

**2014 FAMILY YEAR PLANNER AND CALENDAR. THEME: FAMILY TOGETHER - THAT'S US!
INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR THE FAMILY +20.**

INTRODUCTION

In 2014 the world commemorates the 20th anniversary of the 1994 United Nations sponsored International Year of the Family. Other 1994 events, the 1st fully democratic elections in SA and the Catholic Church's 1st African Synod presented us with the image of "Church as Family." This year can bring some of these commemorations together as we look back at the many changes in Church and society. Increasing materialism, individualism and an apparent loss of faith have had a negative effect on family life while the growing impact of technology is a mixed blessing. Families, church and society want to look to a future where the family continues to play an important stabilising role and where relationships are formed and nurtured. The UN calls on governments to support families as the basic building blocks of society. The SA government in its developing family policy is promoting a stronger family focus. This is also the application of the concept "Church as Family" and the family as "the little church of the home." A family and its members are seen holistically as a unit living in a context. It is to be supported, strengthened and empowered as a unit, rather than as women, men or youth in isolation. The 2014 theme FAMILY TOGETHER- That's us! aims to flesh out this vision.

In preparation for 2014 the UN has used particular family themes in 2011-2013: 1) confronting family poverty, 2) promoting family-work balance, 3) social integration and intergenerational solidarity. These are incorporated into the 2014 calendar themes with quotations from Catholic Social Teaching and other Church documents.

JANUARY. New beginnings - towards balanced families

Life is full of new beginnings and a new year is a good time to take stock and if necessary start afresh. As this is a 20th anniversary some of us may be able to look back over the past 20 years. How can we all make appropriate resolutions for the years ahead for what is best for our family? Have we been giving sufficient time to family, work, recreation and God? Sharing on this with younger family members can help them to consider these important questions.

The risk that work may become an idol challenges the family when work has the absolute primacy over family relationships. They pin their happiness on material well-being and forget God by becoming completely absorbed in worldly occupations. A correct balance calls for family discernment regarding domestic and professional choices. From 2012 World Meeting of Families catechesis.

FEBRUARY. Love - the basis for care

We say, "For richer, for poorer," in our marriage vows and these words underlie any long term commitment, but are they taken sufficiently seriously? Romantic love is rightly cherished but can it survive a change of fortune or a life of deep poverty as these are serious strains on any relationship? Pope Francis continually expresses concern over the needs of the poor and growing poverty in the world,

calling on the haves, through love, to care for the have nots. *"The grace of Christ gives people a heart that loves, a heart that suffers, a heart that rejoices with others, a heart full of tenderness for those who bear the wounds of life and feel like they are on the margins of society. Love is the greatest force for transforming reality because it breaks down the walls of selfishness and fills the chasms that keep people far from one another,"* Pope Francis 18 June 2013

MARCH. Human rights are family rights.

The United Nations, African Union and all regional and national bodies recognise human rights in their constitutions. In some cases these are mainly individual rights which may clash with the variety of social rights of families as multigenerational units of different types. This complex area for the benefit of families and each of their members should receive a greater focus. The right to life in all its forms while enshrined in many constitutions and Bills of Right is too often rejected or ignored.

The Church's 1983 Charter of Rights of the Family states: *The rights of the person, even though they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, enjoy the same right to social protection, with a view to their integral personal development. Article 4e.*

APRIL. Faith and Families - Together

Freedom of religion is a basic human right. The practice of religion is personal but may have become individualistic and so the right and duty to transmit their faith within families is often disregarded. A common and shared faith life acknowledges God's presence within a family as a little church of the home even if there is a difference in practice of religion. Family prayer and sharing of faith and life realities are an important means to strengthen interpersonal relationships and relationships with God. *"The educational mission of the Christian family" is "a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith, a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. In the family conscious of this gift, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. AM46*

MAY. Parenting and Work-family Balance.

Parenting is surely one of the most complex and demanding life tasks and one that comes without a clear instruction book. It is a skill learned from previous generations but is practised in an environment where roles are changing. It requires a balance between nurturing and providing at all times. Parents may work hard to pay for children's education and the many extras that are involved and then not have time to spend with them in meaningful communication or take an interest in their activities and prepare them for their own future in the world of work. *Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods, by adopting a simple and*

austere life style and being fully convinced that "man is more precious for what he is than for what he has." FC 37

JUNE. Youth and their Families.

Across the world youth employment has become a major concern. The needs of the workplace and youth aspirations often do not match or youth may become despondent or rebellious. They may remain overly dependent on their families or due to lack of motivation and suitable outlets become involved in anti-social behaviour. How possible is it to engage the youth in confronting family poverty and intergenerational concern? *The self-giving that inspires the love of a couple is the model and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. FC37. We should involve young people directly in the life of society and of the Church, so that they do not fall prey to feelings of frustration and rejection in the face of their inability to shape their own future, especially where they are vulnerable due to lack of education, unemployment, political exploitation and various kinds of addiction. AM 62*

JULY. The elderly and families

Should the grandparent generation, the elderly, be encouraged to remain within the family unit, live apart or be cared for in institutions? An ideal would be for them to be integrated into their families with a meaningful role to play, giving love, care and support while being valued and respected and not being exploited or abused. In reality their pensions are often used to supplement family income and combat family poverty while support for their needs may come from outside rather than from within the family. *In old age married love, which has been purified by long fidelity, can be deepened. They can offer to others the kindness and the wisdom gathered over the years, and what energies remain. There is also the burden of loneliness due to abandonment or neglect on the part of children and relations. There is suffering caused by ill-health, gradual loss of strength, the humiliation of having to depend on others, the sorrow of feeling that one is perhaps a burden to one's loved ones, and by the approach of the end of life. FC77*

AUGUST. Gender Balance

Families are sexual units and all relationships are influenced by sexuality and gender matters. Gender roles are learned from modelling and experience. Attitudes, habits and behaviour patterns are influenced from early in life by how boys and girls see themselves. Women's empowerment has been a factor in challenging stereotypes and changes in gender roles. Families need considerate, open and honest communication to avoid undue conflict and gender-based violence. *Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value, not only because they are both, in their differences, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the reciprocity that gives life to the "we" in the human couple, is an image of God. Catholic Social Teaching. 111.*

SEPTEMBER. Families – Diverse and Together.

As in our society as a whole so also in families unity, not uniformity, is needed for healthy functioning. Interracial, intercultural and interfaith marriages and families are increasingly common and require commitment and skill to

manage differences effectively. The diversity need not be downplayed but adds greatly to the richness of the life experience, can enhance social cohesion and should be celebrated with joy. *"Father I pray that they will be one as we are one." John 17:21. In the family, moral values are taught. Starting from the first years of life, the spiritual heritage of the religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family one learns social responsibility and solidarity. CST 213*

OCTOBER. Reaching out family to family.

Every individual, every family and society have as their mission to improve the quality of life. This cannot be kept within narrow boundaries but should be for the common good of all. Becoming a community serving humanity should be an extension of building and strengthening our families. Some people have a mission to work beyond their own family and community and missionaries travel across the world to spread their message including the good news of family life as a foundation of love at the heart of society.

Christians also have the mission of proclaiming with joy and conviction the Good News about the family, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources and the importance of its mission in the City of God and of man. FC86

NOVEMBER. Loss And Needed Support.

Because of its quality of permanence family life is a typical example of the changing reality of life. There is birth, there is life and there is death. There is change. There are gains and losses to be worked through and accepted. Many of these are experienced as painful and traumatic and it is through solidarity as members stand together in love and support that difficulties can finally be accepted with grace and gratitude as gifts of life and gifts of God. *Solidarity can take on the features of service and attention to those who live in poverty and need, to orphans, the handicapped, the sick, the elderly, to those who are in mourning, to those with doubts, to those who live in loneliness or who have been abandoned. From CST 246. "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."*

DECEMBER. Healthy Families – hope for the future.

The 2014 International Year of the Family has provided an opportunity to reflect, look back, evaluate and look forward with hope that physically healthy and psychologically well-functioning families will grow and remain as havens of stability and security. Family types have changed as much as their lifestyles change but the security of permanence, rooted in a faith tradition is a needed human characteristic for personal growth and happiness and the optimum development of the greater human family. *In a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. AM43*