



**OFFICE OF PASTORAL RENEWAL  
AND FAMILY MINISTRY**  
ARCHDIOCESE OF ARMAGH

# Creating a Vision of Family Ministry in the Archdiocese of Armagh:

## Policy of the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry

### 1. Introduction

The Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry (OPRFM) in the Archdiocese of Armagh was established in September 2003. Given its newness many questions were asked about its direction, purpose and activities. One of the most common questions asked was: *what is family ministry?* This document, which arises out of a series of gatherings with a committed group of interested people, attempts to describe the OPRFM's vision of family ministry in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

Family ministry is a relatively new term reflecting the ongoing development of the understanding of ministry that emerges from the Second Vatican Council. While the term is new, it could rightly be said that family ministry among Christians has been going on from the beginning of Christianity.

From a Christian perspective ministry is a service rendered to others in Christ and because of Christ. The vocation to minister is rooted in baptism and confirmation.<sup>1</sup> Thus, all Christians are called to minister and have a responsibility to minister. This broad understanding of ministry has opened up the possibility of recognising that much of what happens within family life is ministry. Thus, when we speak of family ministry we begin firstly with the ministry that family members carry out within their own family and secondly the ministry that families carry out within their church, community, society and world. Family ministry is what families do as baptised and confirmed members of the Christian community and disciples of Christ.



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<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II: Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents, A. Flannery, OP, ed., Dominican Publications: Dublin 31.

Family ministry also refers to what the church community does with and for families. Any activity carried out by a church community, that directly or indirectly deepens faith, hope and love in families, nurtures families in living the life of discipleship of Jesus, and supports families in their ministering to others falls within the broad area of family ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the ministerial activities described in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and the ways in which these have been developed by modern theological writers,<sup>3</sup> the OPRFM believes that all ministry is founded on the six pillars of:

- 1) leadership
- 2) liturgy and prayer
- 3) community building
- 4) formation and proclamation
- 5) service and outreach and
- 6) administration.



These six pillars, or foundations, form the basis for developing ministry whether it be in the context of diocese, parish or family. In the context of family ministry, these pillars describe the elements of ministry carried out by the family within the family and beyond the family. They also outlines the elements of ministry carried out by the church

community with and for families. Thus, a focus on leadership will, for example, lead to questions about styles of parenting and the kind of vision that is appropriate at the beginning of the present millennium. Liturgy and prayer is something that is practiced at home by families. At the same time church communities need to consider how they pray for families and how they create family orientated liturgies. The family is an intimate communion of persons<sup>4</sup> that engages its members in building up the family. Church communities also have a responsibility to strengthen families and integrate them into the wider community. Parents are the primary educators of children. This includes nurturing faith, hope and love within the family. It is in the home that the Gospel is first proclaimed. The parish community is also deeply involved in evangelizing and catechising the families in the community. Service and outreach is an ongoing ministry within families, while at the same time families can carry out a ministry of outreach within the parish community. Supporting families and reaching out to families, particularly when they are vulnerable, is a key ministry within the church community. Managing family life entails ensuring that things are as they should be within the context of a family's self-understanding. It is informed by and informs the other pillars. Church administration that is committed to family ministry will ensure that the parish or church community looks at its own functioning from the perspective of its families.

The OPRFM has proposed in its vision that the primary vocation of all Christians and thus parish communities and families is to know and embody in today's world the Christ revealed in the Gospels. How family ministry, as a focused intentional ministry performed by families and parishes in Christ and because of Christ within the Archdiocese of Armagh, will take shape in the years to come can be explored by adopting the

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the definition of family ministry see Diane A. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 1999, ch 14.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, Westminster John Knox Press: London, 1989; Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, Harper San-Francisco, 1991; Tom Sweitzer, *The Parish As Covenant: A Call to Pastoral Partnership*, Sheed & Ward, Oxford, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, Vatican II: More Post Conciliar Documents, A. Flannery, OP, ed, Dominican Publication: Dublin 21.

perspective of the six pillars of ministry. In what follows we bring this perspective to bear on an exploration of the church community's ministry to and with families.

## 2. Leadership as Family Ministry



The existence of full-time personnel in a diocesan post for family ministry is a tribute to the vision of the leadership in the diocese. Family ministry in the diocese, as a formally recognised ministry, began with the appointment of Fr Bobby McKenna on a part-time basis as Director of Family Ministry. The team he formed around him saw the potential for full-time leadership that would work collaboratively and so they proposed the formation of a full-time diocesan family ministry team which would be made up of a lay person, a sister and a priest. What came to be was a team that was given responsibility for promoting family ministry and pastoral renewal. The Archdiocese of Armagh is one of about eighteen dioceses in Ireland which have a family ministry office.

The central aspects of pastoral leadership in a society that is moving away from a patriarchal style of leadership are:

- a) the articulation of vision
- b) strategic planning

- c) the creation and maintenance of collaborative structures and processes and
- d) a commitment to ongoing formation, delegation and the empowering of people to become leaders within their own families and communities.

### a) *A vision of family life*

A Christian vision is a statement of who we might become with God's grace viewed from the perspective of faith rather than a description of reality as it is presently experienced. Articulating our vision for family life forms the basis and foundation of family ministry. While various Christian Churches and families may articulate the vision differently, emphasising particular aspects, we suggest that within our diocese, the vision of family life include the following aspects:

- ⊞ Families are made up of persons who are created in the image and likeness of God. Thus within every family are persons who are to be treated with the utmost dignity and respect, without exception. Each person has inalienable freedoms, rights and responsibilities. Each person is capable of making their own unique contribution to society and history. The highest human calling of each person is to love and be loved, with love that demands the works of justice and peace. Each human life has a lasting worth, is ultimately worthwhile and has a purpose.<sup>5</sup>
- ⊞ Family is the domestic church. This insight, prominent in early Christianity, resurfaced during the Second Vatican Council.<sup>6</sup> The richness of this insight has been unfolding, particularly in the teaching of Pope John Paul II and in the work of some theologians. However there is still much to be gained by reflecting on the implications of saying that the family is the church of the home. Pope John Paul II had this to say during a homily in Perth, Australia:

The family is the domestic church.  
The meaning of this traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Groome, Thomas, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, Thomas More: Texas, 1998, pg 92-3.

<sup>6</sup> *Lumen Gentium* 11, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

Christian idea is that the home is the church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God's love. She is a communion of faith and love. She is mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity, and it serves the good of all along the road of life. In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church pass the way of the family.<sup>7</sup>



This traditional Christian teaching enables us to affirm that family life is sacred and that family activities are holy. It enables us to recognise that families are active agents of the Church's ministry rather than mere passive recipients. Further, it enables us to speak of the spirituality that is proper to family life and to develop, articulate and practice a spirituality not of the monastery or of the seminary but of the home. It is in

the midst of family life that the mysteries of our faith are revealed:

As the basic community of believers, bound in love to one another, the family is the arena in which the drama of redemption is played out. The dying and rising with Christ is most clearly manifested. Here, the cycle of sin, hurt, reconciliation, and healing is lived out over and over again. In family life is found the church of the home; where each day "two or three are gathered" in the Lord's name; where the hungry are fed; where the thirsty are given drink; where the sick are comforted. It is in the family that the Lord's injunction to forgive "seventy times seven" is lived out in the daily reconciliation of husband, wife, parent, child, grandparent, brother, sisters, extended kin.<sup>8</sup>

⊞ Families play a prophetic role in the world. This role, articulated at the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the Family, was expanded upon by Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* where he outlines the four tasks of families:

- The family is an intimate community of persons
- The family serves life in its transmission, both physically by bringing children into the world, and spiritually by handing on values and traditions as well as developing the potential of each member at every age
- The family participates in the development of society by becoming a community of social training, hospitality, and political involvement and activity

<sup>7</sup> John Paul II, "Homily" delivered in Perth, Australia, November 30, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> Committee on Marriage and Family NCCB, *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, USCC: Washington, 2000, p21

- The family shares in the life and mission of the Church by becoming a believing and evangelising community, a community in dialogue with God, and a community at the service of humanity.<sup>9</sup>

⚪ As well as highlighting the sacramentality of family life, a Christian vision of family life from a Catholic perspective will highlight the dignity of marriage as a sacrament which is a real symbol of the event of salvation. John Paul II has described marriage as “the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby men and women accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God.”<sup>10</sup> The covenantal nature of family life is based in the covenantal nature of marriage.

⚪ A Christian vision of family life will highlight Christ’s compassion. His ministry of healing, reaching out and inclusion of the broken, rejected, despised and excluded reminds all who minister in his name of the responsibility to do likewise. This entails recognising that the reality is often far from the vision and that Christ’s love is present wherever people are gathered. Thus we are to recognise Christ’s loving presence in families that are not based on marriage, acknowledge the holiness of their lives and call on them to participate in the mission of the Christian community to know and embody Christ.

### ***b) Strategic planning***

Strategic planning brings an intentionality and direction to ministry that ensures action. The OPRFM sees strategic planning as a four step process which enables the planning group to move from articulating their desired future, through

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<sup>9</sup> *Familiaris Consortio*, 21

<sup>10</sup> *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.

analysing the contradictions into identifying the broad strategic directions and so build the first implementing steps to achieving the desired future outcome. Developing a family ministry strategic plan for a three-year period at diocesan and parish level will do much to move family ministry from being a concept to becoming an ongoing life-giving activity.

### ***c) Collaborative structures and processes***

Pastoral leadership in a post authoritarian era will adopt processes and structures that are inclusive, empowering and reconciling. In light of this church communities will form a team that might be called the parish family ministry team which will form a part of the parish pastoral council. This follows the insight of Archbishop Brady that pastoral renewal and family ministry are intimately related. The team, empowered by the pastor and supported by the pastoral council and made up of members from a variety of family experiences, will be at the forefront of implementing the strategic plan that has been informed by a Christian vision of family life. In some parishes or clusters a family ministry co-ordinator could be appointed.

### ***d) On-going formation***

Formation for those at the forefront of an intentional family ministry will be essential. It is noticeable that more courses in family ministry are becoming available in Ireland and Britain, an indication of the growth in awareness of the potential of family ministry in the church. The formation of pastors in understanding the vision, nature and potential of family ministry will be important if family ministry is to become a reality at parish level. On-going short formation courses for those involved in various aspects of a community’s family ministry will also be necessary.

### 3. Liturgy and Prayer as Family Ministry



Prayer is central in the life of Christians for in prayer we worship God, express our faith in Jesus and are moved by the Spirit to embody Christ in today's world. Prayer is both personal and corporate – which includes family prayer, the prayer group and liturgy. At the root of the word *liturgy* is a sense of the people at prayer.

Liturgy and prayer as family ministry carried out by the church community has a variety of forms. The most obvious one being praying for the families of the community and the families of the world.

Carrying out its ministry of formation the church community can encourage and support forms of prayer that are appropriate for families and it can enable families to develop a family spirituality.

The central liturgical event for Catholics is the Sunday Eucharist and a lot can be done to create celebrations that are family orientated. Many parishes have a Sunday Mass that is designated as the family Mass. This provides an opportunity for families to bring their real selves to liturgy rather than having the stress of continuously trying to silence children. The Word of God will be adapted to the needs of children and the homily will connect the Word of God to the context of family

life. On some occasions a liturgy of the Word for younger children can be celebrated. Eucharistic prayers for children may be used and families can be invited to carry out the various liturgical ministries during the celebration.

A parish that is attentive to family ministry will create rituals to mark the various significant events in family life. Central to these are the sacraments of initiation, marriage, funeral liturgies and, on occasion, ordination. The celebration of the sacrament of the sick can be celebrated with an attentiveness to family as can the sacrament of reconciliation. Other possible occasions for rituals include:

- Blessing of expectant parents
- An ritual for those whose child has died before birth or in infancy
- A celebration of welcome for those who were baptised in the last year
- A celebration of welcome for the new families in the parish
- A blessing for families as they prepare to bring their child to school for the first time or at the beginning of each school year
- A blessing for families as the first child or last child leaves home
- Marking mother's day and father's day at the Sunday liturgy
- A ritual for engaged couples
- Rituals to mark significant anniversaries, such as wedding anniversaries
- A ritual to mark retirement etc

Organising retreats for family members is a significant form of family ministry. This does not have to be far away or for a long period of time. A retreat is primarily time for prayer and reflection away from the rigours of life and the machines (phones and screens) that tend to dominate it. It could simply be a couple of hours in a community centre, convent or someone's home. Retreats could be organised for married couples, single people, widows and widowers, bereaved families, adolescents, grandparents, for families at times such as Advent, Lent, Easter, or in preparation for first communion and confirmation etc.

#### 4. Community Building as Family Ministry



It is no accident that the family is called the church in miniature, or that family metaphors are often used to describe the church. At the root of both is the desire to build community. The effort to create community derives from the desire to belong, on the one hand and the command that comes the Gospel “Love one another” on the other. Families constantly face challenges in creating and re-establishing loving relationships based on respect, harmony and unity. This is family ministry performed by family members. The church community also has an important role to play in building up unity and love among the families that make up the church community. Some of the tasks we have with regard to community building as family ministry include offering a sense of welcome, being inclusive, reconciling hurts and ensuring a sense of engagement with family members across the life cycle.

The ministry of welcoming and connecting families with each other is becoming more important in recent years. Families are on the move, often settling far from their extended family in areas where they are strangers. Many families have arrived from other countries. The church community can extend a welcome by visiting, by taking an interest when they come to church and by organising social, educational and liturgical gatherings which give a sense of welcome and provide opportunities for families to meet each other. Going further, it can foster opportunities for

families with similar interests and needs to meet together for the purposes of education and support.

Inclusion is a central ministry of the Christian community. It has a responsibility to oppose discrimination and exclusion wherever it exists and to promote the inclusion of people from a diversity of backgrounds. In this the church community faces a tremendous challenge because at this time the church is perceived to exclude people. Community building as family ministry entails finding ways of including in the church community those who are separated, divorced, in second relationships or gay and of respecting the diversity of family life.

The call to love one another entails the call to forgive one another and be reconciled with each other. There are many relationships among family members in need of healing, there are many families in need of being reconciled with other families and there are church communities that need to be reconciled with some of the families that make up that community. There is need for the church community to be constantly involved in the work of healing and reconciliation. The *Healing the Body of Christ* programme used in the diocese in Lent 2004 is a small but significant step in that direction in our diocese. Working to heal divisions across the community, challenging sectarianism and promoting ecumenism are significant forms of family ministry. They are signs to families that just as unity and reconciliation are important within the family of the church so it can be within the families of the church.

Ministering to families across the life cycle is a way of ensuring that all members of families are offered a sense of belonging within the church community. Church communities can find ways of connecting with couples in courtship, newly married couples, families with a first child in the home, families with children at primary school, families with adolescents, families facing break up, blending families, families letting go, families experiencing the “empty nest” and older families.

## 5. Proclamation and Formation as Family Ministry



Evangelisation and catechesis are primary tasks of the Christian community that are to be carried out in every generation. The good news to be proclaimed in the present with regard to family is that the family is the domestic church. Families are *hearers* of the word – it is therefore to be proclaimed to them. However, the recognition that family is domestic church means that families are also *subjects* of the Word who speak the Word of God and they are *mediators* who reveal the Word by embodying it and living it.<sup>11</sup> The great educational task that the church community has with regard to families, perhaps, is that of helping families to come to a realisation of what it means to be a living image and historical representation of the church.

Family ministry as proclamation involves taking a family perspective in preaching and in communicating the Gospel – what significance does the Gospel have in the concrete situations of the families of the parish? It also involves proclaiming to the world the good news about the dignity of family life. This concretely entails advocacy in society on behalf of families and family life and opposing the injustice that families suffer.

The church community has a tremendously significant role to play in family catechesis. Much great work is being done in schools by dedicated teachers using excellent resources. That is only a part of the story and many involved in catechesis are of the opinion that we have become overly reliant on the school. This is illustrated by the fact that a number of children are being confirmed because they are in their last year of primary school rather than from a desire to share Christ's Spirit or make a commitment to a Christian way of life. Parents are the first and primary educators of their children in the ways of faith. The church community has the responsibility to resource parents for that task and to support them in it. Some would say that in the past the church took that task away from parents and then chastised them for not doing it, leaving parents with too much guilt and not enough skills.

It is time for some fresh thinking at national, diocesan, parochial and domestic level with regard to strategies that will enable an effective family based catechesis to take root in our country. Every effort that the church community takes to support families in a home-based catechesis is to be encouraged and supported. Experience suggests that the time to begin such a project is when a member of the family is preparing for one of the sacraments of initiation. There have been some significant advances in this area:

- The *Do This in Memory* programme, recently published by Veritas, which engages parents in the formation of their children in preparation for First Communion, is a welcome development
- The *Confirming Faith in the Family* programme is a tremendous resource which enables parents and other lay leaders to educate parents in what it means to be a domestic church
- Baptismal preparation teams provide another opportunity for lay members of the church community to be involved in the formation of parents at a time when they are open and engaged
- The potential of the Internet to be a resource for parents in forming their children in faith is great.

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<sup>11</sup> Harris, p128.

Catholicireland.net, bethanyfamilyinstitute.com and homefaith.com are websites that can help families to reflect on family spirituality and to pray.

There are countless opportunities for the church community to be engaged in the formation of families. Two particular areas stand out – one is relationships education and the other is child development education. Accord is presently involved in relationships education in schools, in providing pre-marriage education and in providing couples with the opportunity to participate in Foccus and Re-foccus (both of which help couples to gauge the strengths and weakness of their relationship at any given time). Parishes and cluster groups could develop other opportunities to provide relationship education and marriage support education to families. There are many child-development and parenting programmes available that parish communities could adopt by way of enabling parents to hone their skills in working with their children.

## 6. Service and Outreach as Family Ministry



The church has the task of promoting human welfare and tending to human need. Thomas Groom states: “A Christian Community, toward both itself and *all* neighbours without limits, is to minister to human suffering and alienation –

*physical, emotional, and spiritual*, to challenge social structures that deny fullness of life to anyone, and to help create social, political and ecclesial arrangements that promote freedom, peace, and justice for all and the integrity of creation... The church always has the task of serving human needs and of redressing the personal, interpersonal, and social/political causes of suffering, violence, injustice, and ecological destruction.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, family ministry entails tending to the needs of families and encouraging families to tend to the needs of their neighbours without limits. Of necessity the church community must listen to families in order to fully understand their needs. To do this, it may develop systems for listening to families that do not entail much effort. Some forms of listening are more complex and may need the support of government and other agencies. Specific research is needed to understand the reasons for the high rate of suicide among young men so that ways of offering support can be established.

Direct assistance to families in need in the form of food, shelter and clothing is the immediate form of service. In this respect, the work of the St Vincent de Paul Society and other organisations is invaluable.

The church community can reach out to those in need in a variety of ways. The work of supporting bereaved children through the *Rainbows* programme and the separated, divorced and bereaved adults through the *Beginning Experience* programme is well established in the Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre with outreach efforts in other parts of the diocese. This is one example but the possibilities of reaching out to fathers, to mothers, to lone parents, families affected by poverty, addiction etc are endless.

The church can play an important role in networking with groups and agencies that can meet the particular needs of particular families. Again the list is endless – Accord, Alcoholics

<sup>12</sup> Groom, *Sharing Faith*, p303.

Anonymous, Cura, Mediation NI, Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre (NE) etc.

The need for available trained pastoral and family counsellors is acute. The diocese could strive toward having full-time personnel who would offer counselling to family members within the diocese and would further add to the marriage care already offered by Accord.

## 7. Administration as Family Ministry



Family ministry as an emerging key form of ministry needs to be promoted. The Committee on Marriage and Family of the National Conference of US Catholic Bishops have developed what they call *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*. They say:

Using a family perspective in planning, implementing and evaluating policies, programs, ministries, and services means two things:

1. Viewing individuals in the context of their family relationships and their other social relationships.

As a systems orientation, a family perspective is a lens that focuses on the interaction between individuals, their families, and social situations. For example, rather than seeing a frail elderly person as an isolated individual who needs help, a family perspective assesses what kind of supportive relationships that person

has (or lacks) from family, friends, church and neighbourhood institutions.

2. Using family relationships as a criterion to assess the impact of the Church's and society's policies, programs, ministries, and services.

As a criterion to assess ministry, a family perspective provides a means to examine and adjust systematically policies, program design, and service delivery. Its goal is to incorporate a sensitivity to families and to promote the partnership, strengths, and resources of participating families. A family perspective in ministry does not mean establishing another church office or a new level of bureaucracy to carry out such evaluation. However it does mean calling all ministries to undertake this critical process.

A family perspective is rooted in the challenge of John Paul II as stated in *Familiaris Consortio*: "No plan for organised pastoral work at any level must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral area of the family."

At the foundation of a family perspective are four elements that touch the very heart of contemporary family life. Bringing a family perspective to bear in ministry means keeping these four elements in mind when planning, implementing, and evaluating policies, programs, ministries and services. The four elements are:

- The Christian vision of family life – the family has unique identity and mission that permeate its tasks and responsibilities
- The family as a developing system – the family is not a collection of individuals, but a living and developing system whose members are essentially interconnected
- Family diversity – the influence of societal trends and diversity in structure, economic status, special needs, and ethnic and religious

heritages affect the roles and activities of families today

- The partnership between families and social institutions – partnerships need to be formed between families and the institutions that share family responsibilities

The church community committed to administration as family ministry will adopt a family perspective as a management strategy.

Family ministry has financial implications for church communities. It would therefore be fitting for parish finance committees to have an understanding of the vision of family ministry and the ability to adopt a family perspective so that it can properly include family ministry in its budgeting.

## **8. Conclusion**

The Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry believes that bringing the perspective of the pillars of ministry to bear on family ministry greatly enhances the potential of developing a rich and fruitful family ministry throughout the Archdiocese of Armagh. This document has highlighted that potential with regard to the church's ministry with and for families. We hope to have the opportunity to hear the other half of that story from a variety of families in the diocese – how families can bring the pillars perspective to bear on their ministry within family and on their ministry as family in community and society.

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