

Bumps, Bruises, and Blessings

It is fitting that we refer to our new model of parish reorganization as Families of Parishes. Like all families, our pioneer Families of Parishes are growing and learning. As our families grow and mature, we discover that some routines continue to work, while others need to be changed.

While some things change, the focus of our families remains:

- ✓ Recognizing each other's gifts and providing everyone the chance to grow;
- ✓ Attending to the needs of each person; and,
- ✓ Passing on beliefs and supporting what our children are learning in our Catholic schools.

Like all families, our pioneer Families of Parishes do not fall from heaven perfectly formed; there are bumps, bruises and blessings, and more will come. While there are some basic guidelines all families can follow, there is no 'family program'. Instead, families offer their members an apprenticeship for living. Mistakes will be made, but our families make it comfortable for members to try, to fail, and to try again.

In our Families of Parishes, we are continuing to learn and to grow in our ability to love, to serve, to welcome others, to communicate, to be faithful, and to be who we are called to be - disciples of Jesus. It is an apprenticeship of discipleship.

In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis offers fitting directions to families:

The strength of the family "lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. For all the family's problems, [the family] can always grow, beginning with love"; (53)

We need three essential phrases! 'Please', 'Thank you', 'Sorry'. (133)

Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in... family life. (136)



Photo credit the Catholic Church England and Wales

There is an old saying that a family that prays together stays together. It is within our families that we first learn who God is. Key to all families is praying together (such as Sunday Mass, grace before meals, reading Scripture, and bedtime prayers). This is true for our Families of Parishes.

Finally, Pope Francis encourages us, as we grow towards becoming better families and Families of Parishes, to "Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine.

May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us" (*Amoris Laetitia* 325).



IN FAMILIES OF PARISHES WE NEED...

OUTREACH AND SERVICE:

All families are called to reach beyond the door of the churches to serve the geographical area of our Family of Parishes. Disciples have concern for all, including those beyond the doors of the church.

TO BE CHURCH:

A new perspective is being cultivated where each of us moves from “I go to Church” to “we are Church”. We are all called to be saints and cannot do it alone; each of us needs God and others. We are saved, and we save others, in community.

VARYING MASS TIMES:

Juggling the demands on any family schedule is not easy. A Family of Parishes will need to discern how best to make the Sunday Eucharist available to all. (Directives have been developed to assist with this.)

PRAYER:

We need God’s help as we work and worship as a Family of Parishes. Our two pioneer Families recognized this and have developed a Family of Parishes prayer.

MISSION:

We are called to be missionary disciples. The Church’s mission must be at the core of what we do. Our mission calls us to: go out and preach the Good News and to baptize (Mt 28:19-20), serve those in need (Mt 25:31-45), work for the liberation of all people (Lk 4), witness our faith, and to give a reason for our hope (1 Pt 3:16).

TO BE AN EVANGELIZING COMMUNITY:

We all need to become comfortable talking about our faith. By being a good neighbour and walking with others in their joys and sufferings, we build relationships of trust. The relationships will help us to serve our neighbour and to share our faith in Jesus.

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION:

Pastoral teams and staff of the Families of Parishes will need to meet regularly, listen to, and talk with each other in order to collaborate. Our pioneer families have affirmed the importance of communication between diocesan staff and pastoral staff, and between pastoral teams and parishioners.

Collaboration begins by recognizing the gifts of the pastoral team and staff, and all the members of the faith community.

COMMUNION AND UNITY IN DIVERSITY:

Each parish has its own identity and culture within the larger Family of Parishes. We strive to balance the diversity of the parishes while at the same time being united in our mission. Pastoral teams acknowledge this diversity while promoting unity and communion.

Watch for part 4 coming soon: “Mission-Oriented Parishes”