

*The St. Joan of Arc  
Catholic Family Initiative*



# Introduction

## ***Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:***

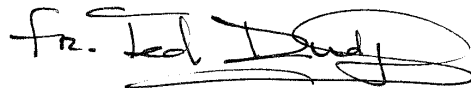
In writing this pastoral message, it is my greatest hope that our faith family will take to heart the great teachings of the Church, especially as they pertain to the family. The Church teaches that *“The Family is a Community of Life and Love”* and that’s what the Church is: a family. And like the father of any family, the Pastor and the priests need the love, support and prayers of his family to serve with the courage God intended. Being faithful to Jesus Christ can be just as hard for a leader in the Church as it is for a layperson. Priests are very human. We’re all human. We all face fatigue and doubt. We all get lonely. And the only deliverance from these obstacles is the love we receive from God, and the love we find in the family we all share. There is also great hope in a family life well lived, and your prayers for those entrusted to shepherd you.

Families are bound together not just by emotion but also by blood. In our case, the family we call the Church, has the blood of Jesus Christ as that which binds us together. We’re all redeemed by His blood . . . and therefore we’re all in the Gospel vocation together: the laity and clergy alike. We all

have the task of bringing Jesus Christ to the world and the world to Jesus Christ. So if we accomplish nothing else in the reading of this Pastoral Initiative, let's be so inspired to grow in our knowledge of God, Church, and family and strive to live like a family, in our homes, in our parish, and also in our worldwide community of faith.

That means treating each other with the affection and obedience to the truth which flow naturally from love. That means supporting each other, each according to his or her own unique vocation, in the work of converting the world. Priests need to be better priests. Married couples need to be better married couples. Both need to encourage and reinforce the vocation of each other. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you . . . By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35). If Jesus died for us . . . we can surely live for each other. Jesus who is our life and love must be at the heart of every family.

*Immaculate Heart of Mary, cause of our joy,  
pray for us.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Ted Dwyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

## Joys of Family Life

God designed marriage and family in a magnificently beautiful way. In the stress-filled busyness of life today, God's design has become clouded and remote. We hurry through life always with a nagging thought that says, "My husband is a good man. My wife is a good mother. We have an o.k. marriage, but something is missing...not quite right. There must be something more...."

Because we are afraid of such thoughts, we drown them in more busyness. Still, they whisper to us in those brief moments waiting at a stoplight or standing in line at the grocery store, "There must be something more...Is this all there is....?"

The "something more" is God's design for marriage and family. The original relationship between Adam and Eve was one of mutual trust and self-giving. Both found fulfillment in becoming sincere gifts to one another and always sought the good of the other. It was only when Adam and Eve chose to reject God's plan that the relationship between man and woman was marred. Self-giving was replaced by selfishness; a spirit of love became a spirit of competition.

Much like Adam and Eve, we have a tendency

toward selfishness. How lonely are our spouses because TV and internet take up the majority of our time for relationship? How much do we hurt one another because internet pornography is “easier” than a relationship? What kind of stress do late nights at work and all consuming extra-curricular activities place on our families?

When Paul Tsongas, a member of the U.S. Senate, found out that he had cancer, he had to re-prioritize his life. He realized that his work schedule was so consuming the only night he would have to spend with his wife and children was several years in the future. He made the statement: “Nobody on his deathbed ever said, ‘I wish I had spent more time on my job.’”

The antidote to all the loneliness, hurt, stress, and separation in our families is making God’s design for marriage and family a priority in our lives. Married love is a spiritual union with God that is intended to be a visible expression of the relationship that God has with the Church, the Bride of Christ. They are so intertwined that Paul switches from one to the *other in Ephesians 5:21*. Husbands and wives are to be “*subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” Wives are to be “*submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and*

*chaste behavior. Let not yours be the outward adorning...but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.... Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pt 3:1-4, 7). Wives are expected to be "well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way' (1 Tm 5:9-10). The ideal goal that is described in Scripture, is one of family harmony and gentleness, mutual self-giving out of love of God, parents devoted to their children and children obedient to their parents, a warm welcome to the home for others, and service to those most in need in the community.*

Through the mutual self-giving of husband and wife, there is openness to a generation of new life, and husband and wife become co-creators with God of new life. As parents, they are the first teachers of their children. Through their parental love and response to children, they teach their children about God's love. Through love, respect, and obedience to their parents, children give their contribution to the family. It is this family that becomes the family God designed.

## The St. Joan of Arc Catholic Family Initiative

While he lived, Pope John Paul II wrote extensively on Family Life and Human Sexuality. He proclaimed without hesitation that one person was the true source of hope for all peoples: Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Man. John Paul II was an instrument of God that has allowed hope for many fathers and mothers who have responded to his desire for a renewal of the family. Many families are strengthening themselves by deepening their prayer life, their personal relationship with Jesus Christ through Mary, and teaching the faith to their children. They are opening themselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their lives and to the rich treasures of the Church's teachings on faith and morals, and on marriage and the family. Families are desirous of becoming salt of the earth and leaven for society.

Therefore it is with great joy that I present to our faith family, **The St. Joan of Arc Catholic Family Initiative**. This Initiative is intended to provide a Five Year plan for families to be renewed. The Initiative will offer a comprehensive plan for Intellectual, Human and Spiritual growth with pastoral opportunities for our families.

The Initiative begins this fall on Tuesday evenings. Beginning in January, Family Night will change to Wednesdays. The evening begins with a carry-in dinner followed by class offerings. We will offer for couples *The Splendor of Love* (John Paul II's Vision for Marriage and Family). This class will be offered Tuesday evenings, Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings as well. For children ages 3 through 5th grade and 6-8th grade, we will offer a children's program that stresses virtues and the saints and brings Catechesis to the home. Tuesday evenings will be a homework free night for Saint Joan of Arc and Patrick school children who participate in the family night. Because this is "family" night, parents must be enrolled in the class for children to participate. For young adults, ages 18-35, Father Hasser will facilitate *Faith Conversations with Father Hasser*. For the divorced and single, *Friendship: The Art of Happiness* will be offered. For our more mature faith family members, *A Prayer Primer and Praying with Scripture* will be taught by Father Ted.

Come join us keeping in mind the words of St. Catherine of Siena when referring to a personal relationship with Jesus and his church. She said, "If you are what you should be, you will set the world ablaze."

# Ways to Unite the Family

Centuries of Christian wisdom have shown that certain features in a family are unifying:

- The family must live together. Living together promotes unity and must be given high priority.
- The family must talk together. Jesus told his disciples, “No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you” (John 15:15). Daily conversation needs to happen for good family life.
- The family must pray together. Families need grace that comes through individual prayer and prayer as a family.
- The family must work together. By working on projects together, families develop cooperation and charity towards one another.
- The family must discuss together. This is different from talking together. When problems occur, discussion among family members needs to happen.

- The family must worship together. Every opportunity should be taken to attend Mass together and receive the Sacraments.
- The family must read together.
- The family must eat together. It was during the Last Supper that Christ opened his heart to the world. During family meals, bodies and souls are being fed.
- The family must play together.
- The family must suffer and rejoice together. A family is united through their companionship in suffering. A family bonds also in their spontaneous happiness over the achievement of another.

One of the greatest gifts I have ever received from my parish family is witnessing families that are truly families of life and love.

# Prayer for the Family

## Pope John Paul II

Lord God, from you every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

Father, you are Love and Life.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families in the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of marriage, may prove mightier than all the weakness and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

Through Christ our Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life for ever and ever.

Amen.+

Prayer Text Courtesy of: Women for Faith & Family; <http://wf-f.org/03-1-FamilyPrayer.html>



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