



SESSION ONE

The Reality of Family Life Today

Coping with change is never easy and all societies find it especially difficult to integrate rapid change... Yet life today in our postmodern world seems to be defined by change. In such a society, security is easily lost, and loneliness can go hand in hand with a frenetic life style... We must learn to dialogue with an ever changing human reality, in order to incarnate in new ways the meaning of life as we understand it in Jesus Christ. (*Share the Good News*, 15)



1. Welcome, Introduction and Overview (10 min)

Leaders introduce themselves to the whole group, and then in small groups participants introduce themselves.

Leaders introduce the programme: This six-session programme explores Pope Francis' document about family life called *The Joy of Love*. The purpose of this short programme is to provide us with the opportunity to discuss what Pope Francis has to say in light of our own experiences of being part of a family and to reflect on the reality of family life today. Each night follows a simple structure and format. We will explore a topic drawn from *The Joy of Love* each night. We start by looking at our own experience in relation to that topic. Then, in the light of that experience, we look at what Pope Francis has to say.

Our first topic is *The Reality of Family Life Today*. We begin by looking at a video clip exploring

different people's experience of family today and then talk about that in our small groups. Then we hear some of what Pope Francis says about the elements of modern culture that support family life and those that make it difficult. We will then talk about that in our groups.

We hope to give everyone a chance to share their own experience of family life and their response to what Pope Francis says. This is what he has asked us to do, especially in preparation for the World Meeting of Families.

Pope Francis emphasises the huge importance of treating each other with respect, especially when we have different views on things. Can we chat for a few minutes on how we can show this respect to each other in this group?

Draw out some guidelines which will help people to communicate in a way that enables everyone to have their voice heard and respected, for example:

- Everybody is made to feel welcome
- Everybody gets a chance to speak – we don't interrupt or take over
- Everybody is entitled to their views – we can disagree, but we don't attack or belittle each other
- Ensure all mobile phones are turned off/silenced

At the end of each night we will record anything we think should be fed back to the World Meeting of Families Office so that it will form part of their listening process in planning the event.

2. Video Clip 1: Vox Pop (5 min)

In this piece of video you will hear a number of people who have different experiences of family life speak about their experience of the reality of family life today.



3. Discussion (15 min)

- What did you hear?
- What surprised you?
- Had you been asked, what would you have said?



4. Video Clip 2: Input from *The Joy of Love* on the Challenges Facing People Today (20 mins)

One of the reasons why Pope Francis wrote the document *The Joy of love*, after worldwide consultation, is because he believes that there is great wisdom among all members of the Church, including the young, the old, those on the edge or marginalised, as well as those at the centre. That includes this group gathered here this evening. Pope Francis wrote this document for everyone who belongs to a family whatever their role, be it parent, sister, brother, spouse, grandparent etc. Again, that includes all of us here tonight.



“It is my hope that, in reading this text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity” (7)





The Joy
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“The Family is a good that society cannot do without and it ought to be protected,” (44)

“The desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and this is an inspiration to the Church,” (1)

“The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity,” (54)

Families are important for the future of the world and the future of the Church. The existence of families is even crucial for people to grow into healthy, happy human beings. Pope Francis wants to bring good news to families that will sustain them in the concrete realities of their daily lives. He says that ‘no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed’. Whatever its shape, the family is the first place where people experience love, where they learn that they are loved and how to love in return. This experience of love enables people to build a positive self-image and to create their own healthy relationships.

The desire of all, including young people, for a relationship based on permanent, exclusive love is a sign of hope for families. Everyone wants to be loved and they need to know that the love they experience will last.

Pope Francis refers to many positive aspects of today’s culture: people want to make mature decisions based on what they believe to be right, rather than simply making choices based on conformity. As a result people feel more in control of their own destinies and more fulfilled in the reality of their lives.

A recognition of the equal dignity of men and women facilitates a greater sharing of roles and responsibilities in families. This also helps people to feel more in control of their own future and gives individuals the possibility of achieving their own goals as well as contributing to the overall good of the family.



On the other hand, many of the values of popular culture can also work against family life and challenge the concept of permanent commitment to another person. When individualism and self-fulfillment are valued to the exclusion of concern for the other and for the common good, family relationships can

be weakened and each member of the family sees himself/herself as an isolated unit. People can become more absorbed in their personal fulfilment than in exploring how they can bring their gifts and talents to the service of others in their family and in the wider world.

“Freedom of choice makes it possible to plan our lives and to make the most of ourselves. Yet if this freedom lacks noble goals or personal discipline, it degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others,” (33)

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Pope Francis recognises the stresses on family life caused by factors such as unemployment, the pace of modern living, lack of suitable housing and poverty. Such stresses can cause people to be less patient with one another and less able to accommodate the needs of others in the family, leading to disharmony, even disintegration in families. He states that families deserve good family policy from political, social and financial authorities.

“Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals,” (44)

An increasing reliance on social media can lead people to think that life and human relationships can be navigated in the same way as social media sites and online relationships. A social media mindset can lead people to expect that relationships can be connected, disconnected, blocked or reconnected at will and does not take account of the complex nature of individuals and of human relationships. Pope Francis obviously

recognises the positive aspects of social media. He uses it himself on a regular basis, but he reflects on how young people are bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth and maturity through social media. Young people, in particular, need to be educated to recognise the values of social media for what they are.

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“They believe, along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly “blocked” (39)

The home is where children first learn about their faith. Faith is transmitted in the home not simply through the things that parents say to their children about their faith, but through the way they live their lives in the home and how they reach out to others, especially those in need. Pope Francis also points to the very important role that grandparents play in handing on the faith to their grandchildren.

The Church’s vision for love and marriage is deeply relevant today. While people long for permanent, committed, loving relationships the

Church’s vision for marriage will continue to be relevant. Pope Francis encourages the Church to find new ways of proclaiming this message to people in today’s world. People today will not accept something that is proposed purely from the perspective of authority, ‘because we say so’! Pope Francis says that rather than criticising or trying to impose, we need to find ways of presenting, in an attractive and appealing way, the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and family.





“As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failures” (35)

5. Discussion (20 min)

- What did you hear in people’s experience of family life that is similar to what Pope Francis is saying?
- If you could speak directly to Pope Francis, what would you want him to hear about family life?
- At the end of this session what thoughts are you bringing away with you about the reality of family life in the world today?



6. Record Participants’ Responses

At this point each evening it is recommended that you invite the participants to fill in a summary sheet, which has two purposes. Firstly, it will provide a brief record of some of the main points that emerged from the night’s discussions, which can be referred to at the introduction of next week’s session. Secondly it is a means of

capturing strongly felt responses to the content of tonight’s session. These will be fed back to those who are planning the World Meeting of Families so that they can be heard in an appropriate way at the event. Leaders are invited to meet for a few minutes at the end of the session to collate the responses recorded on the comment sheets.



7. Video Clip 3: Closing Reflection (5 min)



8. Tea/Coffee





COMMENT SHEET

Available for photocopying

1. What are some of the main points that emerged in the discussion tonight that we can bring forward in summary to next week's session?

2. Are there points emerging from tonight's discussions that you want to have raised at the World Meeting of Families?
