God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:22).

In relation to the written word, God presented the Ten Commandments to Moses on a stone tablet and instructed Moses to communicate his law to the

people in clear terms, "These are the laws you must give them" (Ex. 21:1). God made his people commit to advance communication to future generations through Israel's appreciation of the Torah, "Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. You shall tell them to your children, and keep telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down, and when you are standing up; you must fasten them on your hand as a sign and on your forehead as a headband; you must write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:6-9).

In the New Testament, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God" (Jn. 1:1). The Logos is God's Word which gives creation its generativity. By means of this Logos, God communicates life into the created order. Christ, who is God's Word made flesh commanded his disciples, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn. 20:21). He brought the disciples into the mainstream of communication, God's word, for the life of the world. COJOCARIU, (2016) affirms, "Speech, even primitive and non-articulated, reflects

the capacity of translating the elements of the day-to-day life into concepts and to represent the known reality using symbols – and humans had these capacities when they started cooperating with other individuals of their species."

Communication has advanced tremendously. From oral communication to the mass media, then to social media, with everyone drawn into the interactive system that drives contemporary culture right from the closed doors of our bedrooms. Kellner and Gigi (2012) call it the media culture and insist, "Forms of media culture like television, film, popular music, magazines, and advertising provide role and gender models, fashion hints, lifestyle images, and icons of personality" (p.1). These have overriding influences on the family. They condition lifestyles, postulate ideologies, interpret values, and create role models for the young. Kellner and Gigi (2012) opine, "It is obvious that we must come to understand our cultural environment if we want control over our lives" (p.1). The question is, if the mass media had such compelling impacts on the society in the first millennium, how much more now

that with just one click, one can elicit a reaction from millions across the globe?

The Bad

Laziness and aggression: Research data reveals that "American children are watching TV at the highest rates in 8 years, with children ages 2–5 watching on average 25 hour of TV a week and children 6–11 consuming 22 hours a week. Research indicates that American youth spend one third of each day using some type of electronic media. Studies have demonstrated that media use is associated with children's aggression levels; food consumption choices; and rates of sexual activity, drinking, and smoking" (Kirsch and Murnen, 2015). From the above research, social media has contributed to an increase in aggressive behaviors among the youth of contemporary society. This is pervasive because of the interconnectedness that is visible on different internet platforms.



Distancing: Most young people have virtual families. Some interact with these virtual persons in their lives more than with their nuclear families. For instance, when we were growing up, my family had just one television in our living room. Mostly after dinner, mom and dad would invite us to watch their favorite television programs with them. Those specific times enhanced family sharing and constituted opportunities to communicate family values to us. Today, the social media culture has split families in various ways; children as well as parents have streaming apps and Youtube channels on their smartphones. Family members stream movies, television shows, etc., from their cellphones and in the comfort of their bedrooms. Also, when family members gather physically, they experience external distractions from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, thereby severing the emotional links that would be precious to the family.

Dysfunctional behaviors: depraved moral acts have also been associated with viewing internet materials. Young adults learn binge-drinking on social media. Various sites that encourage promiscuous sexual habits are readily available. People are entertained online with prostitutes and have their sexual urges satisfied. Social media has contributed immensely to the objectification of women. Men engage in sexual fantasies on the internet. One can argue that the real “sexual revolution” can be attributed to social media leading mostly to an erotic view of human relationships.

The Good

Enhanced communication and intimacy: The good side of social media seems to be mostly experienced among families separated by distance. Here we recognize that a time existed when families communicated through telegrams and letters mailed through the post office. Information at that time would take weeks or even months to travel to their receivers. Social media has changed all of that. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Group Me, and WhatsApp are among the



most popular platforms through which families are able to communicate quickly through text messaging, audio and video calls. Many families have created group chats where they exchange daily updates about each other while living miles apart.

Building connections: Various search engines offer options for discovering names of individuals and their locations enabling people to find their loved ones. I know of childhood friends who found me on the internet twenty years after we parted ways. **Creating Opportunities:** Economically, employment opportunities have increased and job offers are available online. In politics, people's voices and opinions are heard faster. Elections are monitored on social media thus making election rigging more difficult, especially in developing countries. In areas of health, people have access to information that enables them to learn good health practices. In education, online programs are easily accessible from anywhere. LinkedIn, for instance, is known for advancing business opportunities and creating networks for job seekers.

The UGLY

Distortion of privacy: One of the adverse effects of social media is the loss of privacy. Whereas social media helped to create

closeness among distant family members, it has also caused great harm to privacy. Access to personal information has become very quick and easy. Hackers have turned identity theft into a lucrative business.

Pro-death choices: Tevington (2006) laments, “The current assault against family and marriage is unmatched. Nothing like it has happened before. Not only are the assaults made legal and acceptable by our legislatures (contraception, abortion, divorce, embryonic stem-cell research, in vitro fertilization and sodo-matrimony) but the corruption of moral integrity through violence, pornography and adultery is piped into our homes via TV, radio, videos, movies, and iPods.” One of my greatest shocks so far remained the day I saw a video on the social media on how to commit suicide. The ad displayed information about available facilities for those with strong suicidal inclinations. In the United States, for example, most school shootings were published on Facebook by their perpetrators. Shockingly, at times, such information is communicated as heroism. The youth consume them and fall prey to such vitriols. But because, the family connection is not strong enough to provide antidotes, social media becomes the first to offer anti-life tools to teenagers and youths.

Improper role models: Consequently, media morality encourages permissive and

relativistic stances. What comes to mind here is the celebrity mentality. Who does the society consider as celebrity and what defines their outlook? For youths and teenagers, celebrities are those with greater followership on social media. Celebrities determine societal trends, what sells and what does not. They become role models notwithstanding the destructive content of their messages. Most times, the influence of these celebrities become stronger than parental influence.

What to do: This is the tough task for families

in today's world because children are simply born into the social media world. It has become the norm. The world continues to advance and the media is one of the vessels for development. Parents have to use their resources to instill the right values in their children. The old maxim, “catch them young,” will always remain relevant. Both scientists and psychologists agree that children start communicating (in utero) with the external environment right after they are born. This makes it critical to introduce the child early to family values. Let parents be the first vital influence on the child. Enforce family

cohesiveness. Let your child recognize the importance of his/her siblings, parents, and family members. Introduce the child to the value of family get-togethers. Teach the child to be emotionally present at family gatherings. Let the child know the importance of respect for others and for life. Introduce the child to the indispensable reality of God and the need to develop genuine love for Him. Don't give in to the competitive and compulsive pressures of social media. As the Old Testament exhorts us, “keep telling them, when you are sitting at home, when you are out and about, when you are lying down, and when you are standing up.” Parents and family must make themselves the first and strongest presence in their child's life before she/he contracts the social media influenza.

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The Empty Nest

When Kids Move Out for Good

By Christine Doty

My husband and I recently spent a week at the beach. Alone. After years of raising children, we are now foot-loose and fancy-free. No waiting up for kids to come home, messes in the kitchen from late night snacks, or loud music blasting through closed bedroom doors. We are officially empty nesters. And we are not alone - an estimated 17 million undergrads returned to school in August (AARP, 2018).

As children grow up and leave home to pursue their own path, the intense years of child-rearing come to an end. My own experience as a parent has been that roles begin to be redefined, and family dynamics shift. This life transition can leave parents feeling uncertain as they face uncharted territory. Advice abounds as to how to navigate this territory. Parents are advised to get a puppy, stay in touch with old friends, and connect with others who are going through the same life transition. This life transition can be energizing and full of new opportunity, but it can also be a time when parents feel grief, sadness and loneliness. It is important for parents to be gentle with themselves as they experience grief over the change in their role as parents. It's okay to miss the noise of a full house and to enjoy your freedom.

Just as you are learning how to live life independently as a parent, your child is

learning how to live away from home. Figuring out how to maintain family connections is another challenge to this life transition. You and your child can decide how much phone contact is too much and how often to visit. Keeping family traditions, especially around the holidays is also important. Attend church as a family. If you always get the Christmas tree the day after Thanksgiving, do that while your child is home. Bake cookies together. Some of the most meaningful connections are the ones unique to your family. My children buy hideous figurines at thrift stores and then leave them hidden around the house for me to find. This silly game is *our* game. One of my children would pass a clown doll back and forth with me by hiding it for each other in strange places.

Mothers may be more likely than fathers to experience the easing of responsibilities when children leave home. They are also more likely to experience empty-nest syndrome, which is defined as depression, loneliness, identity crisis, or emotional distress experienced by parents when children leave home (Bouchard, 2014). Feelings of sadness and loss are normal when a child leaves home. However, if you worry your life has lost meaning, or you are crying excessively and are so sad that you don't want to get out of bed, see friends or go to work,

you should consider seeking professional help.

A big part of the transition is becoming a peer-parent and taking a less authoritative role in children's lives. My husband and I have launched five children in our empty-nest journey (and caught the boomerang of the return child) and have learned a few things along the way that apply to partnered or single parents.

- The mantra during this transition period is *flexible, flexible, flexible*. Rigid rules and ways of thinking will not serve you well.
- Listen to your child. Trust them. You and your child are partners in this process. They will help guide you into your new role.
- Invest in yourself. You have poured yourself into your children. It's okay to focus on your interests and your other relationships.
- Cry. Laugh. Talk to a friend. Take a trip. Talk to a professional. Whatever you need to do.

When the Empty Nest Refills

Many families have experienced the return of a child to the home after having previously moved out for a time. In the United States, a survey carried out by the Pew Research Center found that 39% of 18 to 34-year-olds



were living with their parents or had done so temporarily in recent years; for college graduates younger than 30 years, the figure was 42% (Parker, 2012). Parents remain a crucial safety net for children who are away at school studying, but what happens when your children return to the parental home after graduating from college? What happens if they return with their own children in tow? The shift back to a multi-generation household can be challenging. There are some important additional things to keep in mind when an adult child returns home.

- You may have transitioned to a peer-parent, but it is appropriate for you

to have some expectations for your adult child. Talk with your child about your expectations and make them clear. Listen to your child's expectations as well.

- Talk about money, visitors to the home, household chores, etc. Set some ground rules. Again, the mantra is *flexible, flexible, flexible*.
- Require that your child pay their own way. If money is not feasible, work around the house is always an option.
- If your child is a parent, do your best to maintain your role as grandparent. Don't overstep your

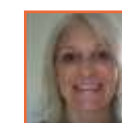
bounds.

- Enjoy this time and view it as a gift. Get to know your child as the adult they have become.

There will be times when these life transitions will be full of joy, and times of frustrations too. Remember, you are not alone. You and your child are each moving into a new phase of life and may often be experiencing very similar feelings. By working to stay connected as a family, you can weather these changes. The family that emerges from this change may look a little different, but the bonds that you have will keep you connected from generation to generation.

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Christine Greiner Doty works as an outpatient therapist to children, adolescents, and adults. She has also worked as a child advocate in the court systems, with women in need of housing and with victims of domestic violence.

MERRY CHRISTMAS



1. Pat, Maryrose, Kathleen at the Sacred Heart of Mary crib in Dundalk
2. Thuy Nguyen and Family at Saint John Newman Shrine in PA.
3. Lorrie Smith with Friends and Family
4. Little Annie Molino set for Christmas
5. Gallagher Family
6. George & Marlene Lauer and Friends
7. Carol Musco's grandchildren - Tara, Jessie, Tanner, Perry, Rex, Tyler
8. Dr. Njideka Udochi excited about Christmas
9. Anna, Kathy, Airryn, Hillevi, Gladys in a Christmas mood at the parish office.
10. Alphonso & Ana Cruz and Family
11. Fred Udochi & Family
12. Annabelle Speck opening Christmas presents



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Adversity and Family Solidarity

Embracing Resilience As Tool In Family Relationship

By Eddie Aku

One positive thing that could be said of tragedies, disasters, or adversities of any type is their ability to bring people together. They ignite empathy and solidarity among people. We are aware of the national solidarity that was shown in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The same was true when Houston was hit by Hurricane Harvey, and more recently as the Carolinas were slammed by hurricane Florence.

This same dynamic is true (Under certain considerations, a nation could be seen as the family at large). Naturally, we see the family as the haven for empathy and solidarity. Where these are lacking, we describe such families as dysfunctional or abnormal. Unfortunately, there are families like this but it's not the norm. When families have slipped into dysfunction, events involving sickness, pain, loss or moments of adversity have been the settings for the recovery of the values of solidarity and empathy. In my years of service as hospital chaplain, I have seen estranged family members reunite at the

bedside of their sick relatives. An example is a scenario where a sick young man in his forties, lamented the pain he had caused his family, especially his wife by parental absence. He asked me to speak with his wife about forgiving him and promised to make amends, pledging to be different henceforth. When I met with his wife, she bore no more grudges. She just wanted him to know she was there for him and couldn't wait to see him well again. Among elderly couples in Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNF), I have noticed solidarity in the form of attachment. I recall the case of Enrique, a man of 106 years old, whose wife suffered from





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dementia and Alzheimer's disease. He came daily on a traditional 8 am to 4 pm work schedule. He always emphasized that if positions were reversed, his wife would do the same for him. This is true of most families I have encountered in long-term care. The physical or mental incapacities of their spouses didn't deter their commitment and solidarity. It's intriguing. Even in old age, family members still bind with their frail members. What is really behind this?

Family Resilience: When adversity further strengthens family bonds.

Solidarity is at the heart of family resilience, a concept that describes the ability of families "to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful" (Walsh, 2011, p. 149). Family resilience is not just about overcoming crisis moments, but also about "turning adversity into a catalyst for the family's growth." This is evident in the number of broken family relationships that have been mended in the aftermath of adverse or tragic events, enriching the relationships and enabling better coping skills for future challenges.

Family resilience resonates with a common principle of the African community consciousness, "I am because we are." Dr. Forma Walsh affirms that family resilience is never a matter of a "rugged individual" saying 'I just did it on my own' and 'I had all the ingredients inside of me.' It is rather "about relational support from others," "how adversity itself can turn into an opportunity to become stronger, together."

Dr. Walsh further highlights the following ingredients for family resilience. They include adherence to shared beliefs. This could be a faith or element of spirituality or tradition that helps the members "find meaning in adversity, cultivate hope and a positive outlook." They affirm a "bigger purpose" beyond the individual ego. This enables a perception of the crisis as "a transformative opportunity for growth."

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Organization: This is another ingredient which reiterates the importance of the family structure, mutual support and connectedness. Rebuilding or maintaining the structure highlights the connectedness of the members, enabling "them to establish security and collaboration within the family, and their social networks in times of need." This affirms the idea of being stronger together. I remember an analogy my elder brother employed when he addressed us during our father's funeral. He brought a bunch of broom brushes, took a stick from it which he broke very easily. He then put back the broom stick in the bunch, tried to break the bunch but couldn't. He elicited a lesson from that, namely, that we're more likely to withstand and overcome any hardship together as a family than individually.

Communication: Communication is another important element of family resilience. "Communication helps family members to feel more connected." It entails openness and flexibility, tolerance and mutual encouragement. Through communication, members believe they can expose their vulnerability to each other, trusting that they would be tolerated, understood and supported. This, according to Walsh, fosters "a proactive and collaborative spirit of problem-solving," as family members "can approach adversity with empathy and resourcefulness." Hence, rather than looking at adversity and seeing all the ways that it can run us down, a positive and resilient disposition enables us to see it as something that can "transform and empower us."

In this light, it is clear that resilience doesn't



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necessarily have to lead to an expected solution. An important aspect of communication that supports family resilience is the acknowledgment of hardships. Accepting the challenge opens the way to brainstorming for solutions, even when a resolution is not reached. The absence of solutions is not necessarily evidence of weakness and failure. The solution indeed could mean adapting to the new reality, implying a transformation from within, a change of attitude or approach, and the empowerment to endure what couldn't be changed. On the same note, acknowledging the hardship could also entail "finding things to celebrate, finding ways to have fun or to laugh at mistakes" or simply to sit with family members and comfort them or support each other.

To conclude, we affirm with Walsh a basic premise in family systems, especially with reference to family resilience that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts". It is not a question of strong parental figures who hold everything together. If it were so, everything would crumble at their demise. "Rather, there has to be a sense of common purpose and mutual interdependency. Family members should understand it this way, we are here to support each other and care about each other. When one falls back or needs help, the others will step forward. This way, the resilience of the family unit will trickle down to each individual". "We can look at adversity and see all the ways that it can run us down. Or we can think of it as something that will transform and empower us". The latter is the path of family resilience.

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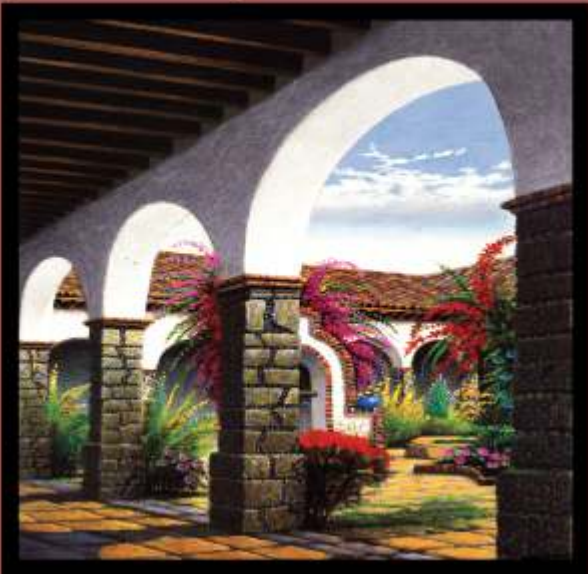
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Such cycles of conversation is typical in every family with kids and with adults behaving like kids. It describes sibling rivalry. Exchanges like this may cap to a yelling match or turn into physical altercations. Parents, caregivers, and adults may turn such moments into opportunities of family bonding with simple skills. In this article, we'll examine the meaning of sibling rivalry and present some skills of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as a way of turning sibling rivalry into family bonding moments.

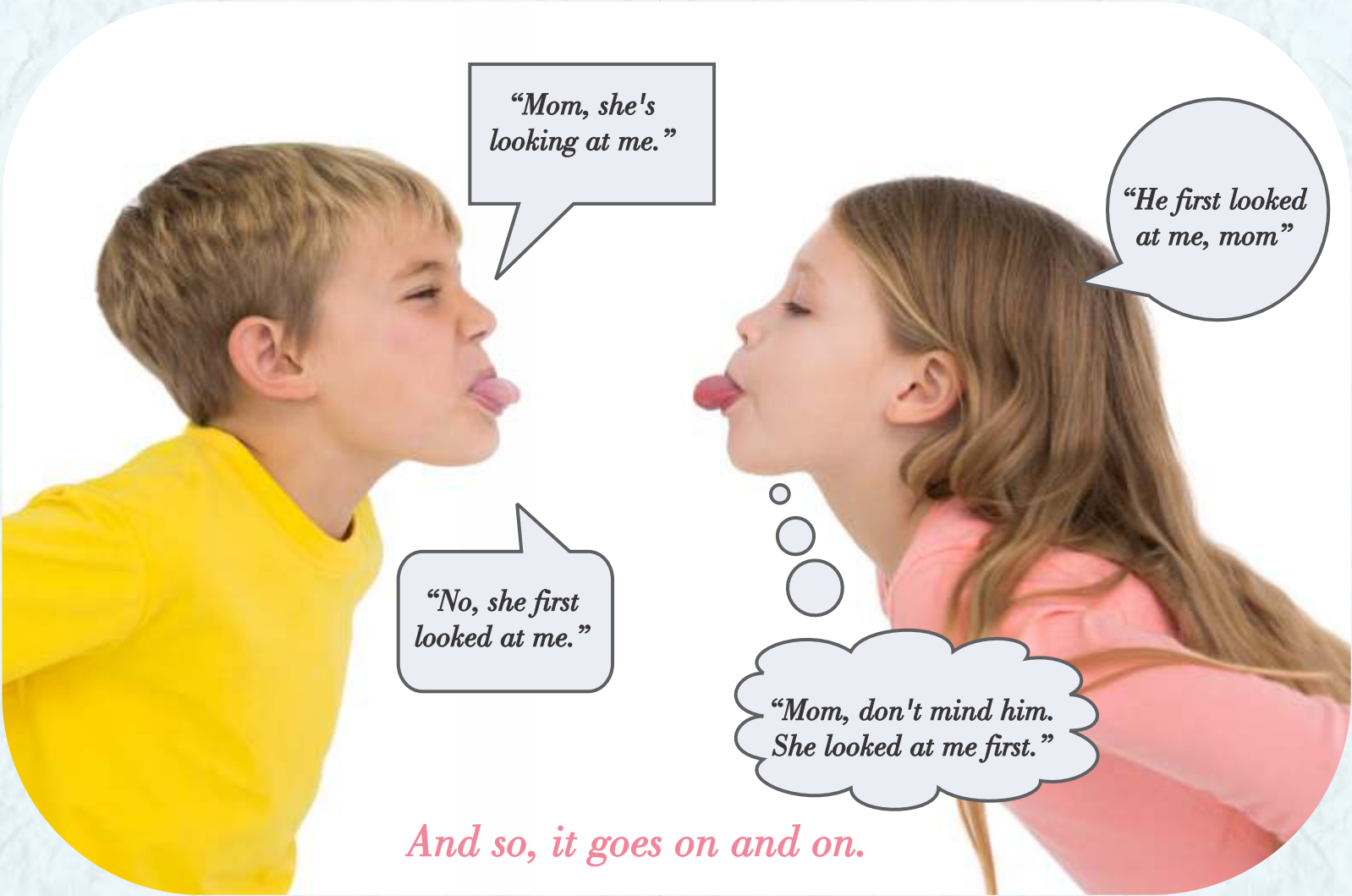
Defining sibling rivalry
Barker (2003) defines sibling rivalry as an expression of competition between siblings, that it serves basically as a way of gaining parental favor or attention. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes it as a situation common between siblings. Sibling rivalry cuts across culture, age, race, ethnicity, and class. In the Bible, the greatest story of sibling rivalry that led to the first recorded murder (Gen. 4: 1-8.) is about Cain who kills his brother Abel because of jealousy. Other passages in the Bible allude to or explicitly depict sibling rivalry such as Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25: 22-34), Joseph and his siblings (Gen. 37:12-36).

Turning Sibling Rivalry into Family Bonding
Sibling rivalry is a part of family life, and parents should know how to deal with it in a healthy way to create family bonds that lasts through life. Sibling rivalry is a great opportunity to teach kids lessons in boundaries, paying attention to one another's needs and values. The key is knowing when to intervene. Parents who raise kids should be aware of such developmental processes in the family and be able to navigate the boundaries between them and their kids, among the kids in a healthy way. When proper intervention is given at the proper time, sibling rivalry can become a moment of learning social skills and building a community- *koinonia*. Such can produce lessons in humility, honesty, and generosity for the family. For the, I recommend using the skills of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) also called Compassionate Communication in turning sibling rivalry into a learning experience.

NonViolent Communication Skills
NVC is a way of life that uses empathy to build connections (Rosenberg, 2013). Rosenberg argues that everything that any human being does is a way to meet a need. Nonviolent Communication uses four simple skill sets to meet needs. They are designated as OFNR- Observation, Feelings, Needs, and Request. Observation is the ability to name succinctly what is going on. In this approach, the five senses are used to articulate what is going on without evaluations or judgments. The five senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. For instance, "What am I seeing or what did I see?" "I saw Ryan pull his sister's ear" is different from concluding that "Ryan is a bully" or "Ryan is mean." This is very important in handling kids. Adults have ways of reading meaning into simple human acts. Observation as a skill helps a parent or an adult resolving sibling rivalry by actually naming an event as it happened. What one is seeing, hearing, tasting, perceiving through smell, or touch reduces the word game kids often use during rivalry - "I touched her - No, you hit me." The adult equally teaches the kids some honesty in the reporting of events. The adult is able to discern issues that deserve attention and which do not.

Dealing *with* Sibling Rivalry *in a Healthy Way*

By Nkiruka Okafor



Feelings in NVC is the ability to name an underlying feeling or what is alive for the person. Simple expression of feelings is an acknowledgement of our humanity. Gender disparity might affect our evaluations in terms of culture. For instance, in many cultures, boys are taught to suppress their feelings and only show anger. Girls are disparaged as being emotional for showing and expressing feelings. Naming and accepting feelings make us more human and humane. In NVC, through naming feelings, kids are taught to use their own feelings to guess how others are feeling too and seek more connection. For example, "Ryan, I saw you push your sister hard. How does that make you feel? How do you think that makes her feel?" Such dialogue reduces premature apologies which make kids feel unheard. Naming the feelings helps to unveil unmet needs for kid's actions.

Needs or Values in NVC are lifegiving. Needs are the deepest yearning beneath every human act. And they are universal. Needs represent our desire for wholeness. A sibling smacking another may have a need for respect which s/he thinks is not being met and so expresses that desire in physical ways. Kids' need for attention and to be loved is huge. Parents who are aware of what need a child is expressing will easily meet the need. A kid may cry and the parent senses the need for food, yet the child continues to cry. Perhaps, the child needs warmth. Letting kids guess their own needs and the needs of the other in resolving a sibling rivalry makes each person aware that the other person's needs are important. Kids could be helped to figure out strategies that could meet their needs. This is where setting boundaries and laying ground rules becomes very

effective. Kids realize that every human being has needs and also expectations to meet those needs.

Request in NVC refers to the ability to articulate what strategy is needed to meet a need. Kids are taught to ask for what they need. Using NVC language, kids learn to express their requests in a timely, specific, and clear manner. The kid engaging the other in a rivalry may discover that their needs could be met in a nonviolent way. NVC helps to emphasize positive attributes of relationships such as love and joy in family life.

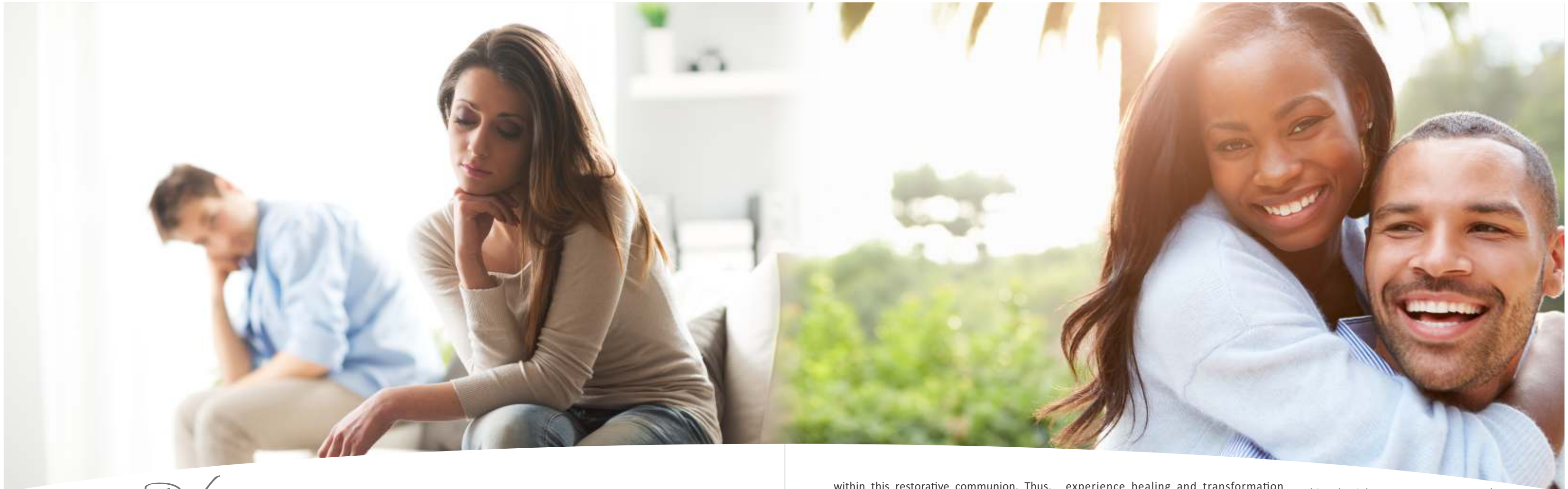
Conclusion
Sibling rivalry is inevitable and occurs in day-to-day interrelationships. It is the adult's responsibility to help kids turn those moment into family bonding experiences. Using NVC could be of help to parents in response to such rivalry. The mother may focus on the child reporting, on herself as the mother or the second child being reported. To the child, mom may consider the following: validate the child's feelings by showing that you clearly hear her and understand what she is saying. Ask for clarification through Observation skill; "I heard you say that your sister is looking at you. You looked at her and saw she is looking at you." Supposing the answer continues to be 'yes,' mom goes on to empathise with her feelings. "I sense you feel irritated or awkward when such happens." Then, let the child express her need - "could you tell me what is important to you when you feel that way?" Finally, Request - "could you express to me what you want in this situation?"

Practicing NVC with kids and adults may first seem awkward. Every new language does. Perseverance in practice makes it fun and easy. Hopefully, honing such skills will help resolve sibling rivalry in healthy ways. That could be a teaching moment for the kid for the rest of her life.

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Between Emotional & Physical presence in marriage

By Tina Bode

What comes to mind when you consider the word marriage? Terror? Elation? Disappointment? Adventure? Fantasy? Regardless of the reaction, we all wish for a sense of belonging, a sense of being significant to another. Whether our family history is made up of close and healthy connections, a controlling and rigid structure, or a complete lack of attachment resulting from abandonment or abuse, one universal truth prevails: connection matters. As we are created in the image of the One who is in perfect triune relationship, we long for intimate connection through a healthy triune relationship: Self - Spouse - Savior.

Every child's dream seems to embody the hope for a prince or princess with whom to unite and live together happily ever after. Wow! No pressure! Of course this does simplify the process to three steps: 1- be the perfect partner 2- find the ultimate companion and 3- wave the magic wand!

Often reflected in this flawless scenario, or quite literally 'fairy tale', we find an interpretation of ideal Christian gender roles and the aspiration to attain an absolutely harmonious union. It's no wonder that we find so many of our marriages crumbling under the pressure of the idealistic mirror of perfection. However, in the wake of broken nuptials, we find people seeking new unions and often reuniting in a second or third marriage. This pattern speaks to our deep longing as humans to attach with a significant other and find a sense of value of self in these connections.

We may try to perfect our roles of housekeeping, child rearing, shared financial responsibilities, and a host of other socially articulated expectations, yet our relationships often still feel distant and lonely. With busy work schedules, the allure of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and a host of other readily available social media

distractions, we find ourselves pulled away from our core connections in marriage and family unions. Much of these are by our own choosing. Attachment theory speaks of this deep human desire for connection. Developed by John Bowlby, attachment can be said to be the cornerstone of families; marriages evolve through the intersectionality of the couple's individual attachment processes.

Surprisingly, what and how we feel matters, especially in significant marriage and covenant relationships. How do we know the key to our connection with others? Is there a way to know my partner's style? And if so, what if we are not compatible?

Lest we panic or react out of fear, there is hope! (No, there is still no magic wand.) It's actually within the intimate associations in marriage that we find an opportunity to reconcile our wounded selves as infants

within this restorative communion. Thus, marriages offer a space in which to grow healthier attachment bonds with our spouse out of which we are able to explore and interact with more confidence. Created to be in relationship, our minds, bodies, and spirits experience healing in these unions. Thus marriage proffers spouses the opportunity to unite and heal in our soul deep spaces of brokenness. I theorize that following the reciprocal fall in the garden, we all possess 'garden brokenness'. And so, separation from our Creator leaves us struggling with self-worth, issues of abandonment and rejection, and an overall sense of disconnection from our self, others, and our God. Plantinga-Pauw (2013) summarizes,

"Marriage is a bond that strengthens both partners to act and accomplish things that make for creaturely flourishing. The comfort and courage a marriage generates radiate far beyond itself. Marriage can give people courage to do what they couldn't afford to do, wouldn't dare to do, couldn't imagine doing, on their own. Marriage is a joyful "yes" to God's gift of creaturely life."

This harmonizes with Ephesians 5:31, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh (NIV)". Similarly encountered through salvation, we

experience healing and transformation within the bonds of a marriage partnership. In marriage, secure attachment extends beyond merely managing the functionality of life together. Paying bills, raising children, and managing careers together emerge better out of a relationship in which both partners feel deeply connected to a supportive equal.

At the heart of the marriage union is the need for close healthy attachments which fosters a foundation for current and future healthful living. In the age of high speed Internet, Amazon Prime, microwave meals, and instant gratification, we miss the presence of being engaged in mutually beneficial attached relationships. In reality, I cannot remember ever hearing someone wishing to cuddle up

to his or her iPhone. However, everyone longs for an embrace and connection from their spouse. Differences in attachment styles can cause conflict, but the growth happens by processing and working through that conflict. Understanding that not only does our spouse hold the key to our healing and growth, but also that we hold the key to theirs. Rather than allowing conflicts to create distance, we may take steps of faith to lovingly transform conflicts from wedges into glue. So, in the midst of the impending holiday melee, take moments to hold your partner, share kind words, laugh, play, and enjoy the benefits of your healthy attachment in marriage. Perhaps he/she needs more of your emotional presence as much as your physical presence, too.

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Stay Strong, SINGLES

By Meredith Rubeling

I have always been one who especially enjoys Thanksgiving and Christmas. Those days remind me of fun times with family and of the incredible gifts God has given me, particularly the gift of His Son. However, the earlier part of the year had brought new experiences, and for the first time, I found the holiday season to be painful.

On Thanksgiving morning I remember waking up and feeling so grateful for all the blessings in my life. I decided to go to Mass early so that I could spend some quiet moments alone with Jesus. I relished that time... When the Church was practically empty, and I could be alone with the One who knows my soul best. That morning I specifically chose to sit up towards the front in order to focus entirely on Jesus. A bigger part of me chose for a selfish reason to sit up front -- so that I wouldn't have to look around at the young families and couples and be filled with longing. As I sat quietly, I felt so much peace... And then, just as the processional hymn began, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was my dad, inviting me to the back of the Church, where the rest of my family was waiting in a nearby pew. I had mixed feelings...I was so touched by my dad's sweet consideration and care for me. But, I also knew that moving to the back of the Church would inevitably bring into view many of the young families and couples I was trying to avoid. Almost immediately, as I stood singing with my family around me, I looked up towards the altar and caught sight of many friends... Young friends of mine who had just recently had children, and those who were recently engaged; it felt like couples were *everywhere*. My heart instantly sank. I felt such a deep longing for those significant relationships evident all around me.

As I tried holding myself together, I was taken

aback as I sat in the pew next to my dad. My heart was consumed with emotion as he put his arm around me when we sat down. During Mass he held the hymnal for me as we sang and kissed my cheek at the sign of peace. I was overwhelmed by his love for me. I thought about what a tremendous gift he is in my life. It touched me especially that day, thinking about the reflection of God my dad is to me. He so beautifully reflects the eternal Father's love. He is always so encouraging, he builds me up, and he offers to help me constantly. He is so sacrificial, loving, constant, and he leads by example. Even something so simple as him holding a hymnal made tears well up in my eyes. While I felt so desperate for a

*“After all You are constant
After all You are only good
After all You are sovereign
Not for a moment
will You forsake me”*

relationship and romantic love, I was so overwhelmed by the beautiful gift of my father, and his love for me.

Just as I want to please my heavenly Father, I also want to make my earthly father proud. I want my dad to know that eventually I will be more peaceful, and hopefully happier. I hope that God will bring a man who will care for me in the same sacrificial way, to ensure that my dad knows that I am taken care of. I want to have a holy companion to experience this life with, someone to share my heart with, and someone who wants to protect my soul and

help me get to heaven. I struggled so much that day, because on a day dedicated to giving thanks, all I felt was longing, even though I tried to cultivate a grateful heart...

Just several days ago on Christmas eve, I had another experience while at morning Mass for the fourth Sunday of Advent. Tears were streaming from my eyes at such a rapid pace during the homily, as our parish priest was preaching about Mary's “yes.” He mentioned that Mary's willingness to say “yes” to God meant that she was also saying “yes” to whatever suffering God allowed her to experience. That morning I had again come to Mass joyful and hopeful, but all at once I felt so lonely and sad and hopeless. I was so pained by waiting... waiting for love and relief of the loneliness I have experienced for so long. The priest spoke of the inevitable suffering that we will endure in life with Christ. While listening to his words, I cried and cried. I felt such an utter lack of self-control, and yet the moment was so cathartic and needed.

That day I again struggled with looking around and thinking about the people surrounding me; those who are in relationships, who have families and who are more “settled.” I found myself reflecting on the last year and a half. Jesus has brought me to a new depth of love, but through pain. I have so many things to be grateful for; a wonderful family, supportive and loving friends, an uplifting faith community, and a career that I love. I have transitioned this year to living on my own, something that always terrified me. And I have grown in my relationship with Christ. Yet, why was I struggling so much? Why did I feel such a strong longing, why did I want companionship so desperately? I felt like a fraud in front of Christ; even though I have been given so

much, all I could long for was a relationship.

How could I profess that I trust in Him, when I struggle so much with His timing and plan for my life?

After Mass I shared my struggle with my mom. She spoke of the truth that those who follow Christ in a way will “hate their life.” We are not called to comfort or conformity, but life with Christ ultimately requires detachment. It will require us to abandon all that we love, all that we desire, all that we hope for and lay it at the foot of the cross. Even though I have my own plans for my life, I always go back to what I truly want; **I want God's will.** I have found that it is not easy or comfortable. But how could I ever doubt a God that loves me infinitely, and who displays

His love for me constantly?

Christmas Eve Mass brought some relief. I was overcome by the love of Christ. I kept thinking about the idea and reality of *Emmanuel*—**God is with us.** Christ came to expose our brokenness, to reach out to us in our heartache, sin and sadness. And we have the gift of knowing Him, and He humbled Himself to the point that we get to receive Him into our bodies every time we attend Mass! He



Meredith Rubeling — I am passionate about my Catholic faith and relationship with Jesus. It influences my life daily, especially my work as a cardiac registered nurse and clinical nursing instructor. I enjoy spending time with family and friends, traveling, writing, and spreading truth.

*The Family Apostolate wishes our volunteers,
readers and families a happy Christmas and a
prosperous New Year. May the Lord bless you all.*



What **MAKES** **FAMILY MEALS** *Special?*

By Isaac Makovo

One of God's great gifts to humanity is the family. Our family is like a compass that plays a key role in our lives and helps us to realize who we are, what we want to be, and where we're going. Time spent with family deserves the best, whether it's vacations, get-togethers, holidays, graduations or weddings. While these 'big' moments are important, often, the heartiest (pardon the pun!) conversations happen when family members share meals together.

Sadly, in the last decade, family life has been challenged in many aspects; marriage is being redefined, moral values are eroding. Balancing work and family is a struggle, as well as dealing with financial pressures. These are only a few of the challenges facing families. Social media and technology pose an additional threat which is often difficult to detect because it's presented as an indispensable part of 21st century living. Though social media offers some positive benefits, it appears that one of its negative effects is that it's beginning to override family bonding time. One tragic example of this is a de-emphasis on the family meal.

The family meal is an important time to connect through food and conversations. Simply being together and chatting about the day can be enough to unite and recharge family members. No matter which meal you eat together, it's always good to appreciate having the opportunity to find out what's going on in each other's life. Ironically, this is an opportunity that many families miss, namely sharing meaningful time with their loved ones.

But it's more than that: Not eating together has negative physical and psychological effects. In fact, the average person eats one in every five meals in their car, one in four people eat at least one **fast food** meal every single day, and the majority of families report eating a **single meal together** less than five days a week. And as if this is not bad enough, many families will spend this meal time on electronic devices (we'll need reference for this statistics). So, they are sitting together, but not 'being' together.



There are obviously many reasons why the habit of using our devices at dinner time must stop. We need to fight for our family time and relationships. Good conversations about vocations and careers often begin at the dinner table. Eating together as a family, our children learn important social and communication skills. It's at our dinner tables where we have the best support sessions; we find encouragement, and comfort; affirmation and recognition. It's at our dinner tables that children feel safe to share what's on their minds, ask questions and learn how to independently form their opinions.

This is true for toddlers too who depend on their parents for social and emotional development. In most cases, parents fail to consider the negative effects of technology on toddlers. Some parents hand electronic devices to their toddlers to quiet them in a way that affects their attachments negatively. This might provide temporary relief but in the long run the toddler could be missing opportunities to learn important social skills.

On the other hand, some parents regrettably become addicted to their electronic devices that it becomes the children who seek their parents' attention. Such children can feel unimportant, impacting on their self-esteem as well as their social and emotional development. My parting words here remain, "If we don't talk to or engage one another, sooner or later we will have less friends leading to loneliness or depression. We might even end up *paying* people to talk to us in counseling sessions." Let's make family rules about the use of smartphones from our family dinner tables and implement them. We need to talk to each other.

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Get-togethers and Family Fun

By David Cohn



Being the youngest of seven children, with an eighteen-year span between the oldest and myself, gathering together on holidays is very special for me. Since most of my older siblings are in college, married with children, or have important jobs, there is very little time for us to be together. So, when the holidays come... it's just about bonding with family.

On Thanksgiving, we gather together as a family and celebrate each other. For us, it's much more than massive cooking and feasting on fabulous food. We start out with an assortment of games and activities that involve the whole family - even the babies! First, we all meet to watch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade while munching on hors-d'oeuvres. It's always a great laugh for us when the announcers mispronounce names or we see bloopers, such as cheerleaders falling or singers not lip synching correctly. Next, we would have lunch and play exciting board games as a family. After lunch, most of us would participate in a friendly game of football, while my mom and those who do not want to play stay home, drink coffee, talk, and prepare the big feast. Growing up in a big family always involves great conversations, humors and special time around the dinner table! While we enjoy the food, each person at the table expresses what he/she is most thankful for, which always points to the bonds of family. After we stuff our belly with turkey galore, we would all relax and enjoy each other's company. Usually this entails playing music and singing together to get the babies to sleep. Thanksgiving is a great opportunity to show my family how much I appreciate them.

Because of distance, we all don't see each other as much as we would like. I miss my family members so holidays like Christmas mean a lot to me. Usually, a few months before Christmas, the family meets for dinner and each person picks a name out of a Santa Hat. It's called the Secret Santa game. Whichever family member we get, we not only buy them a present from the store but



also make a home-made gift. Our family goal is to make sure that our presents represent how special the person is to us by going out of our way to put meaning and effort into our gifts. On Christmas morning, while still in our pajamas, we open the presents in the stockings then gather around the tree with a

board games, or just sit and talk. And finally, we have dinner and talk and sing for hours!

Thanksgiving and Christmas are holidays that make me feel especially close to my family. With all the great food and family fun, it's always memorable. Yet, neither holiday brings us closer together than when we are singing and playing music together. What I enjoy most about my family is that we all have been blessed by God with great singing voices. We love each other's company the most when we are all singing together. Regardless of the celebration, music bonds our family together in a special way. I look forward to the next holiday gathering with my amazing family!

*“Love your family.
Spend time, be kind
& serve one another.
Make no room for
regrets. Tomorrow is
not promised & today
is short.”*

– Author Unknown



David Cohn is thirteen years old and in eighth grade. He is currently attending St. John Paul II Homeschool Academy in Hanover, Maryland. In his free time, he enjoys, sports, especially soccer, video games, reading, music, acting and family

cup of hot cocoa and open the gifts that each of us lovingly put time and effort into. Afterwards, we have lunch, again with the special hors-d'oeuvres and play outside, play

A Journey with a Catholic Missionary

By Joseph W. Cote



That same day, Fr. Lou brought me to meet a man named Matteo, a missionary from Italy serving in Baltimore as part of an organization called Operation Mato Grosso. Matteo is one of the most amazing people I have ever met.

A few months later, in February 2018, I lost my job. Like most people who have lost their job, I was worried about the situation but I have always believed that God has a way of turning something bad into good, so I had a choice to make: either go down

the path of frustration and self-loathing or take my own advice. I decided to take my own advice and use all this newfound time off to do God's work. Matteo invited me during Lent of that year to help with a food drive for the mission in Peru. We gathered 76,000 lbs. of food during that drive. While preparing the food for shipment, Fr. Lou asked me if I would volunteer to become a missionary to Peru. Without employment and against all earthly logic, I quickly answered yes. In my heart I felt that God would find a way even though my brain still said to me, "You're crazy." As the time came to leave, I was plagued with

doubts, but I still felt that God had a reason for sending me this tough invitation, my trepidation notwithstanding.

As a child, I lived in Livermore Falls, Maine, and my home parish was named St. Rose of Lima. Now as an adult, I was on my way to Lima, Peru. Despite the double language barrier (the missionaries spoke Italian while the people spoke Spanish), I was thrilled to be there. We spent the first two days in Lima being whisked around by Italian missionaries. They took me to see their many projects. I visited their store, two orphanages, and a few other places. It was unbelievably touching to see how much was being done, especially for the kids. We met with Fr. Ugo the founder of Operation Mato Grosso on our last day in Lima. Through this ministry which was established in the 1970s, Fr. Ugo has touched a multitude of lives with the help of many others. I knew after meeting him that I wanted to walk in his path, the path of Jesus. The next day, we set out for Yungay, Peru, on a bus ride which was about seven or eight hours away. There, I met Marco who was in charge of the missions in Yungay. Marco guided me on my assignments and brought me around the area in a whirlwind tour to show me all they were doing. As I toured the workshops where local Peruvians showed me their artwork - furniture, stone sculptures, textiles, and many other things - it became clear that this was a diverse community of very devout community people.

I attended Mass three times in the first four days. Attending Mass in a foreign country that speaks a different language was an eye-opening experience. I always knew the Church was universal, but I had never

experienced it quite like this. During this time, I thought about how amazing it was to witness the faithfulness of people who were living in very tough conditions. It reminded me of my childhood. The people never complained. They only praised God for their blessings, most of which were due to the missionaries. I was assigned different works; one day we would build a house, the next it was a plumbing job, the next it was electrical work. I simply went to wherever I was needed without hesitation even though some of the jobs were hard or downright miserable.

Even though the work was hard, I didn't realize that part of me would stay - that part was my heart. Before I left for Peru, I was asked what I was expecting from the trip. After careful consideration, my answer was, "I want to have an experience so profound that it changes my life." I had no idea how prophetic that statement would be. Whether it was teaching English in our school (the only free public school there) or shoveling dirt to make concrete, I battled a voice in my head that constantly said, "This is tough and miserable work." I kept asking what I'd gotten myself into. As time passed, however, my thoughts and feelings began to change. During the last 5 days of my trip, the whole town lost water. No bathing almost drove me

crazy, but then I realized that I would leave and they would still be going through this miserable experience. My suffering was nothing compared to what these people suffer every day without complaint. They always praised God. They became the face of Christ for me.

Returning to the US, all I wanted was to see my wife Amanda and have a steak dinner. While eating my delicious meal, reality hit me like a ton of bricks. There I was eating a sumptuous steak, while the folks in Yungay are still eating pasta or rice with little or no meat. With every bite, my heart saddened. At that moment, I realized that I did have the profound, life-changing experience that I had hoped for. These people needed me but it seemed I needed them even more. Long gone was the sting of poverty I had experienced as a child. Thank you, Jesus, for this beautiful experience. The path of Christ is not an easy one. However, God will provide if we do our part.



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● Tim, Claire, Stephanie, Emily, Fr. Michael Rubeling
in front of the Cathedral of Santiago, Spain
After completing 100+ miles of the Camino de Santiago.

VOLUNTEERING IS SO LIFE-GIVING TO OUR FAMILY

Interview with Gary and Stephanie Rubeling

How did the FA meet the Rubelings? That is a good question to ask. All the way from Glen Burnie to Frederick, almost an hour drive, to encounter a family that loves to keep low profile. The answer is simple -- the Rubelings are a simple family, doing ordinary things in an amazingly extraordinary way. But that's what the FA does too, digging up stories of simple, committed, and enthusiastic families. The Rubelings teach us how to love life in a most selfless way, to serve, and to give to the community in which we live. That's bonding, and that's what keeps the Rubeling's family continuously bonded in a unique way. Gary and Stephanie were upfront about this as they stated, "We encourage our children to be generous with their lives with the idea that with God all things are possible." You won't be able to put this article down once you start reading. Enjoy!

FA: Tell us a little about your relationship and how it started.

We've been married for thirty years. We met at Towson University and knew each other for five years before getting married. Stephanie was born in Cleveland, OH, and moved to Rockville, MD, when her father was transferred to NASA headquarters in Washington DC. She is a convert from the Methodist church. Gary is a cradle Catholic born in Baltimore, MD, and he moved to Frederick, MD, when he was young. We are parishioners at Saint Peter the Apostle in Frederick, MD.

FA: What decisions did you make early on as a couple in your marriage?

That we were going to raise our kids Catholic and abide by the teachings of the Church as much as we could. At the time, we were part of an ecumenical community called "Lamb of God" located in Catonsville, MD. We then moved to Frederick where Gary grew up. We were open to life, taking the Church's teaching to heart. We really didn't have much materially, living in a small apartment for five years. We worked hard and eventually saved enough to buy a piece of property in Frederick. All we know is that God has been there and has met us at every step of the way.

When we met, I was living off Campus and Stephanie on campus as we were part of University Christian Outreach. Our whole purpose was to evangelize the people on campus. We were learning to grow in our faith and to bring the gospel to others. That helped us because we got some great human and spiritual formation enabling us to deal with

life's challenges as a young couple.

FA: Stephanie, why did you decide to become Catholic?

It was about the liturgy and about the lives of the Saints. There's something about the Catholic Church that drew me in. It was good that we had that underpinning to stabilize our faith because as a young couple, there's always that questioning. We were looking for answers to issues like contraceptives. But it was good we had the firmness of our Catholic faith helping to provide the direction we needed early in our marriage. I found it extremely challenging because it was the reality of the time. It was on campus that I decided to become Catholic.

FA: How many children do you have, and what's the key to their bonding?

We have ten children, their ages range between twenty-nine to twelve. One of the biggest factors in keeping the bonds of our family strong was the decision to homeschool. We voice and support the idea that each new addition doesn't take away anything from the others. You may hear among some large families the comment, "He's got more than I've got", or "I don't have any room to myself." In our case, there's always that attitude of "Here comes another one into the family and we welcome the new addition." We adopted Gabriel who is number 10 from Liberia located in West Africa. His adoption emanated from a couple from Gettysburg that we spent some time with listening to their adventure. They had adopted from Liberia. As a couple who is pro-life we were always aware of the importance

of giving of ourselves to others and providing a strong witness. Our resources were limited but we figured that adding one more to our brood couldn't be too bad. At first, my head said yes to the idea but I wasn't convinced that my heart was ready. When we started the adoption process it became clear that God was leading us. Our adoption story began to unfold and miraculous events followed. It was so inspiring.

FA: As a family with a priest and two sons aspiring to the priesthood in a society where vocations are dwindling, how were you able to nurture these vocations?

Gary - First, my wife Stephanie is holy and prays fervently. She is a 3rd order Carmelite. She has offered up all our children to God to lead them as he wishes. We have often heard couples voice their support of vocations but with the thought that, "Just don't take ours!" What I bring to the table is that I am very driven and competitive. I have striven to shield and protect them from the world while explaining the realities of the world. We encourage our children to be generous with their lives with the idea that with God all things are possible. At St. Peter's, we've had great priests that the children grew up with attending daily Mass. They really were great examples along with their mom teaching them in the faith and inspiring them with her prayer life. I tell them, "If God gives you the grace, why would you not? As a priest, your offspring and spiritual legacy could be magnanimous. We all eventually come to God singly, so go for it!" Through our spiritual formation in college we were encouraged to consider a single life serving God. I knew it wasn't for me as I have always had a strong desire to be a husband and father. One thing we do as parents is to encourage them to be open and pray for God's direction. Don't close the door. We encourage them as they grow up to pick an adoration hour. It was so uplifting to watch the children because when you go in the presence of Jesus, you're not the same person. You change. It's inspiring to see that God was forming them and molding them. They're not all going to be priests but it will be nice to have all of them become holy men and women.

FA: What's the key to their response to your advice?

There are two things that assisted the children in their choice of vocation:

1. We introduced them to doing missionary works very early. For instance, Fr. Michael went to India when he was sixteen which was a bit of a risk. Our daughter Monica is sixteen. When she was confirmed last year, she wanted to volunteer in a soup kitchen. She was too young to do that, so I (mom) had to go along with her. Our children have been on missions to India, Tanzania (Africa), China, Peru, Spain. They were all purposeful trips that broadened their perspectives. They were exposed to poverty and service. Missionary works have broadened their world.

I feel bad for my boys sometimes. I know for instance, when they're wearing their clerics, they are concerned about what the people are thinking about them

2. With the homeschool education, they were introduced to classical writings of the past and our current time. The imagination that they develop through such reading is powerful. That creates in them a generous spirit and opens them up a lot more.

FA: What major challenges do you have or any moments of trepidation when the children go on such trips?

We knew it was right to let them go. God opened our heart to know it was the right time. Our fourth son, Tim, went to Pakistan this year and that was harder than the other travels. He ministered to the persecuted

Christians in a dangerously risky area of the world. We knew there was a possibility of martyrdom, but God was always present, and they were protected.

FA: What messages do you hear from the society about priests out there?

I feel bad for my boys sometimes. I know for instance, when they're wearing their clerics, they are concerned about what the people are thinking about them. And yet I haven't run into anybody who's mean. I always go back to this idea of, if people have the chance to talk one-on-one with priests and know how good they are... The issue is that people have this global idea about good and bad, but it will be nice to have a direct personal experience with priests.

FA: How does having a priest enhance the bonding in your family?

It's great. We have Mass here in our house. The beauty of it is that Fr. Michael is the oldest. He is such a wonderful influence and role model for the younger ones. They want to grow up to be like their older brother. The five boys and four girls all look up to him. Our secret is that we're like the "half-cup full" type of family with optimism and hope as our motivation. We want to make our house a place where not only our son-priest can visit but also where other seminarians and priests can come to relax. We have a large amount of property so we're building a large deck under a gazebo as a place for them to hang out. We know that a lot of priests have nowhere to go locally. They can come to our place, eat and drink, and have no one judge them. As parents of priests and religious, you think about your priests differently. You understand that like any human being, priests are on a continuum with their faith. They need more grace than criticism. We need to support and pray for them.

FA: Any specific conflict moments?

We're like any other family. I have often said, "If the boys can survive the pecking order of their bedroom, then they can survive the world!". This points to the fact that the kids know how to battle it out and settle their

differences among themselves.

FA: Any rules about social media?

We don't really have straight rules. We kind of ask them to get the sense of what's going on. We're not a rule-driven kind of family. We try to let them self-regulate themselves. It helps them to know what to do. Our dynamic is that mom is more of stay-at-home mom who is with them. As dad, being in the sales profession, I am very busy often traveling. I tell the kids to be real. That for us, is important. We are in the fray whether we like it or not! The world can certainly 'bite' you but what better invitation then to live out this earthly life as the church militant! We know as parents, that there is a gradual letting go, a gradual release. We have seen that our kids need us more between the ages of 15-25 than the ages of 1-14! The reason is that as you're letting them go gradually into the world they begin to realize that they are different. There's a lot more conversation at that age. That's when the children ask a lot of questions. Our boys were not over-sexualized which ultimately gave them the grace to be able to discern their vocations. Getting them past puberty without being tainted is a

humbling merciful favor!

A: How does the couple bonding influence the kids?

It is the security for the children. In our case, our oldest boy helps us a lot. He is the one who reaches out to the younger ones. He takes that responsibility. We provide the base and security. We're always glad to see the kids do things their own way. As husband and dad, I am the "priest" of this home. I am the "domestic priest" of this family and what I've taught my sons is that we as men answer the call. We are not perfect, but we are to be responsible and stand resolute through God's grace. Do your best. Even if you fall get back up again and again. There is nothing you can do that God hasn't seen. Your sin is not beyond God's mercy and forgiveness.

FA: How does volunteering help to strengthen your bonds?

We do street evangelization in downtown Frederick. We go on the streets handing out rosaries, prayer cards, and religious medals. We talk to people about Jesus and at times offer to pray with them. It's non-confrontational. We just reach out and give of

ourselves. Our family believes so much in the Scripture passage that says, "Go out to the whole world, and preach the good news." We don't force our kids to do evangelism. We have shown them that volunteering is so life-giving.

FA: How does the family celebrate thanksgiving and other special events?

Holidays provide such great opportunities of bonding for us. We rent a hunting cabin in northwest Pennsylvania. No television, no cellphones. We do it from the Sunday before Thanksgiving to Wednesday, then get together on Thursday back home. We do a lot of family trips. Camping is big for our family. For twenty years we've taken the family to Rocky Gap in Western Maryland and spend four to five days. It has become a tradition in our community for the past twenty years with 30-40 families that join us. Also, we have a Praise and Worship meeting at our house on the first Friday of the month during the school year. Sometimes we pray the Stations of the Cross, the rosary together, and of course sing.



● Rubeling Family vacation with their grandma-Outer Banks 2018

Infancy (Christmas) Narrative

- A. Mark and John
- B. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
- C. Luke only
- D. Matthew and Luke

- A. He wasn't
- B. At birth
- C. At 8 days old
- D. At 13 years old

- A. Elizabeth
- B. Simeon
- C. Anne
- D. Zechariah

- A. Anna
- B. Gabriel
- C. Elizabeth
- D. Simeon

- A. Nathaniel
- B. Peter
- C. John the Baptist
- D. Simeon

- A. A barn
- B. A feeding trough
- C. A type of inn
- D. A cave

- A. Micah
- B. Joel
- C. Jonah
- D. Jeremiah

- A. His mother went to visit Elizabeth
- B. Joseph went to Bethlehem for a census
- C. That's where both his parents lived
- D. He wasn't; he was born in Nazareth

- A. God is Born
- B. Jesus saves
- C. God is with us
- D. God in the flesh

- A. Micah
- B. Joel
- C. Jonah
- D. Jeremiah

A. True
B. False

Genesis 37

1. Canaan
2. He was the son of his old age
3. Israel (Jacob)
4. Joseph was their father's favorite son
5. Joseph's family would bow down to him
6. Reuben
7. Threw him in a cistern
8. 20 pieces of silver
9. He tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins
10. Potiphar

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