

The Christian Family

**Good News for
the World**

@ Serving others

“Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.”
(John 13:5)

The world’s greatness is revealed in these lines from the Gospel. The world’s beauty is contained in this very human gesture that Jesus makes towards his disciples. The world’s attention is centred on Jesus, who chooses to get down on his knees to demonstrate God’s real and tender love for his children. Jesus gets on his knees before each one of us to communicate his love, affection and Life to us.

God continues to do this today in our families, and invites us to love as he does by freely serving others. After 2000 years of Christianity, Jesus’ example continues to inspire his friends.

Listen to what this Canadian mother has to say: *“As I kneel among the plastic bags, bleach bottles and dish detergent, trying to fix a leak under the kitchen sink, I consider the possibility that my kneeling here is an act of surrender to the Father, that I too serve the Lord in my ready acceptance of his will. Yes, water will leak all over the floor. Yes, children will get earaches in the middle of the night. Yes, teens will expect*



attention and demand respect at the least convenient times. In serving these others, I serve the Lord, and in doing so with joy, I become a beacon to the world. Of course, the problematic word here is 'joy,' and the greatest challenge a parent faces is not to do the work required, but to do so with joy."

This is the life that awaits those who decide to follow Christ: a life of service, an offering, where we get down on our knees in order to join others in their mystery. A life that is as attentive to weakness as it is to strength, as mindful of fragility as it is of vigour. A life that always respects the rhythm of each person, ready to understand someone who walks as well as someone who falls and gets back up again; someone who stops and someone who never seems to get going. A life that is open to the unexpected, to differences, to the unknown.



A patient life that gives time and knows how to “waste” time on things that may seem unimportant.

Each loving gesture becomes a response to the presence of Christ in others. At each moment and in every circumstance, God allows himself to be found and contemplated in the people who surround us. We can glimpse God in the events that mark a family’s life. Every time we look upon someone else, it is a chance for us to get down on our knees before the image of God in the other person.

In family life, humans agree to allow other people into their lives as they themselves enter the lives of others. They leave behind the pursuit of independence to embrace interdependence. This conversion is made possible by the grace of God, a grace that allows them to serve others and transform the world thanks to the love that unites them. This is how the Christian family becomes a living cell in the body of society and the Church, a cell that doesn’t hesitate to *“take the initiative, to struggle for social policies and legislation that promote and protect the rights of the family, a just distribution of resources and support for the most vulnerable and helpless.”*¹

Children: humanity's greatest treasure

To choose to give life today and to help it grow is often an act of faith and hope. Far from being a burden, children are a gift of God, a chance for humanity, an invitation to go beyond where we are. The mysterious unfolding of life in each one of our children is marvellous to watch. It is a great responsibility to collaborate in raising caring citizens who are autonomous, hard-working, respectful of the sacred characteristics of life and the dignity of others, compassionate and generous with their time and them-



selves. And it is a great privilege to be their “good shepherd” and walk by their side while they climb the highest peaks of glory or stumble over life’s obstacles.

More than ever, Christian families are called to help a world that is thirsting for meaning and hope to rediscover the meaning of God’s extraordinary plan for humanity. We have to begin by helping our children live out the mission that was entrusted to them at their baptism: becoming collaborators with God at the beginning of this third millennium, even becoming saints and apostles – not with their own strength, but by counting on the power of the Risen one, offered through prayer, the Word of God and the sacraments.

Fathers and mothers do this by accepting the daily demands of parenting, which is truly a vocation, and by rising to the challenges that come with the decision to stay together as a family through thick and thin and to remain “good news” for society. Each day will bring its share of joys and

sorrows, and each one is an opportunity to meet God. *“It is in the rhythm of daily life that families humbly but radically change the world, as they seek to follow Jesus.”*²

Each little loving gesture a parent makes throughout the day announces Jesus’ good news. Parents transmit a range of values to their children, along with a vision of the world and an idea of what it means to be human. *“Through simple gestures that brighten the lives of others, they bring to the heart of the world the Christian values of generosity and love. As they evangelize their milieu, they transform daily life into an extraordinary meeting place with God who calls Christians to be ‘the light of the world and the salt of the earth’.”*³

You are invited, dear parents, to rediscover the exceptional good news that comes from living in a family that is open to the gift of life and attentive to the divine potential of each child that God entrusts to you. Those of you who make family a priority are encouraged to spread good news

that is twofold: children are humanity's greatest treasure, and each family is good news for the world and for the Church. What a challenge! What a mission!

Family: the first school of life and faith

Married Christian couples who say “yes” to life and have children carry within themselves the victory of love. Walking on a path to holiness, they are privileged witnesses to God's love. Together they spread incredible news: God is the God of the living, and in Jesus Christ, love triumphed over death once and for all.

In fact, *“it is within the family itself that we can find the ‘good news’ of a love that overcomes fear and brings hope to the world.”*⁴ What great and happy news! A reminder that God wants a full life, a life exceeding all expectations, an eternal life for all families. Yes, what good news!

Let us rejoice in God's presence at the heart of our families and proclaim that the Christian family is good news for the third millennium. The family is a little church, a sanctuary of life, a domestic church, a church at home, a mysterious presence of the living God. The good news, then, is that God is with us in our daily lives, in our hearts and in our homes.

It is within this domestic church, built by a man and a woman who have chosen to live out the sacrament of marriage, that children learn to spend time with Jesus and *“are invited to become a living witness of the gospel of life in the church and in society.”*⁵

Let us celebrate families and affirm that the Christian family is a unique and sacred milieu in which each person is called to follow Jesus Christ along the path of service and of life. The family is the privileged place where children discover, thanks to

the loving care of their parents, their inestimable value in God's eyes and the mission that God wants them to carry out in the heart of the Church and in the heart of the world.

Woven from the threads of their individual family histories, our children can transmit, in their turn, the values they have received and decided to keep. New things can arise from this for society's greatest good. This is the fertile land that will nourish coming generations and allow the integration of a multitude of values – gift of self, service, respect for life and others, integrity, love, and more – in all levels of society.

Today, when individualism reigns supreme, a family that wants to become good news must adopt a counter-cultural mentality. It is called to live as a communion of love, forgiveness and peace. In that



way, it reveals the presence of God and transforms the world.

Even as families struggle with disappointment, tragedy and apparent failure, they remain the first school of life and faith that teaches a world of meaning. The family is good news for the world when in its fragility it opens itself to God's loving and saving action.

Fostering the happiness of others

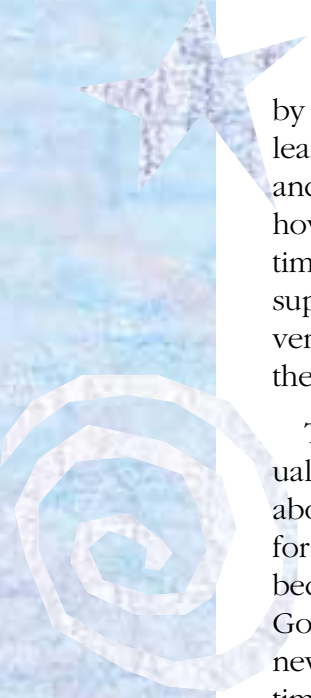
What family is immune from life's daily challenges and worries? When parents – despite the efforts of daily life and despite their personal weaknesses and imperfections – choose gentleness over aggression, tenderness over violence, forgiveness over bitterness, their family is proclaiming the victory of love, the victory of the Cross.

This victory is known to mothers and fathers who, roused from a deep sleep by a

crying child, go to comfort him; who are able to smile at their older children after a sleepless night with the littlest one; who provide a warm welcome for their children after a long day at school, and for their spouse after a hard day of work. It is known to parents who, after a tiring day of work, prepare a healthy dinner for their family, take the time to listen to each one talk about the ups and downs of their day, take children to lessons or activities, drive teens to a friend's house, help with homework and are present to their children instead of just doing housework or turning on the TV. And it is known to families that pray together, that visit a person who is alone, or that prepare and deliver a meal to a family that is going through a hard time.

The family's good news is expressed first through the attentive presence of the mother and father, through respect and caring, and through the generous gift of self. Little





by little, each member of the family will learn to give his or her life for the others and contribute to their happiness. This is how a family works together, one day at a time, to help each member live their joy, to support them in their suffering, to persevere in their silent struggles, and to accept their shortcomings.

This family “training” overcomes individualism and teaches people to truly care about the common good. Giving one’s life for the little nothings of daily life thus becomes a sign of the greatness of our God. This daily Christianity – new and never-ending – transforms the world! Every time family members discover a new way to love each other, they enter into partnership with God. He comes to them and invites them to supper. This is the tremendous, astounding news that the world needs so much today: God is with us! God dearly loves our children. God wants to dine at our table and invites us to his, to serve us.

Christian families are the messengers of this incredible good news of a God who walks on human paths. They are the reflection of a God who is so close to us that he accompanies us and fills our needs beyond all hope by giving us his life force – his Life in abundance. Beyond paralyzing fear remains hope in God’s promise, Jesus, who is Love made human and who will never leave us: *“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

June 15, 2004



- 1 Pontifical Council for the Family, Conclusion of the theological and pastoral Congress – IV World Family Day, Manila, January 24, 2003. The theme of the meeting was “Christian Families, Good News for the Third Millennium.” This meeting brought together families from around the world to celebrate being true communities of life and love. As a conclusion to this meeting, Christian families were honoured as bearers of Good News in the following six areas: 1) Good News for life, 2) Good News for society, 3) Good News for the poor, 4) Good News for youth, 5) Good News for the world, 6) Good News for the church. Two members of the Board of Directors of COLF participated in this meeting along with their spouses (Grant and Janet Ertel, and André and Monique Normand) as representatives of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- 2 Final statement of the 32nd meeting of the Bishops of the Church of America, San Antonio, Texas, February 16-19, 2004.
- 3 Idem.
- 4 Pontifical Council for the Family, Conclusion of the theological and pastoral Congress – IV World Family Day, Manila, January 24, 2003.
- 5 Final statement of the 32nd meeting of the Bishops of the Church of America, San Antonio, Texas, February 16-19, 2004.



**Catholic Organization
for Life and Family**

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COLF was jointly founded by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCC) and the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity and the essential role of the family.

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