



CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIFE

STUDY KIT



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The Catholic Women's League of Canada



A Christian Family Life Study Kit was prepared by the Ontario Provincial CWL Council as a special project for International Year of the Family. It is an excellent resource to be used by councils at any level. All sub-committees are covered in detail. An evening of discussion or a workshop could easily be planned by following the material.

To ensure that this resource would not be lost, it was accepted by the national executive as an inventory item. I recommend that all CWL councils purchase the kit and add it to the chairperson's handbook under the Christian family life standing committee.

I encourage members to take time to read and familiarize themselves with each sub-committee. There is a wealth of excellent information to be used for group participation and sharing.

Vivian Bosch
National Christian Family Life Chairperson

Resources:

CCCB Publications

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This Study Kit is a result of their combined efforts, and we are grateful that they agreed to share it with councils across Canada.



Index

	Page No.
Introduction.....	1
Vocations to the Single Life	4
Ministry to Seniors.....	6
Ministry to the Disabled.....	8
Ministry to Youth.....	10
Introduction: Part A – Children	10
Introduction: Part B – Adolescents Ages 10 – 19.....	12
Marriage and the Family.....	14
Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life	16
Ministry to the Separated and Divorced	18
Ministry to the Widowed	20
Sanctity of Life	22



INTRODUCTION

“For this reason I bow my knees before the father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.” Eph 3:14

Welcome to the Christian Family Life Standing Committee!

The CWL *Constitution & Bylaws* (2000) Article IV states as the third object of the CWL “**to exemplify the Christian ideal in home and family life.**” Article XII, Sec. 3, subdivides the Christian family life standing committee as follows:

- a) **marriage and family**
- b) **sanctity of life**
- c) **ministry to:**
 - youth**
 - disabled**
 - seniors**
 - widowed**
 - separated**
 - divorced**
- d) **vocations**

St. Augustine tells us, “Because You have loved me, O Lord, You have made me lovable.” We are loved and cherished by God. This gives us dignity and makes us capable of loving in return. The work of the Christian family life standing committee is our **love story in action.**

To mark 1994 as International Year of the Family, the Ontario Provincial Council of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada put together this study kit and, at the request of the national executive, generously allowed it to be stocked as an inventory item. We hope it will help CWL parish councils to shine the light of their Catholic faith upon the various aspects of family life as it exists in their midst.

When we think of part (c) of the standing committee, called “ministry to,” we should really consider it as our call from Jesus to walk beside, to interact **with** the other person. “So that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 16:22) We should ask ourselves, what can we do as a CWL council; indeed, what can I do as a person, to make another’s way easier? Our mission is to enable other people, to help them stand on their own as one who is graciously loved by God.

Recalling the words of Jesus, (Matt. 25:40) “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Ontario Spiritual Advisor, Bishop John A. O’Mara (1994-1995) suggests, “that time be given to scripture reflection, prior to the discussion. This beginning with the word of God would enhance personal spiritual enrichment, as well as evoke deeper insight for shared planning and action.”

Scripture Reflection: Eph.3:14-21

Priority issues

Now is the time to break into groups:

- ⇒ four or five people per group
- ⇒ each group is given one of the questions below to discuss
- ⇒ a recorder is appointed at each table
- ⇒ each table is supplied with paper and markers
- ⇒ each person is asked to brainstorm her first reaction to the question for about a minute
- ⇒ the recorder takes notes
- ⇒ the group looks at its results and prioritizes the two most pressing or practical answers
- ⇒ after a total of 10 minutes the entire assembly is called back to order
- ⇒ reports are made
- ⇒ additional ideas may be recorded
- ⇒ an **action plan** is decided upon, to be researched before the next meeting. The recorded data can be given to those doing the investigating.

1. What courses could the parish sponsor to enable families to meet their own needs? e.g., parenting, teen liaison, elder support
2. There may be people in the parish whose special gifts have not been utilized and enhanced. Consider doing a parish **Needs Assessment** with appropriate follow-up. How can this be accomplished?
3. Poverty and unemployment put strains on family relationships. Identify government assistance programs presently available. What additional government action can be recommended to overcome these problems?
4. What kinds of social and recreational programs can be created in the parish community for families?

Challenges

We are in God's time. Now is the moment of grace. Use this kit creatively:

- as a resource
- as the basis of a study day in your diocese
- one section per council meeting all through the League year
- to build workshops at a convention
- to sponsor a 10 week parish discussion group on the family in today's world

Enlarge the kit, add your local ideas and questions to the format. Make it your own, but use it to deepen members' experience of this versatile standing committee. By participation and reflection, CWL members can come to a greater understanding of the scope of the Christian family life standing committee and should be able to discern ways to become the heart and hands of Jesus in the world today.

Pope John Paul II stresses that the following values can best be taught and witnessed within the family:

- self-giving love
- understanding
- respect for human life and dignity
- mutual encouragement
- forgiveness
- patience
- acceptance of those who are different

His Holiness says further: “How important is the apostolate of Christian families for the growth of society and of the church! Never forget the sacred calling you have received to pass on the faith and to train the younger generation to live in a way pleasing to God. The world needs the witness of Christian families, families which are schools of generosity, patience, dialogue and respect for the needs of others.

Only if you are nourished by prayer and sustained by genuine Christian living will you bear fruit. The effect of Christ’s light must clearly be seen in the goodness of your lives. You must be examples of a faith that is rooted in a personal relationship to Jesus, lived in full communion with the church. Your faith must be clearly seen in your lives of charity and service.”

Closing Prayer

Prayer for the Family

Lord Jesus, You were the centre of the holy family,
Help us to learn that our Christian families need Your love in their midst.
Inspired by Your example, may we love one another unselfishly.

Mary, mother of God and our mother, teach us your ways of peace within the family.

God of grace and wisdom, show us how to be patient and kind,
slow to speak harshly and quick to forgive each other.

Bless all grandparents, parents and lone parents, Lord.
Be gentle in Your care for all children—born and unborn.
Cherish all women, Lord, especially those about to give birth.
Guide all fathers to know the wisdom of Your ways.

Be with the sick and comfort the lonely,
Strengthen those who follow You in religious orders.
May our homes reflect the harmony of Nazareth as we share Your love with our neighbours.
We make this prayer through Christ, our Lord.
Amen

VOCATIONS TO THE SINGLE LIFE

“You did not choose me but I chose you.” John 15:16

Introduction

We are all born single, some people just continue to be single. If we consider our vocation as the way in which we are called to live our lives as followers of Jesus, then, the single life is as valid a vocational choice as the married or religious life.

A definition of the single person that might be appropriate: Single persons are **a diverse group of people, from all walks of life, who are single either by choice or by chance.** They may be from a religious group, single by choice, through divorce, or through the death of a spouse.

Eileen O’Brien, in *The Single Journey as Vocation*, tells us, “God loves each one of us in a unique way; each of us is called to answer God’s love with her or his life. How can I best respond to God’s love? How can I best spread God’s love in my life and in others’ lives? How can I best lead a loving life? How can I best live out my baptismal call to service? These are key questions.” (p. 95) The work of the single life, **its ministry, is service to God and God’s people.**

O’Brien, Mary and Christie, Clare, CC, *Single Women—Affirming Our Spiritual Journeys*, reprinted with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT, © 1993, CC Bergin & Garvey.

Scripture Reflection: John 15:12–17

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan.**

1. How can the church be more accommodating to the spiritual needs of single people?
2. What talents, and what needs, has God given the singles of our parish community? How can we use these talents and service these needs?
3. The time constraints of a career are a very real part of a single person’s life. What kinds of events could our parish plan that would involve, interest, and attract single people to participate in the life of the parish?
4. In *Single Women—Affirming Our Spiritual Journeys*, we are told, “Solitude is an opportunity to experience our rootedness with other women, the earth and spiritual reality.” (p. 117) It is solitude that gives richness, meaning, and balance to life, enabling the single person to befriend herself/himself, to celebrate the talents God has given and to reach out in service to others. Discuss the differences between loneliness and solitude.

Challenges

Ibid, “In a society that promulgates instant stimuli and thrives on constant togetherness, solitude is an anomaly, is suspect, and is to be avoided at all costs. Single women can witness not only to the value of solitude in their lives, but to the deeper meaning solitude provides for the growth of the spirit so lacking in modern times.” (p. 117)

In *Lumen Gentium*, 31, we are told, “The laity do not flee the world. They are called to sanctify it from within, as the leaven of society. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity.”

In chapter IV, *Christifideles Laici* called “Labourers in the Lord’s Vineyard,” His Holiness tells us that St. Gregory the Great suggests that Jesus calls us at different stages of our lives—one is led to a holy life during childhood, another in adolescence, another in adulthood, and another in old age. The church is made more vital, and present in the world because of the diversity of callings and situations, charisms and ministries—a variety linked not only to age, but to the difference of sex and diversity of natural gifts.

Some simple tasks that could invite unchallenged single people to achieve integration in our church and community:

- lay ministries in the parish
- present a course, tapping into some of their expertise
- having more time alone with the Lord, they could be given special prayer intentions
- invited to serve at parish functions, perhaps arriving there with others
- encouraged to use some of their free time to assist other people, e.g., as a Big Sister, Friendly Visitor, Meals on Wheels, Vincentian, soup kitchen

O’Brien, op, cit, “The single vocation is risk, vulnerability, poverty. It is a recognition that God can, will—indeed, must—provide. And God will probably do most of that providing through ordinary people and circumstances—through life.” (p. 97)

Closing Prayer

Lord, You chose me to journey with You as a single person detached from the demands of spouse and family. You bless me with time to follow when I hear You call, “come and see.” As with Your disciples, Lord, You chose a few to begin with. Many needed to be convinced that it was You who was calling. They went out in pairs and invited others to join them. Those who joined were not only single people, some were married, others widowed, but they chose to follow.

Lord, as I reflect on my vocation to the single life, joy fills my whole being. I begin to recognize that I did not choose You, but Lord, You chose me, special and unique, to reach out to others as You did in Your single vocation.

Vivian Bosch
National Christian Family Life Chairperson

MINISTRY TO SENIORS

“After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, ... and Job died, old and full of days.”
Job 42:16–17

Introduction

In the League, when we consider “ministry to seniors” we should really understand it to mean “ministry **with** seniors.” The following verse may bring home this idea.

**Don’t walk in front of me,
I may not follow.
Don’t walk behind me,
I may not lead.
Just walk beside me
And be my friend.**

This could be what Jesus had in mind when he said, “*Love one another.*” John 15:17

In Canada, by the year 2000, it was expected that nearly 12% of the population, i.e., 3.4 million people, would be at least 65 years of age. Most seniors prefer to live independently in their own homes. They look forward to events involving their children and grandchildren. Many seniors are active serving their communities; they are sharing the experience of their lifetime.

In *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II states, “I remind older people that the church calls and expects them to continue to exercise their mission in the apostolic and missionary life.” (Chapter IV (48))

Activities, such as card parties, line dancing, special eucharistic celebrations, can be planned for seniors inviting them to help in the planning, preparation, and presentation. Loneliness and isolation of the older person can be problems for which there are solutions.

Spiritual enrichment is an ongoing process in one’s life. Seniors may feel cut off from their parish when transportation becomes a problem or they become house bound. Interesting ways and means can be developed to bring the church to them, making them feel that they still belong to the parish community.

Spiritual Reflection: Job 42:10–17

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. Has your parish been surveyed as to its strengths and weaknesses? With regard to seniors, a **Needs Assessment** could indicate the following:
 - How many older adults are in the parish?
 - Are they able, disabled or isolated?
 - What kinds of things are they interested in doing?
 - What is currently being done in the parish by, with and for seniors?
 - What local community services are available for seniors?

- What issue needs addressing by our council?
2. Involvement that fosters self worth is important to the healthy emotional life of seniors—it gives them a reason to wake up in the mornings! The newly retired person is used to being “on the go.” It is healthier for them to maintain a level of participation. How can we channel their expertise, talents, free time, and energy in our parishes?
 3. Certain physical barriers can prevent full participation by the elderly in the life of the parish. What needs to be done to make our church more accessible?
 4. Unfortunately, home is sometimes where the hurt is. When a senior’s family life starts fraying, everyone is torn. The elderly are particularly vulnerable members of society. Elder abuse takes place in the home and in institutions.

Elder abuse is any action which causes harm to or neglect of an older person. It can be physical, psychological, financial. What causes elder abuse? Understanding these difficulties, what can we do to ease the burden on families?

Challenges

Who are the seniors of our ministry? If they are senior CWL members, our role is

- to keep them informed and connected to the council
- to ensure they have a ride to events or meetings
- to request their prayers for special intentions
- to seek their advice
- to ask them to share their memories to capture a sense of history in the council
- to include them in planning any seniors events e.g., day of reflection, monthly eucharistic celebration, book and craft sales, games and exercise sessions, Friendly Visitors

In the future, the need for more **care givers** will rise. Some provinces have developed a policy, which enables the elderly who require care to remain in their own homes. Care givers are those special people who provide support for the frail elderly and physically or mentally challenged person. Care givers may experience stress resulting from fatigue, financial problems, lack of knowledge of available community services, and coping problems (shuffling jobs, spouses, children and elders). In your parish, form a group of volunteers who can give care givers a few hours of relief from their duties.

Other problems for seniors that could be addressed by your council might be

- safety
- housing
- transportation
- poverty
- drug or alcohol dependency

Those who have strong **belief systems** can often sustain a positive outlook on life. Seniors can become active in prayer ministries for others. Planning a full range of life activities, addressing one’s spiritual, religious, emotional, social, and physical needs will help the spirit to remain vibrant. It will improve the nature, quality and length of life in the senior person.

Closing Prayer

O Lord of all wisdom, help us to value every person as precious in Your eyes. Help us to not be distracted by outward appearances. You love us all. Each person has a role to play in Your kingdom. May we be mindful, grateful and respectful of this; we make our prayer in the name of Jesus, Your son. Amen.

MINISTRY TO THE DISABLED

“Knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Matt. 7:7

Introduction

Today disabled people are **leading the way** for a better life for themselves. The women’s and the civil rights movements did much for the recognition of the equality of all citizens. We all strive to achieve a level of independence, through our knowledge and ability to cooperate with others. Each person endeavours to contribute to society in some way. The disabled do have a role to play in our parish communities; are their gifts being celebrated and utilized?

The **lack of access to services** seems to be the biggest hurdle for the disabled; be it rental cars equipped with controls for the handicapped, tax forms in braille, voice-synthesized computers in the library, or ramps to churches and entertainment locales. There are all kinds of services our League members can offer to the handicapped; it depends on the needs in our own areas.

Abuse is never acceptable; the vulnerable find it much harder to ask for assistance. Often the abuse is at the hands of a care giver, family member or at least someone known to the victim. We should be alert to signals of trouble.

“The handicapped are not made for power and glory. They seem to be made more for communion and friendship. Give them proper living conditions which are humane, harmonious, and they will flower,” recommends Jean Vanier.

In *The Broken Body* he invites us “not to run away from people who are in pain or who are broken but to walk towards them, to touch them. Then you will find rising up within you the well of love, springing from resurrection.... If you walk with Jesus along this path, he will reveal to you the new meaning of pain and darkness; how joy springs from the wounds of brokenness. He will reveal to you that he is hidden in the poor, the weak, the lonely and the oppressed.”

Scripture Reflection: Matt. 7:7–12

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. What can we as a Christian community do to welcome and assist the disabled in our midst? What part would they like to play in the **liturgical celebrations**? How can we facilitate their inclusion in parish social events?
2. What changes to the **physical environment** of our church or community are possible, so that the physically challenged person can contribute ably to our society?
3. **Palliative care** at home is a movement to help people live well while they live and die well when that time comes. The availability of long term care varies from province to province. What programs can we put in place to encourage and assist people to be cared for in their own homes?
4. Reintegration into society is tremendously important. Do we have a **group home** in our parish? How can we welcome and assist the residents?
5. **Mental Illness**, Alzheimer disease and accident induced mental incapacity have been

shrouded in silence for too long. They are not as noticeable a condition as blindness or immobility, but certainly are as prevalent. What can we do in our parishes and communities to help in the recognition of early signs of problems? How can we help families to cope with the trauma and treatment of mental disabilities?

Challenges

As Catholics, we believe that respect for life is a key gospel value. As CWL councils, we can:

- work to create a welcoming atmosphere for people with disabilities
- invite them to contribute in meaningful ways
- offer to give rides to church
- offer to go with them to a hockey game, concert, etc.
- offer respite care to the families for a few hours each week

(Vanier, *ibid*) *“Perhaps we can be a sign of the value of each person no matter how broken, no matter how poor or how apparently useless he or she may appear to society. A sign that they carry a treasure in their hearts.*

Perhaps through our struggle to save and help one person to find freedom we are struggling for all humanity and all the oppressed.

*Perhaps we can help reveal the secret of the gospels:
that God chooses what is foolish
in order to confound the wise;
that God chooses what is weak
in order to confound the strong;
that God chooses what is lowest and most
despised to reveal his power and glory.”*

The Broken Body, Jean Vanier 1988, published by the Anglican Book Centre, Toronto, used with permission.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, plunge me deep into the painful feeling of my brothers and sisters who suffer through no fault of their own. War, prejudice, injustice, and indifference cause many tears to fall. Turn me into a person, Lord, who touches with care the victim, the one imprisoned, those with broken hearts and bodies. Use me Lord, to ease the pain, to wipe the tear, to be Your eyes and ears, heart and hands on earth today.

Save me Lord from my sin of fretful busy-ness. Lord Jesus, that I may see! Amen.

MINISTRY TO YOUTH

“Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them.” Luke 18:16

Introduction: Part A–Children

As League members, we truly appreciate the gift of children. We realize that they are to be prepared in their spiritual lives to meet God. In our parishes, we can endeavour to create a climate that **welcomes children** as a vital part of the parish community. We can look for ways

- to deepen the awareness of God’s love in our children
- to facilitate their experience of God’s love through the Christian community during parish events, and through the celebration of the eucharist
- to awaken a desire in children to share God’s love through service to others

Pope John Paul II says, “Children are the future already present among us; they need to experience what peace means, so that they will be able to create a future of peace.” He warns that “a community which rejects children, or marginalizes them, or reduces them to hopeless situations can never know peace.”

During the 1994 International Year of the Family, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) has reminded us of our commitment to love. As we “become like little children” and learn from the youngest among us, we will give strength and courage to those same children to assist us in our response to the bishops’ challenge:

We invite Catholic families to develop a commitment to loving others. This means accepting the gifts of others as well as their limitations, and welcoming others unconditionally, just as Jesus welcomed the vulnerable and wounded.... We hope Catholic families will be prophets of happiness for everyone.

Scripture Reflection: Luke 18:15–17

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. UNICEF reports on the *State of the World’s Children 1994*, saying that children’s health is not being given sufficient priority. “**Improved health** is one of the most powerful of all weapons for attack on poverty.”
 - a) What indications do we see regarding poor health of children i) locally? ii) globally?
 - b) What organizations are attempting to meet these needs i) locally? ii) globally?
 - c) How are children’s needs being met i) locally? ii) globally?
 - d) How can we become creatively involved in working toward the betterment of children’s health i) locally? ii) globally?
2. Unfortunately, many children suffer the hidden horrors of physical, emotional and/or sexual **abuse**.
 - a) What kind of education regarding this topic is available to us i) as League members? ii) in our community iii) in our parish?
 - b) What group/agencies exist to assist those whose lives have been scarred by this reality ii) in our community? ii) in a faith context?
 - c) What needs are not being met for either victims or perpetrators i) in our community?

- ii) in our faith community?
- d) What responses can be made through prayer, action or financial support i) locally? ii) globally?
3. The reception of the sacraments of baptism, first reconciliation, first eucharist, and confirmation provide families with opportunities to deepen or reopen a personal relationship with Jesus.
- a) What opportunities are available for the adult faith community to deepen awareness of these sacraments in order to assist children in their understanding of them?
- b) What are some of the programs available to assist parishes in providing the immediate preparation for these sacraments?
- c) What can a parish do to build community among children receiving these sacraments for the first time, given the reality that parishes serve different geographical areas, numerous school communities, both separate and public, and families with a variety of experiences?
- d) How can we enable the reception of sacraments to become true parish events?
4. Family prayer is essential for the unity and growth of all family members. As parents, it is important that we teach our children to pray
- traditional Catholic prayers
 - the rosary—why do we pray the rosary?
 - family prayer—meal, morning, bedtime, thanksgiving, time of need—sickness
 - spontaneous prayer

A Child's Prayer (3 years old) to the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary, I would like you to read for me. I want you to read to me about the farm or Christmas jingle bells.

I would like you to make me a birthday cake and a pink coat and I'll draw a picture for you, Mary.

When I am little, you pour me some milk. When I'm a grown up girl, I can pour it myself.

When my Mary walks with me, I'll tell her to stop and tell her something.

When I am little, I like daddy or Jesus or Mary to carry me to bed. I like Jesus your boy to be with me when I am sleeping.

Mary, love me; sing me some songs. Please sing me a song, O Mary. When you sing me a song, I will sleep. When you sing me a lullaby. Can you sing me one more song, Mary?

Introduction: Part B–Adolescents ages 10–19

“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of the elders. Continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

(1 Tim. 4:12, 14, 16)

As League members, we are called to reflect on our image of youth. Young people in all their diversity are a challenge. Each person has different needs, abilities, goals, dreams, and visions.

Our task is to be continually involved in dialogue and efforts to develop what is described in the 1991 CCCB Statement on Youth, *We Are Strong Together*, as “reciprocal community ministry in three spheres

- a) adult to youth, youth to adult
- b) youth to youth
- c) adult and youth to the world”

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. Parents and troubled teens often need a listening ear, some non-judgmental support. “Tough love” is not an easy remedy; it is one of the ways to deal with teenage rebellion. What can your council do to address the problems facing troubled teens today?
2. **Dating and relating** are important to young people. What programs can we offer that promote chastity as a positive, healthy, and realistic lifestyle for young people?
3. “Youth must not be regarded merely as objects of the church’s pastoral concern. In fact, young people ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the church as leading characters in evangelization and participation in the development of society.’ *Christifideles Laici* (46)
 - a. In what ways do we consider youth to be a pastoral concern?
 - b. Do programs for youth ever fragment their households by demanding too much of their time?
 - c. How can youth programs become more family sensitive?
 - d. What are some ways to encourage parent/youth and adult/youth interaction and participation in community events?

Opening Prayer

O Lord
let my prayer rise to You
as the sun rises to signal a new day;
please send Your Holy Spirit to
enlighten me as I offer to You
my mind, my heart and
my whole being through which all
glory and honour may be
proclaimed to You, loving God.
Amen

Closing Prayer

Loving God,
Thank You for the rich gift of Your
son, Christ Jesus
through whom we receive an
abundance of Your love and grace.
Continue to bless us as we strive
to be the presence of Christ
to all those we meet this day.
Amen
Marilyn Olsen, taken from *Humble Prayer*

PRAYER FOR YOUTH

Christ needs us to continue
His mission here on earth.

That of giving glory and
honour to God.

Thirty-three years was not
nearly enough time to pay
homage to the creator.

We Christians, therefore,
are gifted channels of grace,
whereby Christ continues
His work through all that we
say and do.

Let us give praise and
thanksgiving to God for the
gift of Jesus in our lives who
continues to call us to
holiness in love and service.

Marilyn Olsen
Military Ordinariate
Taken from *Humble Prayer*

Note: Please feel free to copy this prayer for use at workshops,
rallies or youth group meetings, etc.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

“Joseph and Mary returned to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.” Luke 2:39–40

Introduction

Nigerian Cardinal Francis Arinze said, “Every family has a share in a mission of evangelization. The family, like the church, ought to be a place from where the gospel is transmitted and from which God radiates.”

Pope John Paul II said that people must be led to rediscover the “way of God in the family,” in order to restore it as the basic unit of society, and the “first and irreplaceable community of love.” The Holy Father “is convinced that there exists an intimate connection between peace and a healthy family life.” He urges Catholics to build their family and civic life on gospel values. He pays homage to all parents who create “families rich in tenderness and faith, instilling in their children a sense of hard work and honesty, educating them in commitments and solidarity.”

Family and home are synonymous. Home is where we ought to feel protected and loved; it is here that we should be able to find reassurance and guidance. It is within the family that we first learn to get along in society. **“The family, with its diverse forms and functions, is a positive and essential unit of society, to be appreciated, to be supported and to be protected.”** (Health and Welfare Canada) Its diverse forms include the birth family, the adoptive family, the single parent family, and the blended family.

Example is more effective than words in teaching our children. If we never pray, our children will not learn to pray. If we use disrespectful language, our children will do the same. And so it goes, marriages are made up of human beings—therefore, they are subject to all human frailties. Pray for strong, love-filled families that have God as their centre.

Scripture Reflection: Luke 2:39–52

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. Communication skills can be learned, and help to build a peaceful society. Our parish could run a discussion group, open to young and old, parents and teens, about facing and dealing with family crises. What experts from our community can we invite to help us?
2. Lone parents need the support and encouragement of the parish community in their efforts to raise a healthy, well-balanced family. How can we welcome them? How can we involve them in the life of the parish? What further assistance can be offered?
3. Violence in families harms all members of the family. There are professionals who conduct violence workshops and offer counselling services on various topics such as: dealing with anger, violence, and building a healthy self-esteem. How can we make these services known so that families and individuals will benefit?
4. Parents are often too busy to guide and emotionally nurture their children. As a result, teachers have been forced to become familial surrogates and psychologists. What are the ways in which this serious situation can be addressed?
5. In what ways can our parishes enrich the spirituality of its families?

Challenges

As CWL councils, we endeavour to help create stable, happy marriages and thus, healthy families, by lending our support and enthusiasm to

- engagement encounter week-ends
- family participation in parish social events
- marriage enrichment
- marriage preparation courses
- natural family planning methods
- parenting courses
- programs assisting single parent families
- stress workshops
- substance abuse programs

Prayer time in the family needs only a bit of imagination and very little money. It can be a time of deep sharing and builds the bonds of togetherness in times of worry, joy, anticipation, and forgiveness. Short prayer services are featured in the “additional prayers for any occasion” section of this kit, in the hope that they will be useful in bringing families closer together. They illustrate how easy it is to invite the holy family to join us as we celebrate the various occasions throughout the year.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank You for coming among us today. Bless our families and loved ones. Help us to carry Your word of peace into our daily lives. Place Your love in our hearts, that we may reach out to others as You reach out to us. We make this prayer through Jesus, Your son. Amen.

VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD AND RELIGIOUS LIFE

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Matt. 4:19

Introduction

The documents of Vatican II remind us, “the work of encouraging and fostering vocations belongs to the entire Christian community.” And so, the time is now for the laity to become involved in vocation promotion. Vocations are everyone’s business.

Within the *Code of Canon Law* in the church, there are two states of life—the clergy and the laity. Those in religious communities are simply part of the Christian faithful. They live a vowed life through the constitution and directives of their specific communities. They give and get support (spiritually and otherwise) from the members of that community.

Scripture tells us that God knit us together in our mothers’ wombs. He knew who we were, our talents and our weaknesses, even before we saw the light of the day! We were called at baptism, called by name, to become followers of Christ. There are many calls proceeding from this baptismal call, and in each there is mystery. It is our task to discern how God wants each of us to serve Him and to help others discover their call.

Scripture Reflection: Matt. 4:18–22

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. Now that governments are meeting the social and educational needs, what issues call out for the service of religious communities?
2. Some parishes now have a vocation awareness team as part of their parish council. What format could we put together to present a **vocation discernment experience** for the parish community?
3. What can we do to foster vocations to the religious life and priesthood in our families?
4. The image of the cross, with the vertical beam and extra long horizontal beam (vertical depicting our relationship with God, and horizontal representing our relationship to each other) could be used to describe the call to religious life or the priesthood. What can we do to ensure that such people live holistically healthy lives, i.e., that their spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs are met and balanced?

Challenges

A vocation committee in a parish would consist primarily of people who are happy in their chosen vocation. It might be made up of

- the CFL chairperson
- a youth representative
- school principal
- a permanent deacon
- a few priests
- a married couple
- a sister and/or brother
- Serra Club and Knights of Columbus rep
- a single person
- a lay person who has worked in the missions

Sometimes in the midst of the thousands of voices calling us this way and that way in life, one must go apart to hear the still, small voice inside saying, “What is God asking of me?” As

League members, we can create the opportunity in our parishes for people to discover their true vocation. By helping fund interested persons' attendance at discernment retreats or by promoting religious life as a career option to young people—ignorance, fear, and apathy can be confronted head on.

“We are destined to be God’s joyful, faithful, covenant partners,” says Walter Brueggemann, an old testament scholar.

Qualities to look for in someone with a possible religious vocation:

- intelligence
- service
- love of Christ and the church
- integrity
- good listener
- ability to work with both men and women, young and old, of different ethnic groups

If, in your community, parish, school or place of employment, you notice a person possessing any or some of these qualities, ask them if they had ever thought they might have a vocation. Such a sincere question may be all they need to confirm a deep inkling they may have harboured alone. Recommend that such a person contact their diocesan vocation office, congratulate them and pray for them.

One’s Christian vocation is not a static state, but rather a dynamic movement toward Christ, our centre. Our lives are a continual answer to His call to “Come, follow me.”

Closing Prayer

God of all creation, in baptism

You called us by name to be Your children.

We give You thanks and praise You for this gift.

Like the first disciples, may many of our young people find the courage to answer Jesus’ invitation to “come and see.”

Bless our diocese with men and women who answer Your call to speak Your word as religious brothers, sisters, priests, and deacons.

We make this prayer through Jesus, Your son and our brother. Amen.

MINISTRY TO THE SEPARATED AND DIVORCED

“Neither do I condemn you.” John 8:11

Introduction

Ministry to the separated and divorced person is one of our most compassionate mandates. We must do more than just pray for them. Recalling Jesus’ words, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matt. 25:40) We must be a friend to them.

Unconditional Christian love and respect is a mighty balm to those who have faced the pains of rejection. Priests, as well as CWL members, should be careful and sensitive to the circumstances and suffering. Unwittingly, a stigma is sometimes attached, to the separated or divorced situation. A separated man tells us, “It is not who you are when you speak, but what you are when you are there.” This powerful feeling of rejection should temper our attitude to be more like that of Christ—not casting judgments or inducing guilt.

At League meetings, members should be aware that not everyone is happily married—some members are single, others may be going through difficult times. Remind CWL members to pray for each other—their spiritual support network brings great consolation in troubled times. New Beginnings is a support for those experiencing loss after a marriage breakdown or death. How can you promote their activities in your parish?

THE DUTY OF FRIENDSHIP

Comfort one another
For the way is often dreary
And the feet are often weary, and the heart is very sad.
There is, heavy burden bearing,
When it seems that none are caring,
And we half-forget that ever we were glad.
Comfort one another
With the hand-clasp close and tender,
With the sweetness love can render
And the looks of friendly eyes.
Do not wait with words unspoken
While life’s daily bread is broken –
Gentle speech is oft like manna from the skies.

Margaret Sangster

A family is an institution “based on the bonds of marriage, a stable relationship between a man and a woman, communicating love and life, open to having children,” said Cardinal A.L. Trujillo. The Cardinal, President of the Pontifical Council of the Family, said that the defense of tradition does not mean the Vatican is ignoring the millions of people throughout the world living in broken or wounded families. “The church wants to be with these people. It looks at broken families with sadness, but also with mercy,” he said. “The church cannot do any different. It cannot accept divorce!” This is our opportunity to stand beside each other, and be the hands and heart of Jesus in the world today.

Scripture Reflection: John 8:3–11

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, leading to an **action plan**.

1. Often those who are experiencing trouble in their marriage suffer a grief similar to that of a death in the family. What kind of self-help programs are available for the separated and divorced in our community? Who can our council invite to help us understand the healing process?
2. Initially our efforts are directed toward helping the newly separated or divorced person get back to normal, feeling better about themselves, and finding a job to help support their family. How can we maintain their involvement in parish life?
3. Those who most benefit from the consolation offered by the sacraments and the Christian community are often not in the churches. How can we reach out to them?
4. Going to the Marriage Tribunal can be a frightening experience; the search for truth is a long involved process. Sometimes the wait of two, three or even four years results in a feeling of alienation. How can we help with respect and love?

Challenges

It is an overwhelming experience to go through a separation or divorce. Often the person feels betrayed, alone, vulnerable, rejected, and possessing of a low self esteem. That first call for help takes an enormous effort: When it is finally uttered, we all, priests as well as lay people, should not be blasé, putting them off. The person is seeking direction **now**. If we brush them off at this point, some people may never go back to seek help from the Catholic community.

“Finally, how can we forget the many people, who for various reasons, feel that they have no family? To them I would like to say that there is a family for them, too: the church is home and family for all.” In *Familiaris Consortio* (85), Pope John Paul II assures us. “She opens wide her doors and welcomes in all who are alone or abandoned; in them, she sees the specially beloved children of God, whatever their age, and whatever their aspirations, difficulties or hopes.”

Trouble can occur in a marriage at any time, whether one has been married two or even 30 years. Difficulties in marriage are a very real problem for some of our CWL members. Four main causes of family break-up are physical, sexual, and substance abuse as well as unfaithfulness. Provide a list of local available resources and counselling services to help those who suffer the consequences—children as well as adults.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, You are worthy of praise now and always. Times change but You, Lord, never change. You continue to care for me. Gently, oh so gently, You call me by name, and guide me along the way to the place You have planned for me. Each day is different, no two days are the same. Gradually You assisted me to make changes in my life, which enabled me to surrender completely to You. Changes that took place in the workplace and the countless relationships I encountered have helped me to grow closer to You. When changes take place, You draw me close to You and teach me to walk in Your presence. Your light shows me the way. I praise you, Lord, for helping me to change the things I can, to accept the changes I cannot make, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Muriel Schumacher
Taken from *Humble Prayer*

MINISTRY TO THE WIDOWED

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matt. 5:4

Introduction

Bereaved persons are best ministered to by other bereaved people. This could be an important work for any League members who are widows themselves, “for it is in giving that we receive.”

In our outreach to the widowed, mostly we would play the role of friend. A listening ear, an offer of assistance, a welcome to “come along,” are gifts we can give each other that do not require a great deal of organization.

Many CWL councils offer a funeral choir and a parish reception after the funeral of a family member’s death. This is a true work of mercy. Some councils offer a “month’s mind eucharistic celebration”—one month after the death and invite the family of the deceased and all the CWL members.

As time goes by, the bereaved may need the assistance of financial or legal advice—the League network can often give recommendations as to whom to contact.

New Beginnings groups can be a help, but they are mostly geared to the separated and divorced situation. For the widow, she would be better to go to a bereavement group (a survivor support group) in her town. Often CWL members lead such groups, thus helping families deal with the raw anguish of a recent bereavement.

Scripture Reflection: Matt. 5:1–12

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion, taking about 10–15 minutes, coming up with an **action plan** for next month:

1. Deep emotional upheaval is normal after a death in the family. The bereaved must deal with the overwhelming feelings of disbelief, loss of energy, physical pain, anger, and even guilt. How can we help them to see that these are normal reactions?
2. Support groups offer an opportunity for people to speak about their grief in ways that relieve their burdens. How can we promote the work of such groups in our parish and community?
3. Funeral counsellors offer a wealth of knowledge regarding death-related topics, such as funeral arrangements, costs, insurance, memorial funds, counselling resources, and wills. What local facility could provide such a service to your parish?

Challenges

Reaction to grief generally follows a pattern. Many health-care professionals have had bereavement training, and could be invited to explain the stages of grief. Healing takes place by getting in touch with our feelings, and daring to work with our feelings, arriving at new life.

Prayer, patience and compassion are ways in which we can help our bereaved brothers and sisters. **Be aware and be kind.** Volunteer help is needed in many cases and we can do much to alleviate suffering. What can I do to help?

- be a sympathetic listener
- share time together
- encourage involvement in the community
- take them out to dinner
- offer to care for any children, so they can have some free time

Different types of losses and grieving processes require their own support groups. For example, while one group is made up of people who have lost a child, another would be more helpful to those who had lost a spouse or sibling.

Closing Prayer

Merciful Jesus, You always showed compassion to those who mourn. You told us that Your father's house had many rooms, and that You were going ahead to prepare a room for us. When our room was ready, You would call us to Yourself. Comfort those who are left behind, with this promise of Your loving care. Inspire us to lighten their burden, and accompany them in their sorrow. Fill our hearts with an increase of faith to understand Your ways; we ask this in Your most tender name. Amen.

SANCTITY OF LIFE

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10:10

Introduction

Sanctity of life is a vital part of the Christian family life standing committee. Life begins and is nourished in the family, which is the focus of the first part of this standing committee. Later sections concentrate on how we may help people in the various stages and conditions of life.

Sanctity of life forms a bridge, an indispensable link between the first and later sections. It is because human life is sacred that we give ourselves so wholeheartedly to supporting those experiencing difficulty in their lives. We try to carry on the work of Jesus through the Catholic Women’s League.

Sanctity of life deals with all stages of life from conception to natural death, and so, we are concerned with topics as diverse as abortion and reproductive technologies, teen suicide, assisted suicide, and euthanasia. These matters are of the greatest concern in Canada at the present time. We must explore the means by which League members have the most impact in these areas. We must try to emphasize the many positive actions we can take to enhance and support those who are in difficulty.

As you are aware, this is no small task. We will often find ourselves battling a seemingly overwhelming tide of indifference and antipathy to life. We must keep our confidence high, however, that our efforts will not be in vain.

Spiritual Reflection: John 10:7–16

Priority Issues

Time for small group discussion leading to an **action plan**.

1. How can the complicated issues involved in the new reproductive technologies be clarified for the “person in the pew”—the ordinary Catholic?
2. With the current public pressure for euthanasia and the “right to die” legislation, how can
 - a. the issues surrounding these topics be explored by the parish?
 - b. the availability of loving palliative care be increased (what action can we take)?
 - c. we impart the sense of worth to those suffering from degenerative and debilitating diseases?
3. How can we learn to recognize the signs of contemplated suicide (especially in young people), and become aware of the proper help and support to obtain for them?
4. Given the lack of any legal constraint against abortion, how can we act positively and effectively to help the unborn child and its mother?

Challenges

Why is human life so precious? Why all the fuss? If an animal is sick or suffering or old and no longer enjoying its life, we have it put to sleep forever and consider ourselves merciful. Sometimes, to save it the pain of getting used to a new home, we even do so when we move away. We perform all sorts of technological manipulations in the process of breeding cattle. Malformed or unwanted newborn animals, or pets with a bad temperament, are routinely killed.

What makes human life different? Why do we have an instinctive revulsion to treating human beings like animals? We have to “de-humanize” them in order to do so. Throughout history all peoples, however primitive, have recognized this special quality of human life; their laws and customs have protected it. One who gives the precious gift of his life for another has always been regarded as a hero.

All people know the uniqueness of human life through **God’s law which is written on their hearts**. We, however, understand the **reasons** for this uniqueness. God has revealed them to us in scripture; “So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1:27)

The likeness to God is what makes human life so special. God intends each human being, whom He has created, to live eternally with Him, knowing Him intimately as a father and as a friend. God is determined that each person will have a chance to freely choose to share this eternal relationship with Him—so determined that He sent his own beloved son into the world. He came not only to redeem the human race when it turned away from God, but also to give us a human model of how to live God’s way, how to “have life more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Jesus did not show us by His life that having an abundant life meant being rich, famous, perfectly healthy, wanted and valued by others, without troubles, problems or tragedies, or always in an upbeat frame of mind. It meant being in right relationship and harmony with God, doing our best to find and do His will, to do our part to further His kingdom, whatever the circumstances of our lives. To end our lives before God’s chosen time or to force or assist another to do so, however mistakenly benevolent our motives, is to lose sight of the “God-likeness” of our human lives and the unbelievable efforts God has made on behalf of human beings.

Now, if we are to follow the example of Jesus, we will value the whole of our own lives and those of others, and allow God to carry out His plan for them. Further, we must assist those who, through pain or illness, neglect or ignorance have lost sight of the unique value of human life. As members of Jesus’ body here on earth, we are to act as He would to help and instruct our sisters and brothers, by our actions and example, in the difficult times of their lives. We must do whatever is necessary to show the sick and the suffering, the disabled and the helpless, the depressed and the elderly how valuable and lovable they are to us, and how fruitful their lives can be. We must give support to those facing life and death decisions, so that they may have the courage to choose life.

It is a huge task, but we must do what we can and trust God that it will be enough.

Closing Prayer

O Lord, You created human life and made it like Your own, able to know You and to love You. Inspire us with the awe which such a precious gift deserves. Help us to treat with reverence, our own lives and those of other people. In our efforts to assist and support those whose lives are difficult or fragile, may we truly show our likeness to You, and inspire others to a full realization of the sanctity of life. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, who showed us the way. Amen.