

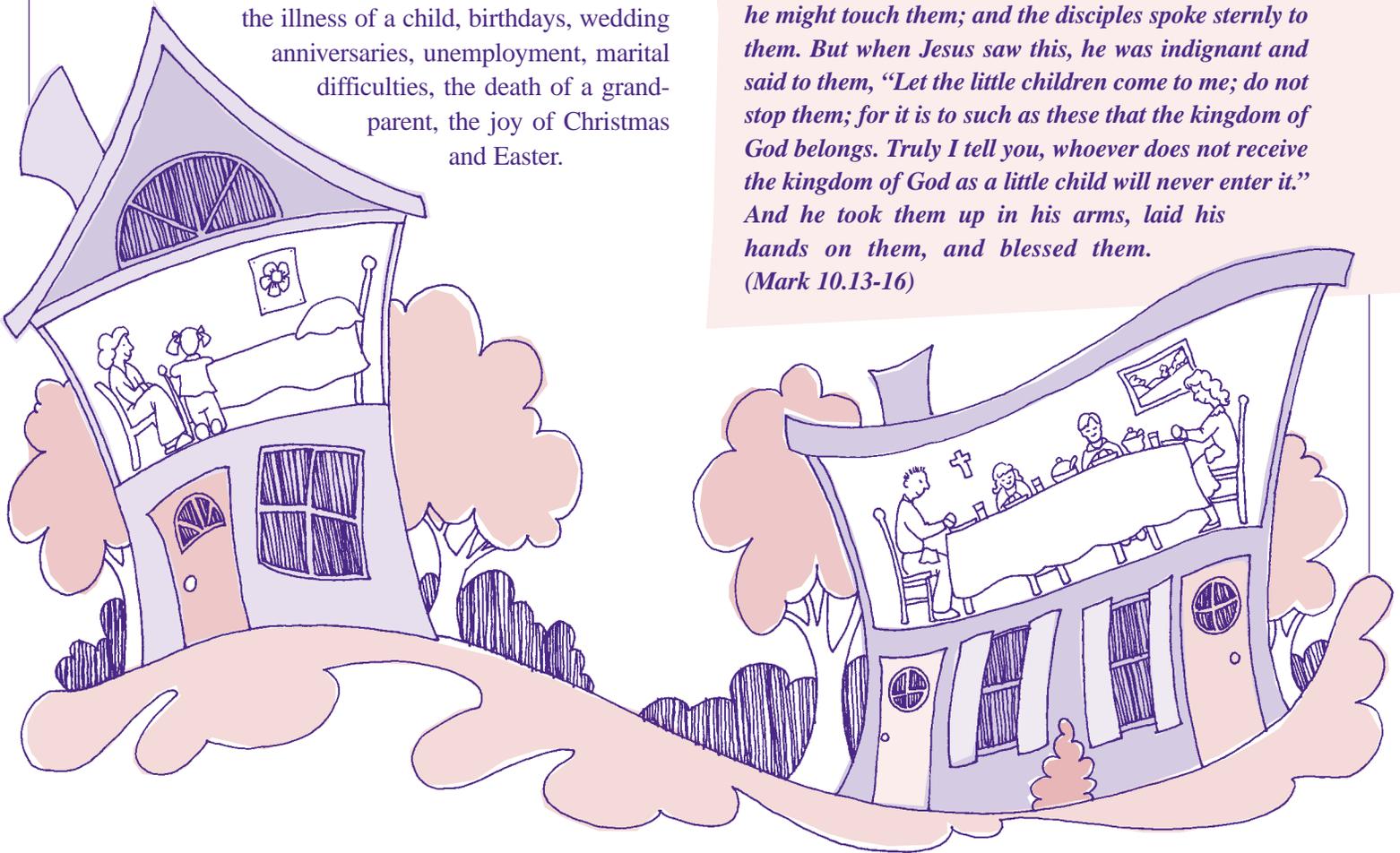
Come let us pray!

A Prayerful Home – A Prayerful Life

Creating the physical and spiritual space for family prayer can seem like a huge challenge to parents who are already busy at home and with their jobs. But family life is already full of intense, loving experiences, many of which inspire parents to turn to God either individually or together. Grace-filled occasions that can be the source of a new prayerful life in the family include the birth or adoption of a child, the baptism of a child, the first day of school, the illness of a child, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, unemployment, marital difficulties, the death of a grandparent, the joy of Christmas and Easter.

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family invites families to follow the pathway of family prayer. Don't hesitate – God is already there expecting you and your children! Explore, discover, enjoy! Recognize God at work in your family, and see that words of prayer are already written in your hearts. Let God into your life, and learn how to pray.

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.
(Mark 10.13-16)



Create a small “Church at home” to show the pathway to God

Every family is a small *Church at home*, a “domestic Church.” This belief has been deeply ingrained in Church tradition. But what does this rather surprising expression to be “a domestic Church” mean for today’s parents? It means that Jesus, who is at the centre of the Church, is also at the centre of the family. We are united with Jesus and with one another through him. In this way a family is a domestic Church.

How do you create a *Church at home*? Behind this idea lie questions asked by many Christian parents: How do we bring our children into the world of faith? How do we help them to enter into a relationship with God? How do we bring them to Jesus?

How do you help this small “Church at home” to appear and grow?

By following Jesus’ own example! In the story of Jesus and the children from the Gospel of Mark, we see Jesus playing a very active role. He does not teach or explain, nor does he question. Instead, he interacts with the children; he shows his love by touching them. This model is perfect for parents: he puts his arms around the children, lays his hands on them and blesses them. You need only follow his example in order to show children how Jesus is present in their lives.

“Jesus took them up in his arms”

The children welcomed with joy Jesus, who reached out to them. The confidence of children is so innate and simple. They open up to Jesus, knowing that he loves them. He was the friend of children. To know that they are welcomed and appreciated, and to let themselves be loved tenderly: this is God’s desire for all his children, big and small. As parents, you have the delicate task of helping them to know this God of Love.

“Jesus laid his hands on them”

The laying on of hands is a special type of intercessional prayer that is regularly used in the Church. Through intercessional prayer we pray for one another, adding our voices to the spoken and unspoken prayers of others as an expression of our love for them.

At baptism and confirmation the laying on of hands is in a prayer to the Holy Spirit. In the anointing of the sick, the minister prays by placing his hands on the person and asks for healing. At special times, at the end of the eucharistic celebration, the priest gives the final

blessing by the laying on of hands. Parents may also use this intercessional prayer for their children.

God certainly hears all requests that parents make on behalf of their children through intercessional prayer. Just as you hold a child who needs reassurance or place your hand on the forehead of a feverish child, feel free to use this very natural gesture to pray by taking your children into your hands, as parents.

“Jesus blessed them”

Some families regularly bless their children and ask God to protect them. This is an act full of meaning. *The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.* (Numbers 6.24-26) A blessing from one’s parents is a small gesture that carries with it extraordinary richness and meaning. Through this action, the parent entrusts the child to God and asks for all that the child needs, for the child to feel God’s presence, and for his or her peace of body, spirit and heart.

Your child can easily take part in this little ritual, which can be done at bedtime when you have some quiet time together. Make the sign of the cross on your child’s forehead as you say how much you and God love him or her: “I bless you, my little child of God! I entrust you to Jesus; sleep well until the morning.” The blessing could also be part of the daily comings and goings. Over time your child may want to bless you as well.



Praying comes naturally

In practical terms, what can you do with your children to help them to develop a living relationship with God through prayer?

It should be something real that emerges from your family life and becomes second nature. Where should you begin? Should you speak to them of the God and Father of Jesus Christ? Yes, but how, and in what words? By showing them how to pray.

But what is prayer?

Praying is placing oneself in the presence of God, becoming aware that he is always with us. Praying is letting oneself be looked at by a God who loves us. Praying is reopening a conversation that God launched at our birth: a conversation where we recall his majesty and beauty, where we entrust him with the people we love, where we express our poverty and the fact that we need him. Praying is “returning home” and letting God raise us and take us in his arms. Praying is discovering he is there, in loving expectancy.

Prayer consists mainly in discovering the presence of God in our family lives, in order to listen in the full meaning of the word *Shema Israel! Listen!*

Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6.4-9)

Do this in any way you can. Express joy, remark on the beauty that surrounds you, and stop to contemplate silence as well as the setting sun with your children; admit your mistakes; ask for forgiveness; empathize with those who are suffering. Therein lies a natural path to learning how to listen for God’s presence.

While it is true that prayer is a certain path to God, is that where children begin?

According to many parents, children must first be introduced to *God’s presence* through the many little events of family life. God resides at the centre of your life together as a family, woven into concrete actions. Parents are called by God so that they may contribute to the sanctification of the world from within the family like leaven.¹ Parents, and grandparents for that matter, are disseminators of faith, bearers of meaning; they are the most meaningful believers for their children.

As your family becomes more aware of God’s presence in your daily lives, you may wish to explore different ways of praying. At this point you can decide on the rhythm, the time and the way to pray. There are a great many excellent resources available to enable you to begin to pray as a family.

¹ John Paul II, *Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, no. 15.



Come, let us pray!

• **Reading illustrated Bible stories** can help you make connections with your own family's story, which is holy because it is lived through faith in God. Children can be nourished by the word of God in their own way.

Illustrated stories about the life of Jesus can show how to live according to the Gospel. Younger children are naturally attentive when listening to a story. Reading a small part of the story of Jesus' life each evening from an attractively illustrated book will capture any child's interest. Present Jesus as a hero! He who became our brother, our friend, is the saviour of the world. Our true Saviour! The story of Jesus' birth in particular is fascinating to all children and would be a good starting point. Reading stories about the saints is another way to help children learn about God. How many holy people have shown us the way to God?

• **The community at prayer during the Sunday Eucharist** is a wonderful opportunity for the family to become part of the life of the Church within a community of believers. Some people might say that younger children cannot understand this celebration; however, parents must live the experience to develop a deeper meaning for themselves. Then they will be able to find the words to gently invite their children into this unique liturgical experience which, little by little, will expose them to the spiritual life of the community. When children are present at the Sunday gathering, it is important that they be welcomed and recognized and able to play an active role.

Families might want to start a tradition whereby Sunday is treated as a special day of celebration. A treat or surprise could be a concrete way of giving meaning to the day and of showing, each Sunday, that this day is "the Lord's day": a day of Joy, Peace, Rest, Communion and Celebration, with candles, flowers, music and decorations!

• **Advent–Christmas and Lent–Easter** are two special liturgical times that are filled with meaningful symbols. During these times, families can easily follow their traditions at the same rhythm as the Church in prayer. They reveal all kinds of concrete signs of the love of God, who became one of us.

– *At Christmas time, making a nativity scene out of salt and flour dough or cardboard and construction paper is an excellent way of talking about the meaning of this religious celebration where Jesus is given to us as the greatest of gifts.*

– *At Easter, observing nature as it wakes from winter slumber provides an opportunity to explain the transition from death to life as celebrated in the Easter mystery. You may want to plant seeds and watch the small shoots grow, nourished by water and the light and heat of the sun.*

– *The story of your child's baptism can be the starting point of a discussion about the sacramental symbols of water, light, the sign of the cross and the meaning of new life received as a gift.*

– *With children ages three and up, decorating a leafless tree with colourful ribbons, hung each day during Lent to mark kind words and acts of selflessness performed out of love for someone else, can help to develop the child's conscience. By Easter your tree will be full of colour and life!*

If God is often referred to in the family, if the life of Jesus is told enthusiastically and if everything can lead to prayer, children will become close to God and the family will really become the "house of God." (Hebrews 3.3-6) Even when prayer is most difficult with your children, your love for them will also be a prayer. Let the Spirit of the Living God live among you without reservation... *for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.* (Matthew 18.20) This is how parents can let their little "Church at home" develop.

The sign of the Cross

*In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

The prayer Jesus taught us

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

Grace before meals

*Bless us, O Lord, and these your gifts which we are about to
receive from your bounty. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Angel of God

*Angel of God, my Guardian dear,
to whom God's love entrusts me here,
ever this day be at my side,
to light and guard, to rule and guide.
Amen.*

Psalm 27.4

*One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.*



A prayer of praise

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

To Mary, our holy Mother

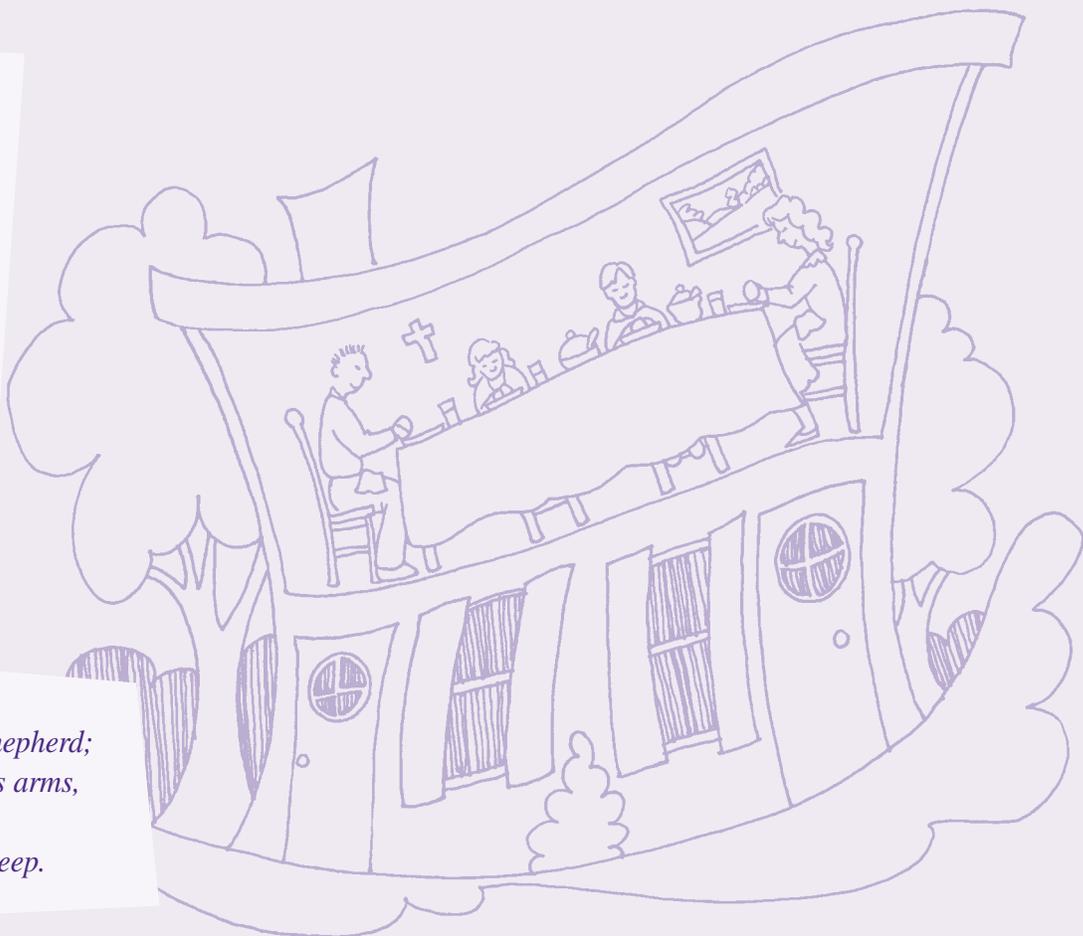
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Grace after meals

We give you thanks, Almighty God, for these and all the benefits we receive from your bounty, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 40.11

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.



Members of the Board of Directors of COLF are: Archbishop Bertrand Blanchet, Dr. Bridget Campion, Ms. Louise Couture, Mr. Grant Ertel, Ms. Dolores Fehr, Ms. Hélène Leboeuf, Mr. André Normand and Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, SJ.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted, 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

The English translation of *The Lord's Prayer* and the *Gloria Patri* © 1988, The English Language Liturgical Consultation.

Come, Let Us Pray! Copyright © COLF, 2001. All rights reserved.