

HOME BASE



An E-journal on Christian Family Life

Mother: What Would Your Child Ask You to Change?

On some days our faces refuse to smile. Mothers know about that. It's much easier to scowl and frown. Mothering is hard work and we want people to recognize that. Parenting jolts, challenges, demands self-sacrifice and prompts wolfish hunger—all before breakfast!

In her book *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Crossway Books © 2005), Carolyn Mahaney recalls a time when "my selfishness robbed me of the joy of caring for my family."

Carolyn and her husband, C. J., routinely invested one-on-one time with their young children. During one such lunch time at a restaurant she began her conversation with her daughter, "Kristin, if there is one thing about Mommy that you could change, what would it be?"

"You haven't been smiling very much lately, Mommy," she replied. "You just haven't seemed very happy."

Mrs. Mahaney admits, "Those words pierced me. I realized in a moment that motherhood had become a duty instead of a joy. I was so focused on the sacrifices that I had failed to appreciate the daily pleasures of raising my children. This had wiped away my smile."

Author Mahaney thought back to the words of Jesus to His disciples after His conversation with the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. The Savior said to His followers, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But, whoever would be great among you must be your

servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

"As mothers, we have a choice," according to Mahaney. "We can either resent the challenge and demands that accompany motherhood and persist in our selfishness, or we can draw from God's grace and receive His help to cheerfully lay down our lives for our children."

This does not require exceptional heroics. "Tender love is not complicated. It does not require a large bank account or creative genius," Mahaney illustrates. "Rather, this love consists of seemingly insignificant activities like cooking, singing, reading, or talking. It includes faithful prayer and encouragement or small gestures of kindness."

What brings a smile back to a mother's face is what tickled the apostle Paul. He rejoiced in reflecting on



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what God had done and continued to do in the lives of the Philippian Christians he served. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer on mine for you all making my prayer with joy" (Philippians 1:3-4).

We mothers can revel in how, through Holy Baptism, God has received our daughter into full and tender communion with Himself. In the good news of the forgiveness of Christ, which she receives in this cleansing God partners with her. Furthermore, He promises that He will bring to completion the work He has begun in her when Jesus returns at the last day.

A mother holds her daughter in her heart because she is a fellow partaker of God's grace. With the affection of Christ Jesus, a mother yearns for the continuing well being of her daughter. She pleads with God that her daughter's love will abound more and more with knowledge and discernment, so that she will approve what is excellent and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. A mother thrills to the thought of her daughter being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (See Philippians 1:6-10.)

As mothers, let's ponder these things in our heart. That will help us more boldly to ask our children, "What would you like for me to change about myself?"

Then, more humbly, with thanksgiving to God we will also focus on what God is already graciously doing in them and in us. That will return to our faces some of the smiles that have been missing.



What's Our Family Life Action Group Up To?

One of the biggest issues our country faces as it ramps up campaigns to elect a new president "may well be one that leaders do not seem to be focused upon: the well-being of America's children," according to an August 2007 survey.

The Barna Group of Ventura, Calif., did the research. Its nationwide telephone conversations involved 1,000 adults age 18 and older, randomly chosen from households in the 48 continental states. The respondents indicated "which of 11 changes were absolutely necessary for the United States to address within the next 10 years."

Eighty-two percent chose "the overall care and resources devoted to children" and "the quality of a public school education" as the top concerns. These were followed by "improving national security" (72 percent); "helping the poor and disadvantaged" (69 percent); "upgrading the reliability and honesty of news reporting" (63 percent); "increasing the nation's investment in environmental protection" (60 percent); and "enhancing the state of marriage and families" (60 percent).

The least significant issues to address were "improving the spiritual state of the country" (53 percent); "increasing people's sense of belonging to a community" (45 percent); enhancing the moral content within entertainment" (44 percent); and "advancing the health of Christian churches" (44 percent).

Now, with national elections almost upon us, have opinions changed? Perhaps.

Here's the big question for us: What do we in our family, congregation and community judge to be "absolutely necessary" or at least "somewhat important" to change for the better in the next five to 10 years?

If our congregation has not yet initiated a **Family Life Action Group**, this fall season may be an appropriate time to do so. The purpose of the group, or one with a similar name, is obvious from its tag. This team of committed Christians, elected by the congregation, or confirmed by the congregation's church council, will identify needs and trends, set reasonable and timed goals, create strategies to achieve these objectives, evaluate the success of these efforts and then follow up with adjustments to the congregation's family life ministries so that they better serve everyone, including single adults.

One task for early 2009 might be to gather opinions from congregation members as well as adults in the community. What changes do they consider “absolutely necessary” or “somewhat important” to strengthen family relationships? How can we better grasp God’s purposes for marriage and the family and improve our skills of caring for one another? How can we help connect families so that we can learn from and support one another in habits and behaviors that rely on God’s grace in Christ Jesus and imitate His servant attitude? How can we more effectively bring healing to families that hurt and sense they are falling into wrack and ruin? How can families bolster and sustain meaningful ties with their single adult children?

Our congregation’s Family Life Action Group could also help us gear up for a spring 2009 emphasis on reinforcing our marginal families. They are the borderline, indifferent, inactive and seemingly disinterested adults and children who may characterize as many as 40-45 percent of our congregation.

Where to begin a positive, constructive building process with them? The apostle Paul counsels, “Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one



another and to everyone. Rejoice always, and pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5:13-18).

We also learn from our Lord Jesus, who endured so much for us, according to the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, so that we do not grow weary or fainthearted. “Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed . . . See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God” (Heb. 12:12-15).

Now is the time for us to ask our Family Life Action Group what’s up for 2009? Or, to ask ourselves, “How can we create a Family Life Action Group to help us get started?”

“How can we better grasp God’s purposes for marriage and the family and improve our skills of caring for one another?”

About Pre-Nuptial Agreements

Most of us know the nature of a pre-nuptial agreement. It's a legal contract. A bride and groom sign it before their marriage ceremony. It precisely details the legal rights of each, identifying who owns a piece of real estate or household furniture, for example, and explaining what literally happens when the couple separates or gets a divorce. The purpose of the contract is to avoid nasty quarrels and bitter disappointments and promote harmony between a husband and wife. Many of today's new couples are being advised to initiate a pre-nuptial agreement.

Attorney Stephen Bloom, author of *The Believer's Guide to Legal Issues* (Living Ink Books) and "Good News on the Law" columnist for *Good News Daily* (www.goodnewsdaily.net), advises couples differently. He believes that pre-nuptial agreements put the sacred covenant of marriage on "shaky ground."

Bloom writes, "God calls husband and wife to be unified—to live as one, to share freely, to trust and honor each other in every way . . . The whole psychology of pre-nuptial agreements encourages each spouse to think of herself or himself as separate from the other, to be suspicious of the other, and to hold on tightly to 'what's yours' and keep it from the other! It's the opposite of unity."

Convinced that he answers to a higher authority, Bloom cites Genesis 2:24, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Bloom admits that his perspective "does not fit the conventional model of standard legal counsel for engaged couples."

Whether we are engaged to be married, or have divorced, or lost a spouse in death and are considering a second marriage, or are parents and grandparents advising loved ones contemplating marriage, we need the instruction of Holy Scripture and the leadership of the Holy Spirit to discern and separate ourselves from anything that pits a husband and wife against each other. Our priorities focus on what intensifies the oneness that God brings to a man and woman when He couples them as husband and wife.

Our congregation and pastor may assume that when we help prepare couples for marriage we should concentrate on the spiritual dimensions of this divine institution.

That's true, of course. But, we should also think in the practical terms of daily life. How many couples will actually consult anyone in the fields of law, economics,



or even medicine before they tie the knot? However, they will talk with their pastor regarding the marriage service and its meaning. That's our opening to speak of marriage more comprehensively.

Our task in Christ's church includes encouraging couples in all things to "walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true) and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:8-10). Christian couples, with the assistance of our congregation, can learn to approach all the facets of marriage in the light of God's Word. We serve them best when we lovingly and openly share that every part of marriage is precious, sacred, and in God's design, natural and of huge importance.

When God created humanity, He fashioned Adam and Eve to complete each other. He planned from the beginning that they live together as husband and wife, not alone. Only then could they live out one of the purposes of their unique creation, namely, human survival.

When Jesus engaged people in conversations about the husband/wife relationship He revealed His will for them. He explained, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

A man and a woman who consider marriage to each other can best enhance the oneness God grants them in their love by entering only into agreements that solidify their desire to share themselves through faith in Christ in every way, all the time, with everything they have, fully devoted to each other.

Tip-offs About Dating Abuse

One of God's purposes for giving us the sixth commandment may easily be obscured for us parents. We are aware that when God commands, "You shall not commit adultery," He protects His gift of marriage. Martin Luther comments on the meaning of this commandment, "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other."

We need to remind one another, however, that our unmarried teens are also in challenging relationships, even though they may be years away from being a husband or wife. It's these teens for whom Dr. Heidi Sallee, a pediatrician at Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center and an assistant professor of pediatrics at the St. Louis University School of Medicine, has some concerns. She wants parents to be on the alert.

"Dating violence is present in every segment of our population," Sallee says. "Your background, where you live, your economic status, and your race mean nothing. In your neighborhood a teen is being abused by a partner. It's alarming" (*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, February 25, 2008).

Dr. Bob Wilmott, chief of pediatrics at Cardinal Glennon, argues that young women, ages 16-24, "are especially at risk of being victimized, because this

period in their lives is often characterized by struggles with self-awareness and confidence issues."

Sallee adds that "because these girls are just entering the world of relationships, they don't know that abuse is wrong. Unfortunately, that sets a precedent for future relationships. Parents must intervene early on to educate their kids on healthy relationships."

Wilmott suggests that parents keep an eye out for their children's "lack of interest in previously important hobbies and sports, constant worry about being available for a partner's call, text or e-mail and withdrawal from long-time friends to spend more time with their dating partner." He also counsels parents to "get to know their kids' friends," boyfriend or girlfriend, especially. It's important to know where they go together and how they invest their time. Help them develop the habit of going out in groups with other friends.

We can also profit from our own voluntary support groupings. Our congregation can help us by providing opportunity for us to meet with other parents and teachers from Sunday, weekday and confirmation classes, as well as Lutheran elementary and high schools. Here we can share with, encourage, shore



up and affirm one another as we reflect on what we believe and put into practice relative to interpersonal relationships, because we are together the people of God. For example:

- Human sexuality is a delightful gift of God. It always has been. When He reviewed His creative genius at the conclusion of the first six days for His world, “God saw all that He had made and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).
- We highly value marriage because it is God’s institution, the lifelong joining of one man with one woman. Jesus said, “What God has joined together let man not separate” (Mark 10:9).
- We recognize and control sexual urges in a godly way. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11-12).
- We engage in sexual intercourse exclusively with our spouse. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (Heb. 13:4).
- In all our human relationships, we reflect to one another God’s compassion and care for us. “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love as Christ loved us, and



gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. 5:1-2).

■ When we fail to keep our commitments, we confess our sins to God and to the one against whom we have sinned. We ask God to forgive us for Jesus’ sake. We also seek the forgiveness of the person we have wronged. “If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

■ When someone sins against us, we follow the apostle Paul’s instruction, “If anyone is caught

in any transgressions, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourselves, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:1-2).

Dr. Sallee prompts us parents, “Kids need to know what healthy relationships look like. If parents talk about the characteristics of healthy relationships—mutual respect, love and fairness—there’s a great chance that their children will engage in meaningful and rewarding relationships.”

Our gracious Lord enters into a loving and forgiving relationship with us when he brings us to faith in Jesus. In this union he empowers us to enjoy and build authentic and significant relationships with the people around us. By God’s grace, our children will grow with us, if we stay alert to what they need from us.



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