

FROM THE PASTOR'S



HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH December 28, 2008 B

THIRTEEN TRAITS OF A HEALTHY FAMILY

On this feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth, we can reflect on our family.

We all know the traits of an unhappy or dysfunctional family, which may stem from lack of communication, infidelity, isolation, alcoholism, etc. But what are the traits of a healthy family?

Dolores Curran, author of several books on the family and popular speaker at Catholic Family Life conferences, outlines many of the traits of a healthy family.

- 1) **The healthy family has a strong sense of family.** Even if the family members live 1,000 miles from home, they still work at staying in touch with each other. They do it through cards, telephone and visits.
- 2) **Traditions and rituals abound in the healthy family.** Ethnic, religious and family traditions and rituals are an important part of a healthy family. One of the most common quarrels of newlyweds arises when opposing Christmas traditions bump into each other. One of the preparation steps for marriage in our parish is the **Family of Origins Seminar**, in which engaged couples are helped to look at the rules, customs and traditions that govern their family.
- 3) **The healthy family has control of the schedule.** Many families today are ruled by the family calendar and Little League, Boy Scouts, piano lessons, etc. The healthy family refuses to allow such activities to divide the family. It evaluates each activity's impact on the overall good of the family.
- 4) **The healthy family demands responsibility and respect from each member of the family.** Each family member, regardless of age, is responsible for some family chores. The family is not just mom's or dad's responsibility - as it tends to be in the unhealthy family - but is **everyone's** responsibility. Respect is shown by never humiliating children or discussing their shortcomings in front of others.

5) **The healthy family can cope with adversity as well as with success.** Healthy families understand that failures are a part of life. They don't fall apart when a member of the family lets the family down, instead, they bond together to heal the hurt and problem.

6) **The healthy family communicates well and develops good communication patterns.** Members of the family know what is going on. They talk about successes and failures. They have a way of dealing with conflict. They are not afraid to seek outside help if they are failing to resolve their problems.

7) **The healthy family spends time alone with other members of the family.** We are not referring here to family meetings, but to times when a parent might spend with **one** of his/her children. This helps to develop a personal relationship within the family unit.

8) **The healthy family develops a sense of humor and play.** Play and humor can be a relief valve in family life. The family that rarely laughs together is in trouble. The unhealthy family tends to use humor destructively. Members laugh **at** rather than **with** each other.

9) **The healthy family allows children their own era.** Within reason, parents allow their children to have their own music, clothes, hair styles, language, e.g., words like "gross", etc.

10) **The healthy family has a strong sense of trust.** Healthy families don't get sucked in by the "you don't trust me" game. Children in a healthy family know that they can trust their parents to want and to do what is best for them.

11) **The healthy family looks forward to teen years.** Many families cope okay until the teen years. Then they become uncommunicative and lose trust. Parents hear their friends say, "Just wait until they're teenagers." This sets parents and teens up for conflict.

12) **The healthy family permits each child to be the person God created he/she to be.** Sickly families try to force kids to fit a particular mold, e.g., if athletics are high on the family priority list, every child must be an athlete, whether or not he/she wants to.

13) **The healthy family lets go.** Children in unhealthy families are never permitted to "leave" even when they are married. They are tied to their parents with obligation, dependency and guilt. Healthy parents let children go when they become adults and now are responsible for their own behavior, beliefs, careers and families.

A NEW YEAR'S BLESSING

May your inner vision be transformed so that you can see more clearly your own journey with all humankind as a journey of peace, hope, and bondedness (Nm 25:15-17; Jn 20:20).

May your God be someone you can lean on in your weak or painful moments. May you know God as your rock, your shelter, your strength, your wing of comfort and support (Ps 94:18).

May you be aware of all the places your feet carry you in the New Year. May you know "How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news" (Rom 10:15).

May you not be afraid of the questions that press upon your mind and heart. May you welcome the questions and wait patiently for the day when they will have their answers (Mt 11:3).

May you be the one with welcome in your smile and hello etched upon your hand, the hand you extend to everyone who blesses you with presence (Lk 7:36-50).

May yours be the gift of reverence for all created things. May you face bravely and enthusiastically the responsibility to preserve and care for the beauty of the earth (Sir 42:15 - 43:33).

May the wellsprings of compassion flow deep within you until you can taste the tears of your brothers and sisters (2 Cor 1:3-7).

May you awake each morning with thank you on your lips and in your heart, recognizing that all is gift, that all is blessing (Ps 138:1).

May your friendship with God be strong and healthy. May that love be both a comfort and a challenge as you struggle to find your way in the New Year? (Jn 21:15-19).

May your spirit be open and perceptive in discovering the will of God for you. May your prayer be that of wisdom, guidance, and a deeper understanding of God's way for you (Lk 1:26-38).

May your life this new year be a living legacy to your God.

Sr. Joyce Rupp

CLOSING PRAYER

God of this new year, we are walking into mystery. We face the future, not knowing what the days and months will bring to us or how we will respond. Be love in us as we journey. May we welcome all who come our way. Deepen our faith to see all of life through your eyes. Fill us with hope and an abiding trust that you dwell in us amidst all our joys and sorrows. Thank you for the treasure of our faith life. Thank you for the gift of being able to rise each day with the assurance of your walking through the day with us. God of this new year, we praise you. AMEN

I am grateful to all of you who sent me good wishes, kind words, goodies, etc. for Christmas. May 2009 be a good year for you personally and for our parish family.

Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you will help them become what they are capable of becoming.

*When the heart is ready
God will show the way.*

Reflection questions for your family

- Which of the above traits spoke to you most?
- Which of the above traits are operative in your family and which ones are not?
- Which trait not operative would you like to be present?
- Is there a healthy trait that Dolores Curran omitted?

Please consider sharing this column with other family members and friends.

Have a blessed New Year,

