

THE FAMILY: HEART OF EVANGELIZATION

Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: The family is placed at the service of building up the kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church. The Christian family is called upon to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church in a way that is original and specific, by placing itself, in what it is and what it does, as an intimate community of life and love, at the service of the Church and of society.

Since the Christian family is a community in which the relationships are renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments, the family's sharing in the Church's mission should follow a community pattern: The spouses together as a couple, the parents and children as a family, must live their service to the Church and to the world. They must be "of one heart and soul: (cf. Acts 4:32) in faith, through the shared apostolic zeal that animates them, and through their shared commitment to works of service to the ecclesial and civil communities.

The Christian family also builds up the kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life. It is, thus, in the love between husband and wife and among the members of the family -- a love lived out in all its extraordinary richness of values and demands: totality, oneness, fidelity, and fruitfulness -- that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.

Thus, the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant will manifest to all people the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together.

By sharing in her life and mission, the family is called to carry out its task of education in the Church. She wishes to carry out her educational mission above all through families who are made capable of undertaking this task by the sacrament of matrimony, through the "grace of state" which follows from it and the specific "charism" proper to the entire family community.

Certainly one area in which the family has an irreplaceable role is that of religious education, which enables the family to grow as a "domestic church". Religious education and the catechesis of children make the family a true subject of evangelization and the apostolate within the Church. We are speaking of a right intrinsically linked to the principle of religious liberty. Families, and more specifically parents, are free to choose for their children a particular kind of religious and moral education consonant with their

own convictions. Even when they entrust these responsibilities to ecclesiastical institutions or to schools administered by religious personnel, their educational presence ought to continue to be constant and active.

--The Pontifical Council for the Family