



Only One Thing Is Necessary

HOW CATHOLIC FAMILIES CAN STRIVE
TO BE UNITED IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT



Cover: Providence Academy, Plymouth, MN.

Right: Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Anthony, MN

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Implementation



As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we are invited to share our gifts in service of building a culture in this Archdiocese that supports parents as the first teachers of their children in the ways of the Faith. As part of our Archdiocesan Synod and in response to the pastoral letter, “You will be my Witnesses,” members of the Blue Ribbon Commission urged that the Archdiocese work to strengthen the culture of family life in the Church and local communities.



A step toward creating better conditions in the Archdiocese for the support of parents and the handing on of the Faith begins with reflecting together — the whole of this local Church — on the situation we and parents today face. Through this reflection and discernment, trusting in the help of the Holy Spirit, we have the opportunity to rely upon the wisdom of the Church and strengthen our efforts to prepare an authentic, healthy Christian life in our families.

Trusting that the Holy Spirit will help any effort that seeks to make a relationship with Jesus Christ the center of family life, I ask and direct that the following first steps, proposed by the Archdiocesan Office for the Mission of Catholic Education and the Archdiocesan Office of Discipleship and Evangelization, be taken:

1. For parents and families in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

The Church is here to partner with you and assist you in handing on the Faith to your children. I urge with all possible haste that you:

- Please read and reflect on the letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*.
- Join and participate in the life of a parish by:
 - Taking your child to Mass every Sunday and making Sunday a day of rest and renewal for your family.
 - Joining a parish small group.
 - Finding ways to serve others through the parish's expressions of corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

- Make a resolution to pray every day with your child and talk about the Faith in action at the dinner table.
- Make a resolution to pray the rosary or another treasured devotion with your child each week.
- Lean on your parish and other Church institutions for help in fulfilling the promise that you made at baptism to raise your child in the Catholic faith by:
 - Sending your child to a Catholic school if possible;
 - If a Catholic school is not an option, asking your parish for help with making sure your child has access to appropriate catechesis;
 - Supporting your parish's youth ministry and encouraging your child to participate;
 - Taking advantage of local programming (e.g., NET Ministries Lifeline program and Sacramental Preparation events);
 - Familiarizing yourself with your parish's access to online content for children and teens.
- Consider sending your child on a retreat or conference (e.g., Extreme Faith Camp at Trinity Woods Catholic Retreat Center or a Steubenville Conference sponsored by the Partnership for Youth).



Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church, New Brighton, MN

2. For all Pastors and Clergy in the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

- Read and reflect on the text of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Leader Guide to enhance your understanding of today's parenting challenges and the responsibilities specifically entrusted to pastors of souls and other clergy by the Church, and pray and discern how you will teach, guide and support your parish families.

3. For Parishes of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

□ **Parish staff engaged in faith formation and catechetical programs**

All parish staff members who work in faith formation and parish catechetical programs will read and reflect in staff meetings on the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Leader Guide to prepare for the 2026-2027 program year.

□ **Sacramental Preparation**

The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide are to be required reading and study for adults and parents participating in the following parish sacramental preparation programs:

- Holy Matrimony
- Infant Baptism
- First Penance
- First Holy Eucharist
- Confirmation

□ **Order of Christian Initiation of Adults**

The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide are to be included as required reading and study for those in formation in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults.

□ **Parish Small Groups**

The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide are to be recommended for all parish small groups.

□ **Eucharistic Adoration**

Copies of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide are to be made available in all adoration chapels in the Archdiocese; moreover, Holy Hours are to be requested for the intention of begging God's help for parents seeking to make Jesus the center of family life and for the intention of parents who, like Saint Monica, long for the return of their children to the Catholic faith.

□ **Parents and Families in Parish Faith Formation Programs**

Parishes will provide a digital version of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide to families in Faith Formation programs and find intentional ways to incorporate their teaching and guidance in



Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Saint Paul, MN

parish communications and activities (e.g., weekly newsletters, social media, parent events and small-group opportunities) and ensure that the intention of families growing together in the faith are prayed for each week.

□ **Parenting Support for All Parents**

Knowing the importance of accompaniment, parishes will work toward supporting families in the following ways:

- Provide parents with access to schools of prayer and other prayer resources.
- Sponsor and offer a parish-based parenting course to help parents grow in knowledge and confidence.
- Access a curated list of excellent resources that assist in accompanying families with children who have special needs.
- Work to assist parents engaged in homeschooling by ensuring that they have access to this Letter, small group activities and other resources geared toward handing on the Catholic faith.
- Realizing especially the incredible weight that parents experience when their children wander away from the Faith, will encourage opportunities, prayers and solidarity with those seeking solace and hope.



Ave Maria Academy, Maple Grove, MN

4. For Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

□ Faculty and Staff

All Catholic schools will make provision so that all faculty and staff serving in a Catholic school will have the opportunity to read and reflect on the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying School Study Guide, through small groups or staff meetings throughout the 2026-2027 academic year and confirm their plans with the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education.

□ **New Employees**

Catholic schools of the Archdiocese will ensure that this Letter and the School Study Guide are incorporated into the training and onboarding sequence for all newly hired employees.

□ **Board Members**

Catholic schools of the Archdiocese will ensure that this Letter and the School Study Guide are incorporated into the training and onboarding sequence for all board or advisory council members.

□ **School Parents and Families**

Catholic schools of the Archdiocese will send a digital version of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide to school families and find intentional ways to incorporate the teaching and guidance in school communications and activities (e.g., weekly newsletters, social media, parent events and small-group opportunities) and ensure that the intention of families growing together in the faith are prayed for each week.

5. For The Saint Paul Seminary and its Institute of Diaconate Formation

Beginning no later than July 1, 2026:

- The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Leader Guide will be incorporated into required formation materials for those preparing to be transitional or permanent deacons of the Archdiocese as they prepare for ordination and ministry.

Saint Mary's Chapel, The Saint Paul Seminary, Saint Paul, MN





Saint Lawrence Catholic Church & Newman Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

6. For Newman Centers and Campus Ministry Apostolates in the Archdiocese

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

- The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide are to be recommended reading for all campus ministers, and the digital version is to be brought to the attention of students and faculty served by these Centers and Apostolates.

7. For consecrated women and men living out their vocations to be missionary disciples within the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

- Read and reflect on the text of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide to enhance your understanding of today's parenting challenges and consider keeping as a perpetual intention that all parents and those engaged in handing on the Faith fully cooperate with the graces given to them by God so that all our young people will be best protected from the snare of the evil one.

8. For those leading Catholic-inspired ministries and apostolates based in the Archdiocese

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

- Encourage and facilitate staff, missionaries and volunteers to read and reflect on the text of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Small Group Guide to enhance understanding of the challenges being faced by those they serve.



Archdiocesan Catholic Center, Saint Paul, MN. Dave Hrbacek

9. For Offices of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Beginning no later than September 1, 2026:

□ **All Archdiocesan Staff Members**

At monthly all-staff meetings of the ACC, Archdiocesan staff members are to be led in reading portions of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Archdiocesan Study Guide and discussing these documents with colleagues organized by Office or Department.



□ **All Archdiocesan Offices**

Department heads of Offices will ensure that all their staff have received a copy of the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Archdiocesan Study Guide, and will incorporate discussions of these documents in their monthly department meeting.

□ **Office of Communications**

In addition to typical promotional efforts, at least monthly, The Catholic Spirit will publish throughout 2026-2027 a full-page color advertisement with an excerpt from the Pastoral Letter and a QR code to the full Letter online.

□ **Office of Discipleship and Evangelization**

Incorporate the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Leader Guide into the Archdiocesan Fall 2026 and Spring 2027 Formation Days.

Build bridges so that this Letter finds its way into the cultural communities in parishes of the Archdiocese.

□ **Office for the Mission of Catholic Education**

Make available to every Catholic school and parish catechetical program a student prayer resource that will assist families in their efforts to pray at home.

Devise and send to parishes a curated list of excellent parenting programs that exist to help parents grow in knowledge and confidence.

Develop a model for parishes seeking to establish and offer Catholic early learning programs

□ **Office of Latino Ministry**

Ensure that the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and all supporting materials are made available in Spanish to our Latino communities in the Archdiocese.

□ **Office of the Chancellors for Civil and Canonical Affairs**

The Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and the accompanying Leader Guide is to be included as part of the Trustee Training Program and other equivalent parish leadership training programs.

10. For all women, men and children who are kept homebound due to illness or struggle:

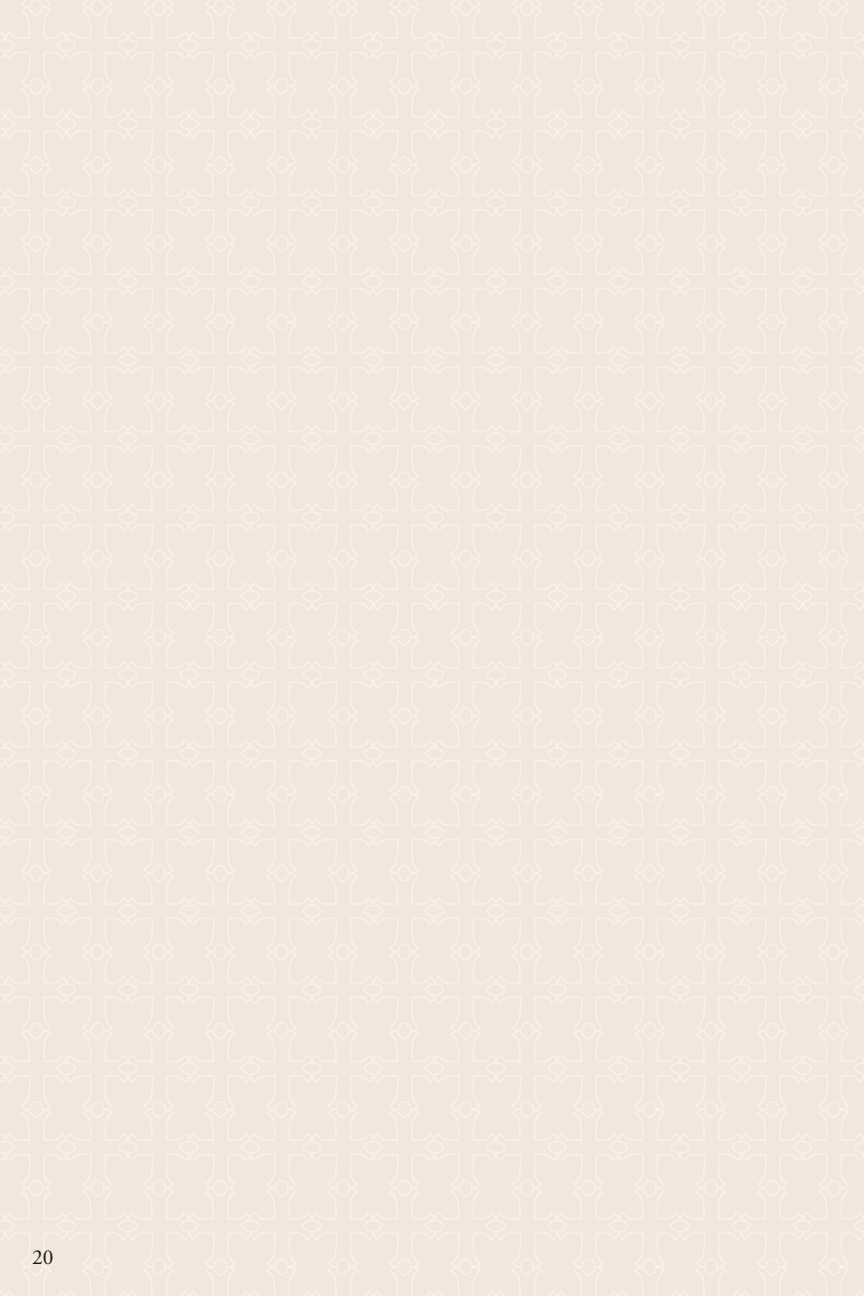
- You are invited and encouraged to read the Pastoral Letter, *Only One Thing Is Necessary*, and to consider offering your sufferings and directing the action of your prayers for families in this Archdiocese or for all those who have wandered away from the Faith so that through the help of God they will find their way back to the Church.

The Way Forward

Finally, all the faithful are encouraged to read the Pastoral Letter, “Only One Thing Is Necessary,” and to reflect on and pray about how we can together build a strong family culture in this Archdiocese and beyond, knowing the Church is here to support you in living as if “only one thing is necessary” so that your family might be more united in this life and together — forever — in Eternal Life.

Church of Saint Peter, Forest Lake, MN





Only One Thing Is Necessary

HOW CATHOLIC FAMILIES CAN STRIVE
TO BE UNITED IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT

PASTORAL LETTER

By Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis



Saints Marie Azélie (Zélie) and Louis Martin, Public Domain
Insert: Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Public Domain

PREFACE

The Church recently celebrated the 10th anniversary of the canonization of Marie Azélie (Zélie) and Louis Martin, the parents of the Little Flower, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Canonized in Rome on October 18, 2015, the saintly couple were held up to the Church universal as role models for holiness in married life. They were the first married couple to be canonized *together*.

Throughout the process that led to their beatification and canonization, it was the ordinariness of their life that was celebrated. Pope Leo XIV recently spoke of these 19th century parents, a watchmaker and a lacemaker, as part of what Pope Francis had called an immense crowd of “saints next door”—saints who are relatable because they live their holiness amid the ups and downs of everyday life.¹ Their lives were never free of sickness and hardship. Zélie gave birth nine times, but the Martins lost four of those children, a great suffering for the couple. They poured out their love for the five surviving children and desired to present to them a witness of holiness. Zélie died at a young age, leaving Louis to raise their daughters. Louis himself would confront ill health and spent years in a state hospital suffering from a type of dementia. Amazingly, all five of the daughters entered religious life.

1 Pope Leo XIV, *Message on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Canonization of the Parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus* (Vatican City, October 1, 2025), (published in the Daily Bulletin of the Holy See on October 18, 2025). Pope Francis had spoken about the saints “next door” in his Exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, March 19, 2018, nn. 6-9.

Pope Leo has rightly noted that the seemingly “ordinary” life of Zélie and Louis “was inhabited by a presence of God that was, to say the least, ‘extraordinary’ and was its absolute center.”² He noted that they bore witness “to the ineffable happiness and profound joy that God grants both here on earth and for eternity, to those who commit themselves to [the] path of fidelity and fruitfulness”³

I will always have fond memories of the 2023 procession from our State Capitol to the Cathedral of Saint Paul with the relics of Saints Louis and Zélie and their daughter Saint Thérèse, and I have been constant in my prayers that they would intercede for the families of this Archdiocese. I share Pope Leo’s prayer that families, “so dear to God’s heart, but also sometimes so fragile and tested, may find in the Martins, in all circumstances, the support and graces necessary to continue on their journey.”⁴

I have been blessed throughout my life, and particularly throughout my 36 years of ministry, with wonderful examples of marital holiness in everyday life. While it is unlikely that my parents will ever be canonized, my siblings and I often speak of our indebtedness to our parents for their witness to the faith and their willingness to sacrifice for their family. We will always be grateful for the way they introduced us to God’s love and made sure that we found a home in our Church.

I have witnessed that same sense of sacrifice here in the

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.



Pope Leo XIV, Sheryl Moran, Edina, MN

Archdiocese. During the prayer and listening sessions that led up to our 2022 Synod, I heard time and again of the love and concern that reside in the hearts of so many parents in this local Church, who want nothing more than to lead their families to Jesus. They instinctively understand and model what Jesus taught Martha in the midst of her anxiety: “only one thing is necessary,” being with Jesus (Lk 10:42).

For that reason, I was not surprised at the 2022 Synod when the proposition regarding “parents as the first teachers of their children in the ways of the faith⁵” received so much support. I was happy to both include that proposition as one of our first three priorities for implementation and to appoint a Blue Ribbon Commission to help the Archdiocese develop a plan for responding to parents who desire the Church’s assistance in assuming their weighty responsibilities.

I remain grateful for the work of our Blue Ribbon Commission, and I am happy to issue at their recommendation this pastoral letter as an expression of encouragement to parents and to all those who support them pastorally.

Commended to the help of Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, and the mighty intercession of our patron Saint Paul in the 175th year of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

*Lead Kindly Light.*⁶



Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

⁵ The notion of parents as “primary” or “first” educators is referenced in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), §2223, 2226. Section 2223 states that “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children” and Section 2226 provides that “Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith.”

⁶ Saint John Henry Newman. *Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the Encircling Gloom*. 1833.



Photo courtesy Archbishop Bernard Hebda, 2026



Section I

OUR URGENT CHALLENGE AND THE NARROW PATH

1. Raising a Christian family has never been easy. In every age and culture, struggles naturally arise from the different personality traits we find in our families, as well as from our own shortcomings and selfishness, and even from our miscommunications.

On top of those perennial challenges, today's families are faced with challenges particular to our time. While I continue to be inspired by strong and vibrant families in our communities who are doing all they can to pass on the faith and to support one another in love, they often speak to me of what can seem to be an uphill battle. We look around us and see a general societal decline in religious practice and church affiliation. There is a significant decrease in the number of couples seeking the Sacrament of Matrimony or even choosing to marry civilly. Living together before marriage has become acceptable, and the number of children born outside of marriage continues to grow. Social commentators of all stripes point to the number of children who are impoverished in so many ways by the absence of fathers in their lives.

As Pope Francis noted in the Bull of Indiction for the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, *Spes non confundit*, there is also a sad phenomenon of young people who have lost their enthusiasm for life and their readiness to share it, resulting in a number of countries “experiencing an alarming decline in the birthrate as a result of today’s frenetic pace, fears about the future, the lack of job security and adequate social policies, and social models whose agenda is dictated by the quest for profit rather than concern for relationships.”⁷ We see that in our own state of Minnesota: The widespread availability of abortion and the acceptance of contraceptives separate the traditional ends of marriage and further obscure the dignity of all human life.

Given these developments, we should not be surprised that even the strongest of families are seeing the rise of depression and anxiety and facing the effects of soaring escape-seeking dependence on drugs, alcohol, pornography, technology and screens.

Screens are now ubiquitous in modern American life, and we need to be honest with ourselves about what this change means for children and Catholic family life, especially for the youngest among us. While screen time can create the opportunity for connection among families and communities, it is not a neutral space for children. This reality requires parents to exercise urgent vigilance for dangerous content and endless distractions that cause lasting damage.

⁷ Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction for the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, *Spes non confundit*, May 9, 2024, §9.



Christ with Children, Christopher Santer, Saint Paul, MN

Just consider: In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation”⁸ stemming from, in part, social media, smart phones, virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI).

What would our families and our society look like if we spent but a fraction of what we spend on screens looking at the faces of our family members?

Dear families, please take heart. You are not alone. The Church journeys with you, the Church loves you, *and the Church needs you!*

⁸ U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>



Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saints Zélie and Louis Martin, Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church, New Brighton, MN

2. Pope Saint John Paul II saw clearly that “The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”⁹ This path is indeed a call to holiness that is not for the faint of heart, a calling that requires daily growth and renewal. It is a call to embrace the “narrow way” that Jesus himself identified for us: “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few (Matt 7:13-14).

9 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* [On the Rose of the Christian Family in the Modern World]. November 22, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html

We are blessed by God’s superabundant grace and by the examples of holy families who remind us that it is indeed possible for us to pass through that narrow gate. Pope Leo has recently held up for our imitation three saintly couples who were together recognized by the Church for their holiness: Saints Zélie and Louis Martin (the parents of Saint Therese of Lisieux who were canonized together in 2015 and referenced in the Preface of this letter); Blesseds Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi (beatified by Saint John Paul II in 2001) and finally, Blesseds Józef and Wiktoria Ulma (beatified by Pope Francis along with their children in 2023).

I was blessed to be present in Saint Peter’s Square when Mr. and Mrs. Beltrame Quattrocchi were beatified. I remember that the booklet prepared for the beatification Mass referenced the little notes that Maria would pack with Luigi’s lunches. Like the parents of the Little Flower, Luigi and Maria were refreshingly ordinary, and certainly relatable — the “saints next door.” After their beatification,

Blesseds Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, Public Domain





Family of Józef and Wiktoria Ulma, Public Domain

Saint John Paul II had their remains moved to the Sanctuary of Divine Love on the outskirts of Rome, where hundreds of Roman families typically gather on Sundays, to remind families that holiness is attainable. I'd often stop at their graves to pray for my family and for all families.

More recently, I made the pilgrimage to Markowa, Poland, to pray at the tomb of the Ulmas, seeking their intercession that this pastoral letter might bear some pastoral fruit in our Archdiocese. The Ulmas were simple farmers from Southeastern Poland (living in the same diocese as my grandmother's family, the Archdiocese of Przemyśl). Along with their six children (and one on the way), they were brutally killed by the Nazis in 1944 for having given refuge on their farm to Jews who were fleeing from the persecution of the Third Reich.

While Józef and Wiktoria are now remembered for their martyrdom, the museum in their hometown paints a picture of a couple who had been deeply in love with one another and committed to their children, desiring to teach them about Christ and His command to be like the Good Samaritan in loving our neighbor, understood in the broadest of contexts. Józef had the only camera in Markowa and his photographs chronicled not only wartime life in his village but also the ordinary life of his extraordinary family, poor as church mice but rich in love.

Even in Minnesota, we can journey together with those holy families, and in that way, we are never alone.

To be certain, perseverance on the narrow path requires the grace that flows from our rooted friendship with Jesus

Christ. Only within the context of that essential relationship can our other relationships be directed toward our highest calling: eternal life with God.

You, dear families, are made for eternal life. In contrast, to be in the modern culture without the good ordering of a practiced faith is to be merely of the culture. And to be of the culture can pull us off the narrow path of holiness and onto the broad and prevailing cultural road that all too often leads to godlessness, selfishness and decadence.

Because the family walks together, we are invited on the narrow path not just for ourselves, but with and for our spouse, our children, our parents and our siblings. In particular, we must form, educate and accompany the youngest members of our families; we must do our part in helping till and cultivate the soil of their precious young souls. This sacred calling is urgent.



Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church, Minneapolis, MN

3. We must travel with eyes open while also allowing the Lord to lift our gaze to the deeper, truer and more lasting realities that envelop all of us as believers: to saintly men and women then and now, to hope in God's promise, and to heaven. We can't help but marvel at the perennial relevance of the Lord's Parable of the Sower, the Gospel passage addressed by Pope Leo XIV at his first General Audience as the Successor of Peter:

Asower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear (Matt 13:3-9).

Right: *Golden Hour*, Madeline Orsinger, Stillwater, MN



In offering this memorable parable, Jesus the Divine Teacher is not presenting some abstraction, but rather articulating the deep theological truth of God's continual offer of grace — indeed, the offer of His very life — and of our freedom to choose to accept that offer or to refuse it. Jesus explained to His disciples that, in real life, the seed is the Word of God, who is not an ideology but rather a Person, True God and True Man. And the soil? Pope Leo concludes that “it is our heart, but also the world, the community, the Church.”¹⁰ Here the question arises: What soil does the Lord find in my heart, our world, our community, our Church? How do I receive His daily offering of His very self? On what path am I, my spouse, my children and my parents traveling?

Let us take a moment to examine the types of paths and see what they mean for our families.

10 Leo XIV, General Audience, May 21, 2025. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/21/250521c.html>

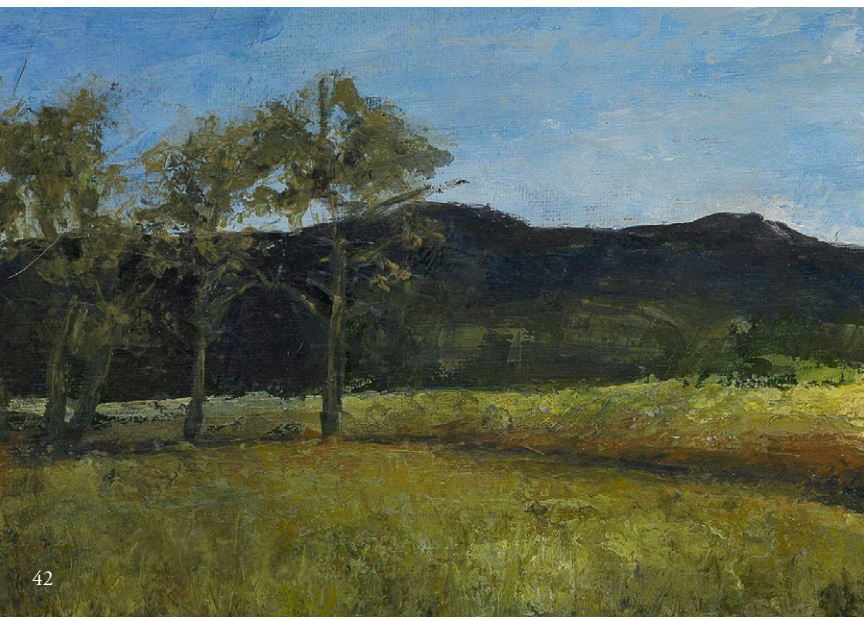
4. During his Angelus address on July 12, 2020,¹¹ Pope Francis explored the four “paths” that are before us. He identified the first path as the “path of distraction.” The “busy life” can, at first glance, appear productive and efficient. Here, the birds flock and chatter, but they also eat the seeds immediately: “Beset by lots of small talk, by many ideologies, by continuous opportunities for distraction inside and outside the home, we can lose our zest for silence, for reflection, for dialogue with the Lord, to the point that we risk losing our faith, not receiving the Word of God, as we are seeing everything, distracted by everything, by worldly things.” This insight leads us to ask: Where in our home life are moments and places of silence and reflection encouraged?

The second path was likened to that of rocky ground. To onlookers, this path might seem “put together,” well arranged, controlled. But despite its manicured facade, it lacks the depth of soil where roots can go deep: “This is the image,” Pope Francis said, “of those who receive the Word of God with momentary enthusiasm, which however, remains superficial; it does not assimilate the Word of God. In this way, at the first difficulty, such as a discomfort or disturbance in life, that still-feeble faith dissolves, as the seed

11 Francis, Angelus, July 12, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2020/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20200712.html

that falls among the rocks withers.” That reflection leads us to ask: Where in our home life are we encouraged to settle in and go deeper into our minds and hearts, and ultimately, into prayer, so that we may withstand the disturbances that come our way?

The third path in the parable is strewn with bushes and thorns. Pope Francis taught that on this path the world’s attractions and affirmations take primacy of place. Amidst “the thorns are the deceit of wealth, of success, of worldly concerns There, the Word grows a little, but becomes choked, it is not strong, and it dies or does not bear fruit.” The late Holy Father’s reflection prompts us to ask: Where in our home life do we find ways to examine our consciences?

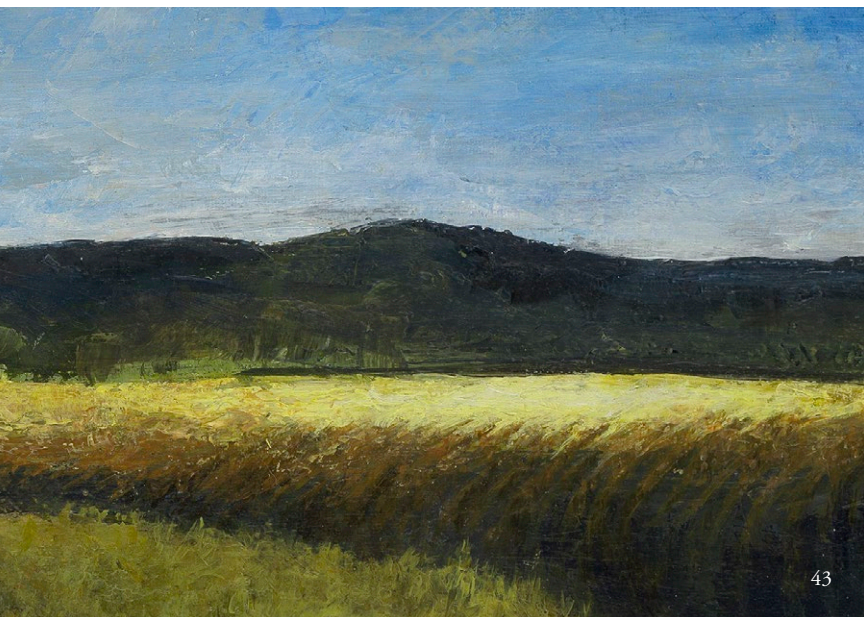


To notice when and how we are motivated by the world and its allure?

Finally, we arrive at the fourth path, the good soil: “Here, and here alone does the seed take root and bear fruit. The seed fallen upon this fertile soil represents those who hear the Word, embrace it, safeguard it in their heart and put it into practice in everyday life.” At last, we have the path that we and our families must travel, a path that we must show the world. For, as Saint John Paul II observed, “As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.”¹²

12 John Paul II, Homily, November 30, 1986, Perth, Australia, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html

Below: *Less of Me*, Madeline Orsinger, Stillwater, MN



5. Dear families, I know it is not always easy to choose the fourth path. At some points in our lives, we may find ourselves among the thorns or struggling to deepen our roots. It is precisely in those moments that we may take to heart one final reflection on this parable, offered by Pope Leo, who reminds us of God's closeness and assistance even when facing life's challenges:

It is true that the destiny of the seed depends also on the way in which the earth welcomes it and the situation in which it finds itself, but first and foremost in this parable Jesus tells us that God throws the seed of His Word on all kinds of soil, that is, in any situation of ours: at times we are more superficial and distracted, at times we let ourselves get carried away by enthusiasm, sometimes we are burdened by life's worries, but there are also times when we are willing and welcoming. God is confident and hopes that sooner or later the seed will blossom. This is how He loves us: He does not wait for us to become the best soil, but He always generously gives us His word. Perhaps by seeing that He trusts us, the desire to be better soil will be kindled in us.¹³

13 Leo XIV, General Audience, May 21, 2025. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/21/250521c.html>

How I wish that kind of love, the hopeful love of God the Father, would be present in all our families in this Archdiocese.

Given that God loves us that much and so clearly sees the potential in all of us, how could His Church not be similarly loving, assisting you as you strive to support your families so that the seeds that the Divine Sower has sown can indeed blossom within them? I am inspired when I see how deeply you desire to love the members of your families into eternity, to walk the narrow path with them, to pass on to them the faith with its wisdom, solace and salvation. However, so many of you express frustration that you don't know how best to do that, and you humbly turn to Mother Church for help.

This letter is a humble attempt to reassure you that the Church is listening and desires to walk with you. You are not alone.





Section II

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK?

6. The task of Christian discipleship never ends. Even in Heaven, the saints delight in the unfolding of God’s vision and plan as they attentively intercede on our behalf. What a beautiful reality! Yet, for those of us still journeying here on earth, the daily transformation in Christ that makes possible the faithful living out of our vocation can feel daunting — a path fraught with challenges. Parents often experience hurt and even shame at their own perceived shortcomings and mistakes; they might wonder if they are capable of guiding their children to Heaven.

It is always painful to recognize our inadequacies. Pope Leo suggests that it is precisely in those moments, when “we realize we are not a fruitful soil,” that we should not be discouraged, but rather ask the Lord “to work on us more to make us become a better terrain.”¹⁴

Nobody journeys alone. No genuine vocation originates simply from our own idea of self-fulfillment or self-determination. Rather, it comes from our Creator. If we are able to accept that being a faithful Catholic parent or grandparent or son or daughter is a calling from God and

¹⁴ Ibid.

originates in His plan, we can be confident that He will both bestow on us the grace that we need to live out that vocation and empower our cooperation.

If we need to justify that confidence, we need not look any further than what God the Father has done for us in giving to us Jesus and His Word as our Seed, fully knowing that “the seed, to bear fruit, must die.” Never was there a greater sacrifice! This is how deeply our Lord enters into our reality, into our families, into our hearts, to transform us. Pope Leo reminds us that God is ready to “waste away for us” and that “Jesus is willing to die in order to transform our life.”¹⁵

To cooperate with this outpouring of grace, I offer three primary parental practices.

15 Leo XIV, General Audience, May 21, 2025. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/21/250521c.html>



7. First, we are called to give Jesus primacy in our lives. In his letter on the 10th anniversary of the canonization of Zélie and Louis Martin, Pope Leo noted that they had chosen for their motto as a couple “God first served,” a phrase popularized by Saint Joan of Arc.¹⁶ Our call is to love Jesus first, and to love as He loves, to imitate Him. It is in that sense that “Only One Thing Is Necessary.”

By grace, you must strive to love your children in a Christ-like fashion through their ups and downs, moods and misgivings, faithfulness and resistance. Faithful parenting is about giving until it hurts and then giving some more.

¹⁶ Leo XIV, *Message on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Canonization of the Parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus*, October 1, 2025, Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, October 18, 2025.

Below: *Saint Joan of Arc*, Saint Louis King of France Catholic Church, Saint Paul, MN



There are no ledgers, scorecards or demands for perfect reciprocation.

Yet we know that Truth and Love can never be separated. For both to be authentic, they must find unity in the One who is both Truth and Love: only Jesus. I am told that parents often feel pressure from peers and even from professionals to “love” their children by affirming all their choices. But not all choices can be affirmed. The dignity of the person is what we affirm. The immeasurable offer of grace that Jesus is constantly offering is what we affirm. Likewise, His open invitation to return to Him whenever we have sinned, and then to return again and again, is what we need to affirm. We witness to this by our own acceptance of our limitations, our own reliance on the grace that leads to conversion, our own willingness to grow from mistakes. This more nuanced approach to parenting is far too rare in our relativistic society.

Today, as Pope Leo reminds us, “it is difficult to build authentic relationships, since the objective and real premises of communication are lacking.”¹⁷ These challenges, particularly in the context of the family, can only be faced with and through Christ and within the context of our own growing and dynamic relationship with God.¹⁸ This is the true community — and communion — into which you must be inviting your children and family members, and it begins with the revival of our own life of faith.

¹⁷ Leo XIV, Speech to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, May 16, 2025. <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250516-corpo-diplomatico.html>

¹⁸ Ibid.

You serve your families by being grafted onto the vine that is Jesus (Jn 15). If you want your children to know Christ, you must help them see Him in you. If you strive to be in constant conversation and communion with the triune God, the power of the Holy Spirit will course through you to your children. To draw from an admonition attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi, “let all the brothers ... preach by their deeds.”¹⁹

19 First Rule of the Friars Minor (1221), Chapter XVII.

Grace Restores Harmony, Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, Edina, MN, Rosalie Ramstead



8. Closely connected to the first practice, the second requires us to strive to live the life of virtue as taught by Christ and His Church. By seeking to grow in our understanding of the Church's teachings, being faithful to the precepts of the Church, reading Scripture, praying, worshiping God, partaking in the Sacraments, and performing corporal and spiritual works of mercy, we demonstrate that our faith is more than an idea; it is a devoted and lived practice.

What a tall order! Who can live up to this? Who of us is blameless before the face of God?²⁰ God is not asking for perfectionism. No, as a Catholic parent you are not called to be perfect as though already a finished product. But please, dear parents, try to model the way of striving each day

²⁰ Col 1:22



toward perfect friendship with God. Model how the believer journeys through ups and downs. Model how the believer returns again and again to the Sacraments as the fount of grace and healing.

By your life you will show them how to walk when there are distractions and thorns. By your life you will show them how to walk when they are in a dry and barren time of life. Above all, you will show them what we read from Pope Leo: “He does not wait for us to become the best soil, but He always generously gives us His Word. Perhaps by seeing that He trusts us, the desire to be better soil will be kindled in us.”²¹ I am hopeful that better soil will be kindled in your children and family members when they see your trust in God and your trust in them.

21 Leo XIV, General Audience, May 21, 2025. <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/21/250521c.html>

Below: Church of Saint Pius X, White Bear Lake, MN





Jesus and the Children, Corbert Gauthier, formerly of the Twin Cities

9. Finally, the third key practice is recognizing that all children are God's children first. They can never be objects of your possession. They are not your projects. With this recognition of their true Heavenly Father comes encouragement and expectation, warmth and accountability, mercy and justice. This makes your children special, but also calls them to a special responsibility.

An unconditional love that never fails to recognize to whom children belong (and not solely what they achieve) will remind them of their eternal value amid a world of fickle affections. Simultaneously, it places upon them certain expectations that draw them deeper into a loving, yet accountable, relationship with God. As Christ reminds, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Lk 12:48). A sense of being dignified, loved, and accountable will remind your children that they are consequential in the eyes of God and their family. This, in turn, fosters a familial culture that is a foretaste of Heaven.

10. This familial culture should not be found only within the walls of the home; it is meant to permeate all of society. Society, in turn, is meant to foster the family. Already in his early papacy, Pope Leo reminded world leaders that “it is the responsibility of government leaders to work to build harmonious and peaceful civil societies.” This can be achieved above all, he stressed, “by investing in the family, founded upon the stable union between a man and a woman, ‘a small but genuine society, and prior to all civil society.’”²²

The Church’s clear teaching on marriage and family²³ is too often perceived as being divisive. It is undeniably countercultural but, according to Pope Leo, it is never accurate to see the truth as being divisive: “Truth, then, does not create division, but rather enables us to confront all the more resolutely the challenges of our time.”²⁴ It is the truth of the core dignity of the human person and of the family unit as a whole that has to be our touchstone.

22 Leo XIV, Speech to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, May 16, 2025. <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/may/documents/20250516-corpo-diplomatico.html>

23 See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, §§1601-1658. See also Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016, and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, For your Marriage <https://www.foryourmarriage.org/>

24 Ibid.



Holy Family, Eric Menzhuber, Rogers, MN



IESUS NAZARENUS
REX IUDAEORUM

LET IT

BE DONE TO ME

ACCORDING

TO YOUR

WORD

Section III

SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE: THE ESSENTIAL FOUNDATION FOR A FAMILY OF DISCIPLES

11. We live in a world designed for communion and solidarity. At the very beginning of our creation, the Lord God recognized a cosmic dissonance in the solitary state of His beloved Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him” (Gen 2:18). With that in mind, God created Eve — wonderful in her common humanity, glorious in her distinctive femininity — to accompany Adam. Adam recognized the sheer delight of a partner — a companion of incomparable intimacy who, like him, could appreciate beauty and seek meaning. In fact, the first words we hear from Adam are of joy and gratitude:



This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of man this one has been taken (Gen 2:23).

Above: Church of Saint Thomas the Apostle, Corcoran, MN
Left: *Crucifixion*, Eric Menzhuber, Rogers, MN

“At last,” he sighs. “At last.”

The joy Adam feels reminds us of the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger before his election as Pope Benedict XVI: “Man is not satisfied with solutions beneath the level of divinization.”²⁵ We do not live for this life alone. We are made for Heaven, and we are made for fulfillment in God. Now, to be sure, such divinization — being made more and more into His image — is achievable only through God’s limitless grace. And yet, the Ten Commandments are among the earliest of the precepts that guide us toward our hopes of divinization. What we discover in the Ten Commandments is that they point us toward the art of holy companionship with our God and with our fellow human beings.

25 Ratzinger, Joseph, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, December 12, 2000.
https://www.piercedhearts.org/benedict_xvi/Cardinal%20Ratzinger/new_evangelization.htm

Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Saint Paul, MN



12. Outside of our relationship with God, what form of companionship is chief among human beings? Sacramental marriage. Male and female are exquisite in their complementarity. Alike, but different, male and female beautifully overcome the “aloneness” to which we might be tempted while, simultaneously, bearing fruit in union with the other.

Few can rival the poetry of Genesis in illustrating the unrivaled mystical union into which married man and woman enter. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (Gen 2:24). When that type of union finds its expression in marriage, it becomes the foundational relationship, the initial cell, the first community, the originating culture that gives rise to a civilization.²⁶ As the Catechism teaches, “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”²⁷ Like Baptism, Reconciliation, the Eucharist,

26 For an extensive explication of the nature and importance of matrimonial unity, consult the doctrinal note, *Una Caro*, published by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (November 25, 2025).

27 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), § 1601.

Confirmation, Holy Orders, and the Sacrament of the Sick, Marriage rises to the level of a sacrament. It is only through Christ — Love and Gift Incarnate — that the love and gift of sacramental marriage is possible.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, Minnetonka, MN



13. For the baptized, marriage is sacramental and, as such, extraordinarily strong. Eternal, indissoluble, and ineffable, how can marriage fail? It fails because sacramental marriage is also incredibly delicate. Entered into by two dignified but fallible people living in a world of great hope, but also of great brokenness, a marriage endures and transforms life's trials. Life with all its fears and anxieties, its assaults and uncertainties can sadly break down the sturdiest of people and the hardiest of relationships, but especially those who lose touch with God by falling away from the sacraments and daily prayer. He alone is the source of all hope, strength, and salvation.

But a strong marriage rooted in God and grounded in the daily habit of "willing the good of the other" is a sure path. English author G.K. Chesterton once quipped, "The whole pleasure of marriage is that it is a perpetual crisis."²⁸ This means that while marriage can be challenging, it is also supremely good — even in those challenges.

Abraham and Sarah, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Louis and Zélie and, of course, Joseph and Mary, never lived idyllic lives free of anxiety or strife, but they lived lives of faithful devotion to God and to their marriage so that they could raise children as faith-filled as Isaac, John the Baptist, Thérèse of Lisieux, and, of course, Jesus. A marriage rooted in God matters.

28 Chesterton, G.K., *Criticisms and Appreciations of the Works of Charles Dickens*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1911), 136.



Section IV

“THE FAMILY OF FAMILIES” – THE CHURCH SUPPORTING FAMILIES ON THEIR JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

14. One of the most famous (and searing) opening lines in all of literature comes from Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”²⁹ Naturally, the sin that stains an individual has an impact on everyone in their circle of relationships. To be sure, that includes the family.

Brokenness in families comes in many forms, including neglect and even abuse (physical, sexual and emotional). But family brokenness can also subtly manifest as selfishness, judgment, passive-aggressiveness, indifference, resentment, lack of discipline or expectation, and faithlessness. While any of us can be wounded by our parents or by our siblings, spouses and children, we must be mindful that we, too, can wound others. It is for obvious reasons that Mother Teresa of Calcutta is said to have urged that if you want to change the world, go home and love your family.

²⁹ Tolstoy, Leon. *Anna Karenina*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 1.

Left: *Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa)*, Bernadette Gockowski, Somerset, WI

Navigating the stresses and strains of daily life can only exacerbate the brokenness in our families and in ourselves. As such, to live a sacramental marriage and nurture the Christ-centered culture of the family, we must honestly recognize that faithful, resilient family life is a constant “work-in-progress” — an “already, but not yet” reality — dependent upon frail human resolve paired with the limitless grace of God.

Divine Mercy, Christopher Santer, Saint Paul, MN





Pietà, Cathedral of Saint Paul, Saint Paul, MN

15. How, then, does one have hope and solace given the sinfulness we each bring to the family and the pain we endure from the sins of others? We can have hope in realizing that our God is a loving and merciful God intent on the well-being of His children. And we can find solace by remaining at the foot of the cross with Mary. It is our first recourse to be comforted by Mary, the Immaculate, as she, in her full and vulnerable humanity, endured a heart pierced by the suffering of her own family. Her faith in the midst of suffering gives us the hope that we, too, can find faith. Mary is always there as our mother to share our experiences.

16. With Mary as her model, the Church also suffers for families and with families. The Church stands resolute in the truth of Jesus Christ against the slings and arrows of the day, defending against assaults on the dignity of the individual and the sanctity of the family. She accompanies families from the moment of our Baptism until the sacraments that we receive at the end of our lives. She celebrates in times of joy, teaches in times of uncertainty, and comforts in times of loss. The Church is our home and is forever close to her children, taking her cue from Christ, who said, “Let the children come to me.”

And so, we come to the Church. Families bundle up to attend Mass and go to confession, to celebrate a baptism or to mourn at a funeral, to honor a confirmation or witness an ordination. However, we not only nourish ourselves with Christ’s sacraments, but also with the deep and abiding community of believers that make up the body of Christ. The parish can truly be our second home. Our brothers and sisters in the parish accompany us on our spiritual journey through lush valleys of hope and contentment, as well as through dry deserts of uncertainty and distress. This fellowship heartens us from the days of our youth to the days of our infirmity. Likewise, parish communities can be transformed into Spirit-led fraternities that give life to dioceses and archdioceses.

Moreover, the many Catholic apostolates and institutions

that we find in our Archdiocese gather people of common interests in charity and advocacy, mission work and evangelization. As such, the innumerable threads of the Catholic fabric are woven even more deeply into our larger society.

In our life's journey, our families are never alone. The Catholic Church is with us every step of the way.

The Way of the Shepherd Catholic Montessori School, Blaine, MN





Section V

“FAMILY, BECOME WHAT YOU ARE!”

17. The French Catholic novelist Léon Bloy lamented, “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint.”³⁰ When asked about how one becomes a saint, the Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas, purportedly uttered a single word: “Velle,” which in Latin means, “Will it.”

In shaping our wills, we need to remember that we are nothing less than sons and daughters of God. The loving Father who desires that we be saints wants the absolute best for you in your marriages, child-raising and family life. Indeed, He has given us an exquisite dignity of infinite worth. Pope Benedict XVI used to stress that, “man was created for greatness — for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched.”³¹ It is within the family that our hearts are most often stretched.

³⁰ Bloy, Leon. *La Femme Pauvre*, 1897.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* [On Christian Hope]. November 30, 2007. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

18. In his *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope Saint John Paul II exclaimed, “Family, become what you are!”³² Twenty years later at a Prayer Vigil of Families, the saintly pope added, “Believe in what you are; believe in your vocation to be a luminous sign of God’s love.”³³ If each one of us is a dignified child of God, and if our families are the sanctified building blocks of a civilization, then what we are is a mighty thing indeed.

To become what we are, and to be a luminous sign of God’s love, we are called to love, serve and worship. In our daily engagements with family and friends, strangers and enemies, we must draw from the endless fount of God’s love and love others in return. In our daily work and vocations, we are asked to serve with humility and charity. And, perhaps most importantly, we are to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Matt 22:37) and worship Him accordingly.

32 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* [On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World]. November 22, 1981. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html

33 John Paul II, Address at the Prayer Vigil of Families, October 20, 2001. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20011020_family.html

Right: *Karol Wojtyła Print (Pope John Paul II)*, Meghan Whipple, Saint Paul, MN



19. In an age of efficiency and multitasking, competition and one-upmanship, our modern culture is easily tempted to do the devil's work. It too often divides and scatters, distracting us from what Christ, when teaching the harried Martha, called the "unum necessarium" — the one necessary thing. Jesus Himself is that one true thing. And if Jesus is that one true thing, then He should have primacy in our lives and never be relegated to second place. In the Archdiocese, we have been working on helping families to reclaim Sunday — a day currently dominated too often by sports, work and commitments — as a true Sabbath day of worship and rest. We are hoping that Sunday will once again become a Christ-centered day shared with our families and with the "Family of Families" that is our parish.

An intentional day with God and family will surely transform us. It will certainly foster greater intimacy with God. It will also bring us closer to our families. It will remind us of the promises we have too often forgotten in our daily anxieties: joy for the heartbroken, rest for the weary, company for the isolated, and salvation for the lost. If we want to find happiness, we must never settle for the meager surrogates often found on the first three paths in the Parable of the Sower, such as wealth, honor, pleasure and power. Rather, we must go to the eternal source of happiness. If we want the children in our families and parishes to believe, then we must show them how we believe. If we want them



Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Pascal Baylon Catholic Church, Saint Paul, MN

to live in reality, to be people of substance and depth, to be holy and pure, then we must strive to be that, with God's grace, every single day.

There are concrete actions that we can all take in that direction. In an Angelus address offered on Holy Family Sunday at the end of the Jubilee Year, Pope Leo noted that families "should cherish the values of the Gospel: prayer, frequent reception of the sacraments — especially Confession and Communion — healthy affections, sincere dialogue, fidelity, and the simple and beautiful concreteness

of everyday words and gestures.³⁴ Offering a word of encouragement, he noted that these actions will make families “a light of hope for the places in which we live; a school of love and an instrument of salvation in God’s hands.”³⁵ That, brothers and sisters, has to be our goal.

34 Pope Leo XVI, Angelus, December 28, 2025. <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/angelus/2025/documents/20251228-angelus.html>

35 *Ibid.*

Saint Joseph Catholic Church, Waconia, MN



20. Louis and Zélie Martin and their family prove that even such a lofty goal is attainable. Given all the responsibilities that came with raising their children and working to support them, the lives of Louis and Zélie, probably like yours, were extremely busy. But they made it a point to do three things very well: to love each other and their children unconditionally; to teach their children about God and the virtuous life; and to worship God at home and in the parish.

Their hope was in the Living God, a God who is Himself a communion of Love-as-Gift. Throughout a lifetime of joys and trials, they and their children would strive to follow the path of holiness. While they were an ordinary family, they lived exemplary lives of extraordinary faith, worthy of imitation. It should not be surprising that Saints Louis and Zélie are patron saints of marriage, parenting, widowers, those who have lost children and those struggling with illness. Their saintly daughter, “the Little Flower,” is patron saint of missionaries, florists and the sick. And it all began with faith in the home.

In a small French village, in an ordinary house rented by a humble family, saints were made by means of a family living out its highest calling. This is what God wants for your family, too! He is calling you, dear families, to make a place for Him in your home and to let Him and His Church help you teach your children the Faith.

It is up to us to get to work rebuilding a culture of dignity and sanctity, of family and parish life. Together, now and forever.



As we take the first steps on the journey together, I invite you to join me in a prayer to the Holy Family of Nazareth composed by Pope Francis:

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of true love; to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen.³⁶



³⁶ Francis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* [On the Love of the Family]. March 19, 2016. https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

Right: Saint Helena Catholic Church, Minneapolis, MN



Only One Thing Is Necessary

HOW CATHOLIC FAMILIES CAN STRIVE
TO BE UNITED IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT

Questions and Insights

PRACTICAL GUIDE TO
LIVING THE FAITH AS A FAMILY

Prepared by the Office of Discipleship and Evangelization
and the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education



Section VI

HOW DOES THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR VOCATION?

21. No earthly entity possesses such an intimate understanding of the seasonality of life and its accompanying joys and woes as the Catholic Church. The author of Ecclesiastes writes:

There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.
A time to give birth, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them;
a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away.
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace
(Eccl 3:1-8).



Church of Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Anthony, MN

From the joy of childbirth and the gift of adoption to the challenges of parenting, from the discernment of truth to the heartbreak of falsehood, from the pursuit of vocation to the limits of one's energy, from the pleasure of retirement to the anxieties of mortality, the Catholic Church knows and speaks acutely to us at every turn and in every station.

22. No man-made ideology or secular dogma can fully apprehend the nature of man and woman nor provide the sacramental graces that both heal and enliven like the Catholic Church.

As G.K. Chesterton astutely observed:

There is no other case of one continuous intelligent institution that has been thinking about thinking for two thousand years. Its experience naturally covers nearly all experiences; and especially nearly all errors. The result is a map in which all the blind alleys and bad roads are clearly marked, all the ways that have been shown to be worthless by the best of all evidence: the evidence of those who have gone down them ...

Nine out of ten of what we call new ideas are simply old mistakes. The Catholic Church has for one of her chief duties that of preventing people from making those old mistakes; from making them over and over again forever, as people always do if they are left to themselves.³⁷



³⁷ Chesterton, G.K. *Why I am Catholic*, 1929.

Image: *Chesterton*, Bernadette Gockowski, Somerset, WI



Holy Spirit Catholic Church, Saint Paul, MN

23. In parish life, we travel these liturgical seasons — seasons of hope and anticipation, seasons of mourning and sacrifice, and seasons of joy and celebration — together with our families, our friends and our neighbors in Christ. And within those seasons, we witness change both in the Church and in ourselves. Vestments change. Hymns change.

Readings change. But what remains the same is the truth of Christ, His living presence in the Eucharist, the power of prayer and the vibrancy of the sacraments.

From Sunday to Sunday, daily Mass to daily Mass, sacrament to sacrament, we center ourselves on Christ, that “one necessary thing.” We quiet our souls. We sense the stirrings and nudges of the Holy Spirit. We bask in the love of the Father. We feel contrition, receive absolution and find ourselves renewed. The Church dispenses graces which no human or human institution can offer. And those graces change us. But that change isn’t always easy.

In her classically blunt but honest style, southern Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor asserts, “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.” She further explains that, “All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us, and the change is painful.”³⁸ It is the liturgical and sacramental life of the parish that steadies us with its God-ordained rhythms and Christ-sanctioned graces. When we are proud and need humbling, when we are worried and need assurance, when we are lost and need direction, and when we are joyful and need company, the Catholic Church is there.



Flannery O'Connor, Bernadette Gockowski, Somerset, WI

38 O'Connor, Flannery. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, 1979.

24. The Catholic Church takes the formation of souls as among its highest callings. In a world tempted by ideology or relativism, there is great risk that a person's conscience can go unformed by Christ's truth or deformed by an unanswered barrage of popular (if not seductive) falsehoods. In a homily popularly dubbed *The Dictatorship of Relativism*, preached by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on the eve of the 2005 conclave that would elect him pope, the future pontiff warned of the dangers of an unrooted open-mindedness that succumbs to fashionable falsehoods while failing to discern God's Truth.

Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church, Buffalo, MN



How many winds of doctrine we have known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves — flung from one extreme to the other: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from agnosticism to syncretism and so forth. Every day new sects spring up and what Saint Paul says about human deception and the trickery that strives to entice people into error (cf. Eph 4:14) comes true.

Today, having a clear faith, based on the Creed of the Church, is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas, relativism, that is, letting oneself be “tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,” seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.

We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An “adult” faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is the friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from false, and deceit from truth.³⁹

39 Ratzinger, Joseph, Homily, April 18, 2005. https://www.vatican.va/gpII/documents/homily-pro-eligendo-pontifice_20050418_en.html



Holy Family at Home, Saint John Vianney College Seminary Chapel, Saint Paul, MN

25. The Catholic Church wants us to be friends with Christ. But before we can become friends, we must know who He is, what He has done for us, and how we are to be strengthened by His graces and live by His example.

However, in the modern world, it is not so easy. Pope Benedict XVI once observed, “Put simply, we are no longer able to hear God — there are too many different frequencies filling our ears.”⁴⁰ Beyond our worship at Mass and our engagement with the sacraments, how are our families supposed to hear God and to know God amid the cacophony of competing worldviews and ideologies?

The answer is through intentional Catholic formation.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily, September 10, 2006. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2006/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20060910_neue-messe-munich.html



26. Catholic formation is more than the imparting of facts. Catholic formation shapes the lens by which we look at the world. It cultivates a Catholic sensibility using well-honed tools that aid the well-informed intellect, such as intuition, common sense and judgement. Even more, Catholic formation molds character that aspires to the virtuous life and avoids the life of vice.

The present fascinations and fears about technologies and products that increasingly rely on artificial intelligence is a summons for Catholic families to ensure that their children benefit from an integrated formation that results in actual intelligence and provides a child with an approach to the world that can use AI as a power for good in the world. Has there ever been a time when simply learning to read and reason, especially with an eye toward sorting out what is

true, seemed more essential for where we are headed next?

To experience proper Catholic formation, one would be blessed to be raised in a family that talks about, reflects upon and practices the faith as well as a faith-filled parish community where the sacraments can be received and fellowship can be enjoyed.

Catholic formation is also augmented by the educating arms of the Catholic Church. T.S. Eliot once lamented,

“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”⁴¹

Catholic formation educates for wisdom. From cradle to grave, the Church invites each of us to embark upon the great adventure of formation. Early childhood education, homeschooling co-ops, and Catholic elementary and high schools strive to bring students the very best in science and math, literature and physical education, but they are called to do so framed by the wonder and joy, mystery and intrigue of a God-ordained, God-loved world. Too many non-Catholic schools are curbed (or have constrained themselves) from teaching about the fullness of life found in God and His creation. As such, there is a stunted understanding. As G.K. Chesterton noted, “Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.”⁴² For those unable to take advantage of the gifts of Catholic education, Catholic youth ministry and other opportunities for faith formation offer a deepening of faith and preparation for the joys and trials of adulthood.

41 Eliot, T.S. *Chorus from The Rock*, 1934.

42 Chesterton, G.K. *Heretics*, 1905.



27. Adults who have moved past their consequential early years of Catholic education can continue their formation through activities and relationships within the parish. As C.S. Lewis once said, “Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.”⁴³ Whether offering the sign of peace at Mass or enjoying a warm cup of coffee in the fellowship hall, families recognize one another, greet one another and learn more about each other’s backgrounds, children, work and interests. As a friendly intimacy is fostered, they share more. They learn about one another’s hopes and dreams, assurances and anxieties. These relationships offer unique opportunities for prayer and counsel, camaraderie and fun rooted in a common foundation — the foundation of faith.

Joining a parish small group is one simple and meaningful first step to building community while growing in our faith. In time, these engagements in the parish can evolve to friendships outside the parish through retreats and pilgrimages, family camps or hosting one another for dinner.

43 Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*, 1960.

28. Many families will find involvement in Catholic fraternal and social organizations, often parish-based, to be edifying. These can foster faith and facilitate fellowship, strengthen marriages and forge bonds between parents and children.



Father and Son, Corbert Gauthier, formerly of the Twin Cities



Section VII

HOW CAN YOU PASS ON THE FAITH TO YOUR CHILDREN?

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked them, but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”
— Matt 19:13-14

29. It is striking that Jesus — the Alpha and the Omega, the Author of Life, and the Lord of the Universe — placed such supreme value on children. Children, in ancient Palestine, were loved dearly, but were subordinate when it came to adult affairs. Jesus was counter-cultural in that regard. Children, Christ insisted, should come to Him, be loved by Him, formed by Him and saved by Him.

He insisted, in addition, that children should serve as our model for humility — a humility that abandons pride and opens us to infinite wisdom and wondrous graces. If Jesus loves children and we love children, shouldn't we do all in our power to bring our children to Jesus?

But how do we do this?

The answer, which so many of us seek, is ultimately simple.

First, as a family, we can pray together.



Church of Saint Margaret Mary, Minneapolis, MN

30. Sometimes prayer can be difficult. Pope Francis taught:

The teaching of the Gospel is clear: we need to pray always, even when everything seems in vain, when God appears to be deaf and mute and it seems we are wasting time. Even if heaven is overshadowed, the Christian does not stop praying. A Christian's prayer keeps stride with his or her faith. And many days of our life, faith seems to be an illusion, a barren struggle. There are moments of darkness in our life, and in those moments, faith seems to be an illusion. But the practice of prayer means accepting this struggle, too. "Father, I pray and do not feel anything ... I feel like my heart is dry, that my heart is arid". But we have to continue, with this struggle in the tough moments, the moments in which we feel nothing. Many saints experienced the night of faith and God's silence — when we knock and God does not respond — and these saints were persevering.⁴⁴



⁴⁴ Francis, General Audience, November 11, 2020. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201111_udienza-generale.html

Our God is at the other end of each prayer — a God who loves eternally, guides paternally and gives endlessly. But we need to be connected to God if we are to hear His voice. Our souls must be nourished by the Eucharist. Our faults must be cleansed by going to Confession. And our lives must be edified by worship and work, praise and fellowship. To love God, we must know God. To know God, we must talk with Him. And who better to do this with than our family?

Parents are the bedrock of their children's world, serving as nurturers and teachers, protectors and providers, advocates and allies. From the moment of their birth to the days when they are parents themselves, our children look to us for love and support, guidance and counsel. How powerful it is, then, for our children to see their parents and family members pray, hear them pray, learn from them how to pray and accompany us in prayer! Whether we pray before meals or bedtime, on car rides or before the big test, prayer teaches children how to talk to God about anything and everything — our hopes and aspirations, our fears and anxieties, to

pour out our feelings or to rest in silent contemplation. Prayer is the lifeblood of the Faith and the family. There is good reason why Saint (Padre) Pio's famous dictum, "Pray, hope and don't worry," begins with "Pray."

Second, as a family, we can celebrate the sacramental and liturgical life together.



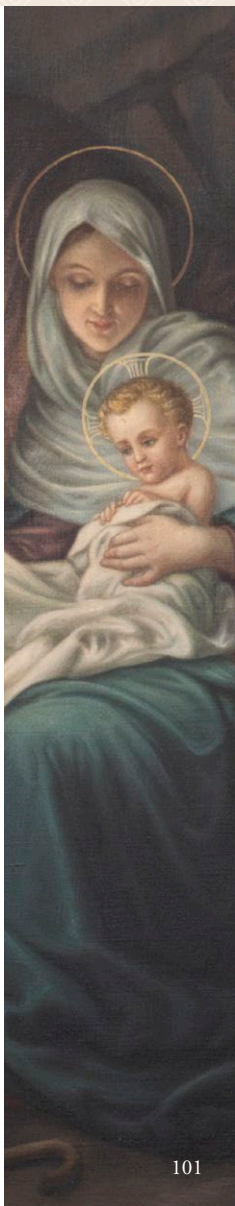
Padre Pio, Bernadette Gockowski, Somerset, WI

31. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton once observed, “Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony.”⁴⁵

As noted before, our lives are regulated by seasons. That said, the calendar most in concert with the celestial seasons is the liturgical calendar — from lighting candles on an Advent wreath to singing Christmas carols, to praying and fasting during Lent, to praying and feasting at Easter. With seasons of anticipation and arrival, reflection and action, feasting and fasting, joy and loss, we prayerfully join the cloud of witnesses in the rhythm of the Church — the brilliant vicissitudes of the divine drama. This God-ordained rhythm calls us away from the anxiety and exhaustion of the world into the ennobling glory and peace of Christ’s love.

Third, as a family, we can share a devotional life together.

⁴⁵ Merton, Thomas. *No Man Is an Island*, 1955.





32. A family with a devotional life draws closer to God and to each other. A family devotion to the Rosary, for example, is powerful. The late Anglican priest Robert Llewelyn, who became a faithful advocate of praying the Rosary, offered that:

The words [of the Rosary] are like the banks of a river, and the prayer is like the river itself. The banks are necessary to give direction and to keep the river flowing. But it is the river with which we are concerned. So in prayer it is the inclination of the heart to God which alone matters As the river moves into the sea, the banks drop away. So, too, as we move into the deeper sense of God's presence the words fall away and ... we shall be left in silence in the ocean of God's love.⁴⁶



⁴⁶ Llewelyn, Robert. *A Doorway to Silence: Contemplative Use of the Rosary*, 1986.

Left: Church of the Assumption, Saint Paul, MN

Right: Saint John Vianney College Seminary Chapel, Saint Paul, MN

Praying the Rosary allows a family to reflect on the Mysteries of the Lord and Our Lady, to offer up the greatest prayers of our Catholic faith, and to engage in powerful, yet meditative communion with the Lord together.

A family can engage in praying novenas, a nine-day prayer tradition that seeks a specific grace pertaining to a particular need. Novenas can be directed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Holy Family or to any number of saints. Novenas can also be prayed for Divine Mercy, Surrender and Forgiveness.

In praying novenas as a family, there is the power of “two or three gathered in my name,” (Matt 18:20) there is the sense of fervent prayer for specific needs, and there is a warm relationship fostered between the family and even an interceding saint.

The Stations of the Cross are yet another opportunity for family devotion. Saint Maximilian Kolbe, martyred at Auschwitz when he volunteered to die on behalf of another condemned prisoner, reminds us that, “The cross is the school of love.”

While the Stations are prayed at our parishes during Lent, they can be an excellent devotion all year long. What better opportunity to deepen our love and refine our devotion than to spend time together at the Stations of the Cross, where station by station we pray, meditate and empathize with the brutality of Christ’s Passion endured for our salvation?



Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Saint Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church, Delano, MN

MY SOUL I COME IN CONTACT V



Section VIII

WHAT'S NEXT FOR OUR CATHOLIC FAMILIES IN THE ARCHDIOCESE?

33. To be sure, the family is the “domestic church.” To repeat, as Pope Saint John Paul II insisted, “The family is the ‘first and vital cell of society.’ In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church, therefore, passes through the family.”⁴⁷ He would conclude, “As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live.”⁴⁸ As such, the Church places a supreme priority on supporting and nourishing a healthy, happy and faithful family.

Are there more ways, beyond those suggested in this letter, to strengthen the Catholic family and deepen its faith? Countless ways.

In a world of anxiety and distraction, self-absorption and uncertainty, is there hope for the faithful family? Absolutely.

47 John Paul II, Homily, November 30, 1986, Perth, Australia, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html

48 Ibid.

In *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, French Catholic poet Charles Péguy mused about how God loves faith and charity, but he marvels at hope.

The faith that I love the best,
says God, is hope.

Faith doesn't surprise me.
It's not surprising.
I am so resplendent in my creation.
In the sun and the moon and in the stars ...

Charity, says God, that doesn't surprise me.
It's not surprising.
These poor creatures are so miserable that unless
they had a heart of stone, how could they not have
love for each other.
How could they not love their brothers...

What surprises me, says God, is hope.
And I can't get over it.
This little hope who seems like nothing at all.
This little girl hope.
Immortal.⁴⁹



49 Péguy, Charles. *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 1912.

Image: Church of the Annunciation, Hazelwood, MN

My brothers and sisters, our Catholic families are the vital cell, the building block, the beginning and end of Catholic civilization. Let us help each other's families flourish. Let us pray, frequent the sacraments, engage in corporal and spiritual works of mercy, study, seek fellowship in our parish, and love our spouses and families with a supernatural, Christ-like love. In so doing, we will change the world, one soul and one family at a time.

Saint Olaf Catholic Church, Minneapolis, MN



Right: Church of Saint Mary, Waverly, MN



Only One Thing Is Necessary

HOW CATHOLIC FAMILIES CAN STRIVE
TO BE UNITED IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT

Reflection Questions

FOR SMALL GROUPS,
FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS

Prepared by the Office of Discipleship and Evangelization
and the Office for the Mission of Catholic Education

§6-10

1. If fruitful soil depends on God's work in us rather than our perfection, how should we respond when we recognize our inadequacies?
2. What changes in family life when parents truly put Jesus at the center of their decisions and priorities?
3. How does recognizing that our children belong first to God—rather than to us—change the way we exercise authority, make decisions, and respond to outcomes we cannot control?
4. How does your family culture permeate other parts of society? How does society, in turn, shape your family life?

§14-20

1. What shared qualities do you think tend to be present in healthy families, even though every family's struggles look different?
2. What would it look like for your parish to truly feel like a "second home" for your family, not just a place you attend, but a place where you are known, supported and welcomed?
3. What do you think St. John Paul II meant when he said, "Families, become what you are!"?
4. What makes it hard to protect Sunday as a day of worship, and how might reclaiming Sundays for worship of God change the rhythm and priorities of your family life?





ARCHDIOCESE
OF
SAINT PAUL &
MINNEAPOLIS