



You,
Family,
and
Church

Contents

Page 2: Living Faith as a Family

Page 3: Life in the Parish

Page 4: Coming to Mass

Page 6: Baptism

Page 8: Schools

Living Faith as a Family

L'Love one another' is the gospel commandment at the heart of family life. If the world is to be a place of self-giving love, then it has to start with the tiniest cell of human loving: the married couple, the family.

Through countless everyday caring actions in the lives of spouses, parents, children,

extended family, neighbours and friends, the family is a source of hope in the world at large. From the life-giving presence of a newborn child to the wisdom of an elderly grandparent, 'all members... have the grace and responsibility of building, day by day, the communion of persons, making the family "a school of deeper humanity": this happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged; where there is mutual service every day; where there is a sharing of goods, of joys and of sorrows' (Pope John Paul II, in a letter *Familiaris Consortio* (the letter's Latin title means 'Community of the Family'), FC, 21).

It is without doubt a precious and awe-inspiring way in which families bring new life into the world. Each new person bears the imprint of the divine image, the original blessing of the Creator. Many families find room in their hearts and homes for children who are without a home.

Bringing forth or adopting a child includes the responsibility of helping that new person to live a fully human life. Pope John Paul emphasises that parents are the prime educators of their children. Certainly other people and agencies (like schools) can help. But when it comes to forming a child in God's ways of love, nothing can replace the impact of the parents and the family community. It is in the atmosphere of the

home that a child 'catches' a spirit of love... or discovers its lack. It is through the spiritual life of the home that a child first senses a reverence for God... or feels the absence of faith.

It is in the family unit that a child first learns 'those social virtues which every society needs' (FC, 37), including a spirit of service and self-sacrifice.

The task of the Christian family to educate its members is a true ministry through which the Gospel is spread, said Pope John Paul. Do not think of your family responsibilities as something separate or secondary to the mission of the Church. When you teach your children (and they teach you!) what it means to love, to pray, to celebrate the sacraments



and to serve our neighbour, you are not just 'helping' the Church's mission - you are living it!

So central is the family to the life and mission of the Church that it is often called the 'domestic church' or the 'little church'. 'The family called together by word and sacrament as the Church of the home, is both teacher and mother; the same as the worldwide Church' (FC, 38).

Handing on Faith as a Parent

As a parent, you have a most important role in helping bring to fulfilment the potential for love and life in your children. Parents are the first teachers of their children by what they do and say. This is true about the life of faith as much as everything else.

Our community is delighted that you are choosing to bring your child up as a Christian, a member of the Roman Catholic church. As a parish we will do all that we can to support you in your role as parents, and we respect the role which is uniquely yours - that of being the first teachers of your children in the faith.

We will strive to support you in your responsibilities through our parish community, its ministers and its groups; and through its schools. But no-one and nothing can replace the role of a parent.



Life in the Parish

We have a variety of groups and activities that are likely to particularly meet the needs of young parents. Life in a city like London can be quite a lonely life. These groups offer parents an opportunity for parents to meet each other, and to find a welcome within our community

These groups and activities include:

Parents and Toddlers group

One of the resources most likely to be appreciated by young parents is our popular group for Parents and Toddlers. This is held from 0930 to

12 noon Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays in the parish hall – and in the parish house garden on fine summer days.

Union of Catholic Mothers

Many of the parish's young mothers have joined the UCM. The group offers an opportunity to come together in prayer and offers a happy setting for meeting and offering one another friendly support and encouragement in the responding to the challenge and joys which are part of the vocation of motherhood.

As children grow older there are opportunities for them to join in a variety of parish activities - particularly during school holiday times, when we try organise workshops and trips out. When parents find that their children do not make such extreme demands on their time, as when they are very young there are a variety of parish activities available to join in. Details of activities for children are always given in their own newsletter as well as in the adults' newsletter.

Coming to Mass

Please know that you are welcome to come to any Mass in the parish, and to bring your children with you. Please choose which ever Sunday Mass best suits your needs as a family.

The 9am Mass is especially popular for families with younger children - if only because the children are up and about early, even on a Sunday morning. However sometimes the large number of people present at this Mass can be disturbing for younger children, and in turn this can cause stress and distraction for many parents. You have our sympathy, and our support!

Introducing younger children to 'church'

A time does come when children are able to take responsibility for how they behave at Mass. Until then the responsibility lies with the parents. It is a matter for parents to decide what is helpful by way of getting their children used to coming to Mass, and learning how to take part.

Long before children are able to understand the words we use at Mass, or why the Mass is important they can learn to respond to the prayerfulness of what we do. They can learn to make the sign of the Cross, and to pray. They can learn reverence for the church building, and learn how to sit quietly, with their parish family.

Many parents take the plunge straight away and bring their children to Mass



weekly from their first week of life. Others decide to bring their children once a month. Still others might begin by bringing the children to weekday Mass when things are quieter and so it is easier for them to get used to the church.

Some parents find it helpful, during their children's earlier years, to take it in turns to stay at home looking after their child(ren), so each gets a chance to experience a relatively peaceful Sunday Mass.

However, there is no one way that suits everyone. Each family needs what is best for them. However there are two things to keep working at:

- Make sure that you yourselves are able to come to Mass each Sunday.
- Helping the children take part in the Mass as they are able. Certainly by the time they are aged 3 1/2 or 4, the children should be joining with us in the actions of the Mass, making the Sign of the Cross with us, becoming familiar with the songs and melodies of the Mass, kneeling when we kneel, standing when we stand, and so on. Often, with the right support and encouragement, these are things children take will show signs of learning at any even earlier age.

Making your child comfortable in church.

Younger children will often sit more quietly if they bring a toy to church with them. *Please make sure this is a soft toy* which does not make loud noises when dropped or banged on the bench (it happens!). If they bring a book, try to make sure it is a book of bible stories or about the Mass, so you can make connections between what we hear and do at Mass, and what is in their book.

Please do not give food and drink to your children in church. It generally makes a mess, which there is little time for you to clear up before the next Mass begins. It also makes it difficult for parents of other children to explain why they are not allowed to 'snack' in church too.

Children will generally find it much easier to engage with what takes place at Mass when the family sits right towards the front of the church or in the transept chapels. This makes it much easier for children to see what is happening and hear, and to be in eye contact with the ministers. Sitting further back there are many more distractions for the children, and they can often see very little.

If your child starts to cry or make a noise

Families with young children often like to use the front chapels. As already said, the children can more easily engage with what is happening on the sanctuary but also because:

- You can use the Respite chapel in the south transept if getting your child to settle is more difficult. You can hear the Mass there and even see some of what is going on. But do resist the temptation to spend the whole Mass in there. It is not the best way to help your child.
- There are side doors that you can use to easily slip out of the church if there is need. These are open for every Saturday evening and Sunday Mass

Dealing with a noisy child is perhaps the most difficult thing for a parent to deal with during Mass. Especially if you get disapproving looks from people around you, or hear 'tut-tuts' while you are trying to do your best, the temptation might be to pick up your child and never come back again!

But be assured you **are** welcome and so is your child. It is **your** church as well as **ours!**

Baptism

It used to be common for children to be baptised at the very earliest opportunity after their birth. Now it is more usual for the family to adjust to its new way of life before bringing the child to church for their Baptism. It is perhaps most common now for children to be baptised between the age of three and six months. You should be aware that, when allocating places, some schools will give first preference to those children who were baptised before they were their first birthday or even younger.

Children aged four or less are baptised as infants. They are baptised on the strength of the faith of their parents, not on the basis of their own faith. Our parish preparation course for the Baptism of children aged 4-0 is therefore really a preparation course for the parents, helping them to consider and even deepen their own faith, and to reflect on how they will share that faith with their children.

Even so, if children are presented for Baptism when they are aged three or four it is important to help the children themselves to understand what is taking place and why.

Children who are still older - children of 5 or 6 or older, ie children of catechetical age - are invited to prepare for Baptism on the basis of their own faith. The preparation which we help them to take part in is aimed at the children themselves. It tries to develop and nurture their faith so that they might be helped to understand what they will promise at their Baptism, and understand what Baptism means.

Children over the age of five would normally have a much more extended period of preparation for Baptism. It would usually include their taking part in the parish's first holy communion programme. They would usually be baptised, confirmed and receive their First Holy Communion in a single celebration.

Preparing for the Baptism of Infants

In our parish we offer preparation for Baptism which has three parts:

1. An initial meeting with a member of the parish team to meet with you, to learn about why you ask for Baptism, and to have a first conversation about the practicalities of the preparation. You will either complete a form there and then, or be given one to take away and complete. When the form is completed and returned you will be given details of the next Baptism Preparation meeting

2. A Baptism Preparation meeting which is hosted by a parish catechist and is attended by a number of parents. It is usually held in the Jubilee Room at Our Lady's at 4pm on a Sunday afternoon. It explores the questions posed on the back of this leaflet. Parents are asked not to bring children or babies to these sessions. The meeting is kept deliberately short to make it easier for parents to arrange for child care.
3. A meeting with the priest or deacon who will be baptising your child. This will usually take place during the week before the Baptism and will focus on the preparation of the Baptism service – including the choice of readings/readers and of any music/hymns you may like. This meeting will normally take place at your home, to make it easier for parents and children to take part in the preparation.

Additional information can be found in the leaflet *Alive in Christ: You, your baby & Holy Baptism*. This leaflet can be downloaded from the parish website or obtained from any member of the Parish Team.

Preparing for the Baptism of older children and of adults

The preparation for such baptisms are less 'standard'. To discuss your particular circumstances and to learn how the parish can best assist you, please speak with one of the Parish Team.



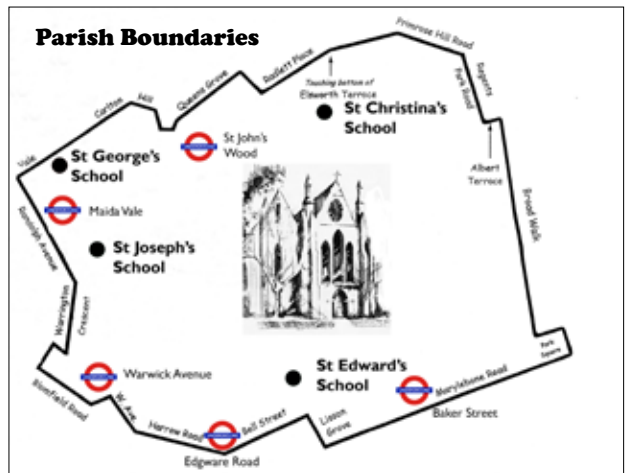
Schools

We are blessed with four Catholic schools in our parish! Three of them are Catholic primary schools. Two of these (St Edward's, Lison Grove and St Joseph's, Lanark Road) are state schools. St Christina's, St Edmund's Terrace is a private (fee-paying) school. Both St Joseph's and St Edward's Schools have nurseries. St George's is a Catholic Secondary school and 6th Form College.

Each school has its own particular criteria for determining admissions. The Governors of the schools determine these criteria to allocate the number of available places amongst the total number of applicants. Governors are required by law to strictly observe their admission criteria in allocating places.

As local Catholic schools are often oversubscribed parents are advised to submit applications to at least their second or third choice schools. This will help minimise the risk of their child not getting a place at a Catholic school, especially where the family does not meet the principal criteria for admission to their first choice school.

For full and up to date information on school admissions please contact the schools themselves directly. Contact details for all local schools can be found on the parish website.



Acknowledgements 'Living Faith as a Family' has been adapted from *Family: An Adventure in Love*. Published by the Home is A Holy Place initiative of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, *Family: An Adventure in Life* includes material first published in Australia © The Story Source, 1998 (PO Box 1106 Maroubra NSW 2035 Australia). Author: Teresa Pirola. Clip Art Images from Religious Clip Art for the Liturgical Year by Steve Erspaner SM © 1992, 1993, 1994 Archdiocese of Chicago. Other images and text © 2007, 2011, Fr Allen Morris

PARISH OF ST. JOHN'S WOOD

Parish Team

Fr. Allen Morris (Rector)

Sr. Brigid Collins (Parish sister)

Rectory and Parish Offices:

54 Lodge Road, London, NW8 8LA. **Email:** stjohswood@rcdow.org.uk

Tel: 020 7286 3214

Website: www.rcsjw.org.uk

The parish is part of the Westminster Roman Catholic Diocese Trust: Registered Charity No. 233699