



Moment Two: Families of Faith

Thursday: Our Parish Family

Keywords:

FAMILY
COMMUNITY
PARISH
CHURCH
ROLES
MINISTRY
ENVIRONMENT

W

Watch: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kbfq2PdoweA (1 min 32 secs)

D

Discussion

- What does community mean to the kids in the video?
- Is it local, worldwide, or both?

A parish is one form of community.

Decide which three of the following definitions of parish are the most accurate, then discuss as a class.

- A parish is a local religious community that is connected to a world community
- A parish is a place with a church and a local school
- A parish is a community focused on learning to know and worship Jesus and to serve others as He did
- A parish is an administrative unit within a diocese
- A parish is a place mostly for old people
- A parish is a place where people actively look after others, by being members of organisations like the local chapter of the Saint Vincent de Paul
- A parish is a place where we celebrate the sacraments
- A parish is a family of families

Amoris Laetitia

Amoris Laetitia speaks of the parish as a 'family of families' (202). Pope Francis talks about 'communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith' (196). He also talks about the Eucharist, saying that 'when those who receive it turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily' (186).

W

Watch: request.org.uk/life/christianity-basically-church/ (2 mins 50 secs)



D

Discussion

- What has been your experience of a local church or parish?
- Are you aware of ways that your local church tries to make a difference in relation to creating a better world?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing parishes today?

R

Reflective Exercise

Read the following account by Fr John McNamara of a time he was involved in setting up a completely new parish.

During the 1970s, in response to severe overcrowding among families in the centre of Dublin, the government built 1,950 new homes in an area of Finglas called Rivermount. The problem was that there were no facilities – no shops, no doctors' surgeries and not even schools, much less a church. The only shops were travelling vans from which you could get basic groceries. I remember a very common sin in confession from children was 'I wouldn't go to the van for my mother, Father.' I worked with Fr Larry Forristal, the parish priest, who later became Bishop of Ossory, and Fr Jim O'Brien with members of the local community. Most of the houses were occupied by young families with children, so our first priority was not to build a church, but to build a school. When we opened St Finian's Primary School, we had a general purpose room that was used as a mass centre. The church, St Oliver Plunkett's, was not opened until later. There was a tremendous sense of community and cooperation. There was something on every single night in the school, every kind of community organisation you could mention, from St Vincent de Paul, to youth clubs, to ladies clubs, to boys scouts and girl guides. There were terrific summer projects run by the Catholic Youth Council, now Catholic Youth Care, which gave children and teenagers something to do during the summer. We also had Sr Claire, a parish sister, who was a member of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. Laypeople were fully involved, in fundraising, as readers (it was before there were ministers of the Eucharist) and in helping others. It was a busy time but a wonderful time. The families had very little in terms of money but there was a real sense of community.

(From an interview with the author)

- Why do you think the first priority was to build a school?
- Is there evidence in this account that this parish consisted of 'communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith'? Give examples.

Eco-Congregations Awards

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. (28)

Some parishes have shown this openness and missionary creativity by deciding to prioritise the environment and have become members of an organisation called Eco-Congregations.

**W**

Watch: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TleGTbt4Bww (2 mins 50 secs)

D

Discussion

In order to receive the Eco-Congregation Award, evidence must be shown of four dimensions in which the parish has engaged.

Spiritual: Linking environmental issues with the Christian faith, e.g. through worship

Practical: Practising what is preached, e.g. an energy, churchyard or recycling project

Community: Working with or through the local community on environmental issues, e.g. a litter pick project with a school or other community group, gaining positive publicity

Global: Supporting charities/projects that are working to help people in developing countries, e.g. Trócaire, Christian Aid, Tearfund

- How is this shown in the video?
- How could these four dimensions apply to other areas in which the Church is involved?

R

Reflective Exercise

Listen to the following parable. Then write in your copy what you think the message of the parable is, and what it has to do with parish life.

Wine or Water?

In a land far away in time and place, it had been a great harvest year for the village elder, the richest person in the valley. He was grateful for his many fields of grain, and for his stables full of livestock. As an expression of gratitude, he decided to share his riches with all the people of his valley: he would hold a feast for all of his neighbours!

But the elder needed help with one aspect of the feast. He would provide the music, the venue and all of the food but he needed others to provide the wine. The people who lived in the valley decided that each family would bring a flask of wine and pour it into a giant barrel for everyone to enjoy.

The first year, there was a great feast, the best of food and drink and there was plenty of wine for everyone.

The next year, the village elder was also very fortunate. He proposed the same idea and people were very enthusiastic. But one family thought to themselves, 'We will pour in water instead. I am sure no one will notice if there is just one flask of water among all that wine.'

True enough, the party went just as well, although some people suspected the wine was not quite as good as the previous year. It seemed that more than one family had had the same idea about the water.

When it came to the following year's party, there was the same display of food, and the same wonderful music, but when people came to draw from the giant barrel, they just made faces. The village elder came hurrying to check what was wrong – and when he drew the wine, he realised that it was nothing except water. He was furious. Everyone had made the calculation that no one would notice if they did not put in their flask of wine. As a result, no one had any wine to drink.



A

Activity

Divide into groups of three or four. Each group reads one of the following biblical passages. Come up with one word that summarises the verse and present that word to the class along with the verse. Explain why you chose that word and what you think it has to do with parish life.

- Romans 12:4–5
- Acts 4:32
- Matthew 18:20
- Acts 1:14
- Romans 12:16
- Hebrews 10:24–5
- Acts 2:46–7
- 1 Corinthians 1:10

W

Watch: vimeo.com/168974687 (32 secs)

D

Discussion

What challenge is Pope Francis presenting us with?

A

Activity

Research your local parish or the parish your school is in. Your research should answer questions such as:

- When was it founded?
- What is its name?
- Why would this name have been chosen?

