

THE FAMILY PREPARES AND FOLLOWS YOUNG FAMILIES (John 4:43-53)

Preparing young people for marriage and family is necessary in our times. In some countries, it is still the families themselves that, according to ancient customs, ensure the passing on to young people of the values concerning married and family life. They do this through a gradual process of education or initiation. But, the changes that have taken place within almost all modern societies demand that not only the family but also the Church should be involved in the effort.

The Church has made notable efforts to promote marriage preparation, for example, by offering courses for engaged couples. All this is worthwhile and necessary. But, it must not be forgotten that preparing young people for future life as a couple is above all the task of the family. To be sure, only spiritually mature families can adequately assume that responsibility. Hence, we should point out the need for a special solidarity among families. This can be expressed in various practical ways as, for example, by associations of families for families. The institution of the family is strengthened by such expressions of solidarity, which bring together not only individuals but also communities, with a commitment to pray together and to seek together the answers to life's essential questions. Is this not an invaluable expression of the apostolate of families to one another? It is important that families attempt to build bonds of solidarity among themselves. This allows them to assist each other in the educational enterprise: parents educate other parents and children other children. Thus, a particular tradition of education is created, which draws strength from the character of the "domestic church" proper to the family.

This holds true especially for young families, which, finding themselves in a context of new values and responsibilities, are more vulnerable, especially in the first years of marriage, to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children. Young married couples should learn to accept willingly, and make good use of, the discreet, tactful, and generous help offered by other couples that already have more experience of married and family life. Thus, within the ecclesial community -- the great family made up of Christian families -- there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families, each one putting at the service of others its own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective, and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values that are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care. Thus, young families will not limit themselves merely to receiving, but in their turn, having been helped in this way, will become a source of enrichment for other longer established families through their witness of life and practical contributions.

In her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly in relationship with its demands of communion and service to life. The Church must likewise help them to harmonize the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society.

When children are born, and the married couple becomes a family in the full and specific sense, the Church will still remain close to the parents in order that they may accept their children and love them as a gift received from the Lord of life, and joyfully accept the task of serving them in their human and Christian growth.

--Pontifical Council For The Family