

About the Year of the Family

Two constants in many of our lives, two foundations to which we return again and again, are faith and family. For many people, family is the school of faith – it is the place where we first learn there is a God and the small community in which we first learn how to love one another. Our faith is also where we find God’s plan for the family. From the very beginning, God said, “It is not good for...man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18, NAB). Through the family, we sustain and nurture one another as we work to become all that God made us to be.

Bishop Aymond has proclaimed 2009 the “Year of the Family” in our diocese. It will be a time of celebration, reflection and formation as we quip ourselves to meet the challenges of Catholic family life in the 21st century. Over the past several months, a Year of the Family Committee has met to plan the resources and activities that will be provided during the Year of the Family. The following is our vision statement:

Our Church teaches that the family is the “domestic Church” and “school of charity” and that as Church, we are all members of the family of God. The Year of the Family will promote understanding of, and reflection on, these principles and support parishes, families, and individuals in living out these principles in the home, parish, and larger community.

Our goals during the Year of the Family will be as follows:

- To promote a vision of the parish community as an “extended family” that equips, encourages, and supports married couples and parents as they live out their vocations.
- To educate parishioners in the diocese concerning Church teachings on the family and how they apply to our daily lives.
- To welcome and support those who have felt marginalized or feel disconnected in some way from the Church’s vision of family (e.g., divorced persons, single parents, parents of children with disabilities, dual-faith households, and those living in civil marriages in need of convalidation).
- To assist families that are hurting due to marital discord, parent-child communication problems, difficult life transitions, mental illness, or substance abuse.

We plan to address these goals in multiple ways, including a number of resources to be made available to families and parishes, such as an e-mail list with Year of the Family events and weekly family reflection questions on the Sunday Gospel readings; a Family Ministry Resource Guide for parishes; “Car Visor Discussion Starters;” Lent and Advent Guides for Families on “Putting Our Family’s Faith into Action;” a family prayer CD/podcast; family prayer cards; reproducible handouts on family communication, healthy marriage, and parenting; monthly family-themed articles in *Catholic Spirit*, and family meal resources. Keep an eye out for these resources and more as the new year begins.

A second component of the Year of The Family offerings will focus on training parish leaders in various aspects of family ministry. This has already begun at the end of 2008, as we started a new cycle of Pastoral Care Volunteer training, equipping parish staff and volunteers to minister to parishioners in crisis, Catholics who are separated or divorced, and those coping with the death of a loved one. On January 10th, we will sponsor an additional training in supporting parents in the parish. This training will cover how to implement parenting classes and parenting support groups at the parish, as well as other information and resources that are helpful to parents and effective ways to make them available. In February, our diocese will host the Region X meeting of the national Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers at Cedarbrake. This meeting will be open to all leaders in the diocese of Austin who minister to families, and will include sessions on helping families meet the challenges of caring for aging family members, supporting families of persons with disabilities, meeting the unique needs of military families, and assisting families where separation or divorce has occurred.

Finally, the Year of the Family will bring some other special events to our diocese, including special talks on marriage and parenting, presentations on Theology of the Body, and family-themed mini-conferences in the fall. It promises to be an exciting and formational year in our diocese as we renew our efforts to build up the “domestic church.”