

Parenting: Familiaris Consortio

A Summary

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On November 22, 1981, Pope John Paul II issued Familiaris Consortio or "The Family Community in the Modern World." The Church has always esteemed the family and seen it as a "domestic Church." It is in the family that the first seeds of true Christian living are planted and cared for in an atmosphere of love, mutual help, forgiveness, and selfless giving. The Church itself is the family of God the Father. The Church has a special care for the family as the basic unit of society and the community which first preaches the Gospel to the children of God, bringing them to full human and Christian maturity.

The well-being of both the Church and society are intimately tied to the good of the family. Marriage and family are willed by God in the very act of creation (see Genesis 1 and 2), and find their fulfillment in Christ.

God's plan for marriage and the family begins within the Trinity itself. God Himself is Love (1 John 4:8). The Triune God lives a constant inter-Personal communion. Since we are created in God's image, we are created 'through' love, and 'for' love. So we are called by our very existence to love with our whole self, body and soul. In marriage, this total self-giving is not just biological but truly unites two persons in a partnership of the whole of life.

The mission of the family, then, is to "guard, reveal and communicate love." Families have a profound influence on the Church and on all of human society. They begin this work of building the human community by first building their own communal life within the family.

One important aspect of creating this family community is the task of teaching the children. Parents always remain the primary educators of their children, both in theory and in fact. The primary 'lesson' they teach is how to be a truly human person: one who is free, able to make choices with a properly informed conscience; one able to love, forgive, apologize, take responsibility, and serves others. In sum, the children are to be formed as mature Catholic Christians who live their faith in Christ every day, because that is the example they have seen from their parents every day.

This education touches all parts of the child: body, mind, will, and spirit. It is meant to make them fully human persons. And so the primary means of this education is simply parental love. It takes courage and personal integrity to teach children the truth: that people are more important than things; that human life has infinite value unconnected with wealth, beauty, intelligence, ability, etc.; that all people are equal; that they are lovable and loved; that they are called to chastity and holiness; that the ability to pray is the greatest gift they can have. Education is not just for human success; it must include the truths of our faith, so that in the end, the children become saints along with their parents.

The Pope ends his letter: "May Christ the Lord, the Universal King, the King of Families, be present in every Christian home as He was at Cana, bestowing light, joy, serenity and strength."

The full text of Familiaris Consortio is available from the Vatican:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html