

CWG V: The Challenge to Bring Spiritual Depth to Family Life
St. Joseph's Cathedral; No Listening Session; +1 Participant
Report by: Jessica Cota, Synod Delegate

1. How can our parishes bring prayer more into the family life, with specific attention to the multi-cultural dimensions of this challenge?

- Response to the “lost culture of prayer” and traditions: integrating multi-cultural forms of church sanctioned practices into regular church practices/sacraments. For example: the Mexican tradition of the family “presenting children at the Temple” when the children are 3 or years old, or Nigerian tradition of offering an infant to God at the altar by the priest, or the Filipino rosary novena for the dead (after mass). Many of these traditions can occur as an integrated part of the mass as they do not have to be an elaborate “ceremony” and only take just take a few minutes, or can become monthly/quarterly celebrations/traditions within the parish, with several children/families participating in the presentation/offering. Additionally, embracing other cultural practices as Singbangabi, Las Mañanitas to the Virgin Mary on Dec. 12, and other cultural traditions. This will help build a multi-cultural community by learning about other cultures and celebrating different ways of praising God. This will not only engage families to actively participate, but will also instill traditions into newer generations, and create a stronger community within the church, and increase multi-cultural growth and diversity; demonstrating that “all are welcome” by including different forms of prayer.
- Family Bible Study/Prayer Nights/Adoration - having weekly “Family Night,” such as Bible Studies, Prayer Nights, Adoration, Charity nights. In this way, families can come together and increase in their prayer life, and have other families to be their “accountability buddies” with new family prayer goals. All different types of families are invited to attend, and families in different seasons of their parenting, and each age and stage of life should have some form of participation and role at every meeting. Family Charity nights can include, feeding the homeless, visiting the elderly, performing other corporal/spiritual works of mercy as a family/community - we live by faith and action. A good working model of this is from St. Michael's in Poway.

- Bring special attention to people who are new to the parish or recent immigrants, families with persons with special needs (and integrating them into part of the mass), and the elderly, giving all of them a role in the sacraments. Or having others in the parish provide respite for family members needing a break. Having volunteers of the parish bring people who are not able to make it to the church (due to age, disability, or no access to transportation), in order to participate in the sacraments with the parish community.
- Icon of the Holy Family - the parish can provide couples at their wedding ceremony an image of the Holy Family along with the Holy Family prayer, with the intention that the new family will look for aid, counsel, faith, hope, and love to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Hopefully, this image will be displayed in the new home to be a reminder for the the married couple/family to come together to pray every day.
- Hosting Novenas/Prayer Ministries - in different households. Every parish can have a monthly calendar in which a different family is entrusted with a traveling statue (Our Lady, St. Joseph, Holy Family, a patron Saint, etc.), for a day, a week, or 9 days of a novena (as long as the family would like to host); members of the parish community is welcome to go to that family's home to go pray the rosary, or a set of prayers; therefore, encouraging family prayer, and creating a sense of community.

2. What steps can our local church take to increase the participation of families at Mass, particularly in their identities as families?

- “Family Mass,” in which an entire unit family partakes in serving during mass, as lectors, eucharistic ministers, alter serving, ushering, etc.
- Explaining the beautiful intricacies, spiritual depth and significance of the mass and other sacraments. So often people stop attending mass because they do not understand what is going on or its deep traditional origins. If people understand the “why” they are more likely to engage, participate, and return. Priests/deacons at every parish should provide several masses or “classes” offered a few times during the year in which the mass is deeply explained and why, then it would bring another element of depth as to “why we go to mass” and it’s importance. This can be done also for the other sacraments.

3. What specific steps can the diocese take to build a spirituality of care, consolation, love and realism in our families?

- Catechize our people, starting by our married couples, in this way laying a sturdy foundation for their children.
- Teach families how to pray (this value has been lost over time, but can be retaught), and instill the discipline of praying. This can occur in a variety of ways: priest/deacon can explain prayer or give an example of during the homily at masses; having family prayer meetings or bible studies lead by married couple; *assigning a role or designated prayer to each member of the family* (Father - Lord's Prayer, Mother - Hail Mary, Children - Glory Be, Guardian Angel, St. Michael's Prayer; read a section of the bible, etc).
- Spiritual Directors & Marriage/Family Counselors. Parishes should have one to two people designated as that parishes Spiritual Director and Family Counselor. Every person should have access to a spiritual director to challenge and guide their spiritual growth. The Diocese needs to invest in Catholic persons certified to be spiritual directors who are easily accessible to parishioners. This could look like licensed social workers (LCSW) and/or marriage and family therapists (LMFT) who are trained to work with individuals, families, and communities, with the additional training and certification to be spiritual directors. These Spiritual Directors/ Family Counselors could have the dual task to provide "Family Spiritual Direction/Counseling." These Spiritual Directors could aid in marital problems, family crises by counseling them and providing/connecting individuals, married couples, and families with other appropriate resources (such as hands of Christ ministries, or parenting classes, etc); therefore, with these Spiritual Directors we would be healing and addressing many of the concerns that often break up families. These Spiritual Directors could exist within the parish and even meet individuals and/or families in their homes.

4. How can we promote a substantial spiritual life shared between husbands and wives?

- Marriage preparation & Post-Marriage groups - having a community group for newly weds (led by experienced, successful, "veteran" couples). Ensuring individual/family prayer life is occurring, and raising and educating the children in the sacraments.

- Renewal of Marriage Vows - having a designated mass once a month to celebrate, and bless the married couples whose anniversary is that month, and if they would like they can renew their marriage vows. In this way, married couples can celebrate and be reminded of the promise they made to each other. For example: St. Rose of Lima's Annual Wedding at Cana celebration for married couples.
- Marriage/Family Retreats - these do not have to be weekend retreats, but instead can be day retreats for married couples, and even have some family retreats! These should be offered on a regular basis (quarterly).

5. What can lead to a spirituality of evangelization and solidarity in family life rather than a spirituality of insularity?

- As a church community we need to work on our stewardship toward others and the manner in which we welcoming people into our churches. It is not enough to have greeters at the entrance of the church, but we need to truly, genuinely, and personally welcome people into our churches. When people feel welcome, especially on a personal level, they become more involved and will want to return and participate. So often in our churches we go, and sit next to the same people at mass week after week, and don't even know their names, they are but mere acquaintances. If somehow we can create a family community/network within our parish communities where we know those around us on a personal level and know their joys and struggles (aiding when we can), we will be promoting and living out the family life and engaging families.
- Family Weekly Goals - encouraging families to create weekly goals for one another that will enhance every members spiritual growth. For example: inviting a new person/friend to church once a week; creating a family spiritual bouquet with small sacrifices each individual offered that week and presenting it at church (before mass as a family).
- Parish Community Outreach - having weekly/monthly parish events, where all are invited to participate (kids, teens, young adults, married couples, elderly), at Community Outreach Events or for Spiritual/Corporal Works of Mercy - praying in front of abortion clinics, feeding the homeless, visiting the elderly, etc.
- Advocating for families to be foster/adoptive families - like the Holy Family of Nazareth, which was built on foster/adoption by part of St. Joseph's, we need good Catholic families to breach their comfort zone and open their hearts and homes to children in our community who have experienced loss and trauma and provide them

with good Christian values and bring them to the Lord through the Sacraments. Our children of trauma within our own communities need families to love them unconditionally as God loves all of humanity. By bringing a child into their home, they will be living out all of Jesus' teachings of love (as all members of the family will be stretched to new depths of their experience of love and selflessness toward other people, by practicing virtues within their own family). In this manner the family will be practicing and living out their faith in their everyday, and broaden their evangelization through the testament of their foster/adoptive family.