

May 12-19, 2013

**Suggestions to prepare and celebrate
the National Week for Life and the Family**
– An initiative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops –

The Family: Facing Life's Challenges Together With Christ

The National Week for Life and the Family is an ongoing pastoral initiative of the Catholic Bishops of Canada. Each Bishop will decide when and how to implement this initiative in his diocese. Bishops across the country may choose to adapt or recommend the following suggestions and options for the 2013 Week for Life and the Family, according to the specific needs, resources, and priorities of each local diocese. In promoting life and the family, the Bishops invite all Catholics to become witnesses to the Gospel of Life, and each family to be both a source of life and a school for life.

The following suggestions represent a few of many possible activities and events which dioceses or parishes might wish to undertake during the National Week for Life and the Family. Additional options and proposed resources for the Week will be available for free downloading from the life and family webpage of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) on its website <http://www.cccb.ca/>. The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) will also be happy to assist dioceses and parishes by recommending possible resources for use during or following the Week.

I. Promotion

Here are some important suggestions you may wish to consider in promoting this Week:

- ▷ **Prayer:** A call to prayer for life and the family in Canada, possibly to be issued on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013, together with the distribution of the promotional National Week for Life and Family prayer card / bookmark. Divine Mercy Sunday would provide a good occasion to acknowledge the sufferings and practical challenges of contemporary families. Dioceses may also wish to use Divine Mercy Sunday to launch the “Elements of a National Pastoral Initiative for Life and Family”. The CCCB life and family webpage will list possible suggestions for homilies and for the prayers of the faithful, to help link the Sunday readings with the Week for Life and the Family.
- ▷ **Encouragement by the Diocesan Bishop:** The Bishop may wish to issue a pastoral letter or find other ways to encourage and thank families for their perseverance and fidelity and for giving of themselves so generously in seeking all that is best for their children, while also assuring them of the Church’s desire to draw close to them in the midst of their trials and challenges. If a Bishop decides to issue a pastoral letter, it could be read from the pulpit and distributed on the weekend of April 6-7, should the decision be made to launch the pastoral

initiative on that date, or on the weekend of May 4-5 (one week before the Week for Life and the Family).

- ▷ **Pro-life March:** Promotion of the National March for Life during the month of April (the National March is to be held in 2013 on May 9 in Ottawa), as well as of local pro-life marches or other events. Promotion might involve extending an invitation to local pro-life organizations to host an information table for parishes and/or inviting members of local pro-life organizations to say a few words at weekend liturgies during one of the weeks between April 7 and May 5.
- ▷ **Bulletin Announcements:** Placement in parish bulletins of short accessible quotations from the Scriptures and relevant Church documents relating to the supreme value and importance of human life and of the family, and also notices promoting the Week for Life and the Family.
- ▷ **Poster:** Distribution and display during Lent of the Week for Life and the Family poster in parish and mission churches throughout Canada. The poster can serve as a visual symbol and reminder of this pastoral initiative.

Here are some other ways you may also wish to consider:

- ▷ **Vigil for Life and Family:** Celebration of a vigil for life and family. Dioceses and parishes may wish to organize a vigil service for the evening preceding the first Sunday of the National Week for Life and the Family (Ascension Sunday). Other options could be the solemn Vigil for Pentecost, or a vigil with Vespers for Trinity Sunday, thus connecting the Week for Life and the Family with the rest of the Church year. Suggestions for the solemn Vigil for Pentecost or a vigil for Trinity Sunday will be posted on the CCCB life and family webpage.
- ▷ **Devotion to Our Lady:** Distribution on the last weekend of April (April 27-28) of a leaflet, with short devotional prayers and suggestions for family-based activities focusing on the Blessed Virgin Mary as Mother of Christ and of all believers, to be used throughout the month of May. (Activities could include such things as a visit to a nearby shrine of Our Lady, planting *Marian* flowers such as marigolds, roses or lilies, visiting and assisting an expectant mother, recitation of the Rosary....)
- ▷ **Essay and Drawing Contest:** Invitation to elementary and secondary students – or in dioceses with no Catholic schools, to Sunday school students – as well as to youth group members to participate in an essay contest. The essays – focusing on the role of faith in sustaining one’s own family or a family member in the midst of challenges – to be of age-appropriate length with small prizes awarded at each grade/age level and announced during the Week for Life and the Family. For younger children – ages 4-9 – a drawing contest focusing on the more general theme of faith. (Age- appropriate explanations of the requirements for participation in the contests would need to be provided.)

II. Events & Activities for the Week

Here are some suggestions of activities you may wish to organize:

- ▷ **Vigil for Pentecost:** The last Sunday of the Week this year is the Solemnity of Pentecost. Dioceses or parishes may wish to celebrate the solemn Vigil of Pentecost. The CCCB life and family webpage will provide suggestions for this vigil.
- ▷ **COLF Brochure & Workshop:** Distribution with parish bulletins on the weekend of May 11-12 of the COLF brochure *World Peace: A Family Recipe!* (This can be downloaded and ordered from the COLF website.¹) The Holy Father observed at the 2012 World Meeting of Families that “it is in the family that the light of peace begins to shine to illumine our world.” This brochure focuses on strategies for creating peace in the family. (Using a guide available from COLF, parishes later in the year might also consider hosting a workshop focusing on the themes treated in the brochure.²)
- ▷ **COLF 2012 Message to Families:** Distribution after celebrations of the Mass on Pentecost Sunday of the COLF 2012 Message to Families, *The Gospel of Everyday Life—An Adventure worth Sharing!* (This can be downloaded and ordered from the COLF website.³) This message was crafted with an eye on the Year of Faith and focuses on the role of the family in the New Evangelization. (At some point later in the year, parishes might consider hosting a workshop on the themes treated in the message.⁴)
- ▷ **Public “Testimony”:** To be given by a family during Mass on the Sunday at the beginning or end of the Week for Life and the Family, focusing on the importance of the faith in their life *as a family* (how the faith sustains them in the midst of challenges).
- ▷ **Family Visits:** Encouragement of parishioners to visit sick, elderly or housebound members of their extended families – friends or neighbours – and where possible, to take their children along.
- ▷ **Wedding Anniversaries:** A public commemoration of significant wedding anniversaries (10, 15, 20, 25 . . . 50, 55, 60 . . .) to be hosted by parishes and/or pastoral units on the afternoon of one of the Sundays of the Week (the second Sunday might be better to avoid competition with family-based Mother’s Day celebrations).
- ▷ **Movie Night:** Parish-based family movie night to be hosted on Friday or Saturday, either at the beginning or at the end of the Week. The movie shown should be family friendly and contemporary but need not be explicitly religious in content. (At some point well in advance of the event, an advertisement could be placed in local newspapers “announcing” God’s love for families and inviting area families – not just “church-going” families – to participate in a movie night in the parish hall featuring free popcorn and beverages.)

¹ http://www.colf.ca/mamboshop/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=282&func=fileinfo&id=31

² http://www.colf.ca/mamboshop/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=267&Itemid=357

³ http://www.colf.ca/mamboshop/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=278&Itemid=91

⁴ http://www.colf.ca/mamboshop/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=279&Itemid=357

- ▷ **Family Photo/Video Evening:** Encouragement of parishioners to spend an evening looking at old family photos/videos – showing children photos and videos of their (and of Mommy’s and Daddy’s and, possibly, of Grammy and Grampy’s) Baptism, first Holy Communion, Confirmation and of other sacraments and significant faith-based events/activities (for example, the family around the Christmas crèche, on pilgrimage, etc.). As an incentive to participate, the parish could offer a small prize for the oldest photo featuring a faith-based activity (or for some other appropriate category of image). The parish might consider mounting a “Family and Faith” display in which families use a poster to display images of their family and the life of faith. The display could be viewed when refreshments and coffee are served after Mass or in conjunction with the parish barbecue (if held on the grounds of the church or near the parish hall). Alternatively, the posters could be crafted by school-age children (in dioceses with Catholic schools) or by participants in parish-based catechetical programs and displayed either in the local Catholic school or parish hall.
- ▷ **Parish Barbecue:** A parish barbecue featuring appropriate family activities to be hosted on the second Sunday afternoon of the Week.

Here are other possibilities you may wish to consider:

- ▷ **First Sunday (Ascension) Liturgy:** Theme: the particular call of the family in the context of Christ’s call to his disciples, at his Ascension, to share in his mission and ministry as prophet, priest and king. Suggestions for homily ideas and prayers of the faithful will be available on the CCCB life and family webpage.
- ▷ **Second Sunday (Pentecost) Liturgy:** Theme: the family empowered by the Holy Spirit to become a Domestic Church supporting its members on the path of holiness and giving birth to apostles of the New Evangelization. Suggestions for homily ideas and prayers of the faithful will be available on the CCCB life and family webpage.
- ▷ **Leaflets:** Distribution of a series of single-topic leaflets focusing on various aspects of Church teachings related to life and family, possibly drawing on reflections and insights generated by the 2012 World Meeting of Families in Milan:
 1. Sunday as family celebration;
 2. Parents as first educators (specific roles of fathers and mothers);
 3. Aftermath of divorce (resources);
 4. The family dealing with unemployment;
 5. Meeting the parenting challenge.
- ▷ **Parents’ Appreciation Dinner:** In parishes with active youth groups – hosting by the youth group of a parents’ appreciation night activity (e.g., a dinner or concert).
- ▷ **International Day of the Family:** Distribution of a leaflet with suggestions on how to celebrate the International Day of the Family – May 15 – at home.

- ▷ **Vigil for Trinity Sunday:** Dioceses and parishes may wish to organize a vigil on May 25, the Saturday before Trinity Sunday, thus connecting the Week for Life and the Family with the rest of the Church year. Suggestions for a Trinity Sunday vigil with Vespers will be posted on the CCCB life and family webpage.