



The Online Newsletter of the Christian Family Movement

February-March 2012

Volume 65 No. 7

CFM groups ACT to make a difference

CFM families at **St. Francis of Assisi** parish in West Des Moines, Iowa, brightened the day for residents of a senior living center nearby. CFM arranged for a presentation by historical storyteller and entertainer, Darris Crow on Saturday, December 10, 2011. Of the 25 residents, 24 attended with 8 staff members. CFM families sat with the residents and enjoyed the afternoon entertainment. After the program, the CFM children helped serve cake and cupcakes to the residents. "It was a real pleasure to provide an opportunity for CFM families, the residents and the staff to gather to celebrate life and advent," said Jennie Bailey, CFM member who organized the group action.



St. Francis of Assisi CFM member, Holly Cleghorn, organized Christmas caroling for senior citizens on the first day of Christmas vacation. Several of the dads took some time off of work to join their families. The CFM families enjoyed singing Christmas songs, and then served Christmas cookies & candies. "What I enjoyed most was seeing the kids interact with the residents. It was a great way to introduce them to a nursing home environment, and to help them think of little things they can do to help others. It reminded the kids and the parents of the true meaning of Christmas" said Pam Flori, CFM group leader.

Presidents' Perspective *by Bob and Anne Tomonto*

As we begin the New Year, we often strive for new goals and new challenges in our life. Perhaps we look at our “bucket list” and decide as a family what adventure or travels we should plan for the new year. Will we exercise more, eat less, drink less coffee, read the Bible more often and call extended family members more frequently. Likely our list did not say – work longer hours away from the home, travel more without our spouse and family, eat more and exercise less. We are a society that often needs to set goals for ourselves.

I recently heard on public radio that January 3 is the busiest day of the year for divorce attorneys. Obviously, I have no way of validating this fact, but if this is true, this is very disturbing.

In contrast, the Miami Herald, our local newspaper, announced that several prominent NBA basketball stars had announced their engagements to women with whom they have lived for years and had children. These are the stars our kids look up to and our community youth would like to emulate.

As CFMers, we use the Jocist method of “Observe, Judge and Act”. We recognize the history of the CFM movement was established on the basis that “Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the apostolic mission of the Church.” In writing this article, I interviewed my Mom and we discussed what made her relationship with my father so special. Mom and Dad had been married more than 53 years when he passed away. Her response without much hesitation was “we worked together.” Their mission was one of promoting healthy marriages. As a Deacon, my Dad had the formational training, and as a married couple my parents had the practical experience. Like many couples they had grown up through their involvement in CFM, attended a Marriage Encounter, participated in a Cursillo weekend and their legacy was the writing of the “The Covenant Weekend”.

The Covenant Weekend, as quoted by Bishop Agustin Roman, is “an effective parish-based program to assist married couples to concentrate on the covenantal, sacramental relationship that they share.” But what does the Covenant weekend have to do with CFM? The Covenant Weekend is an Action that came out of an “Observe-Judge-Act”. The “Observation” is we need to promote and encourage healthy marriages and healthy families. The “Judge” is we can all make an impact, and the “Act” is to reach out and touch someone.

Anne and I are preparing to present our twenty-third Covenant Weekend at our local parish. We are joined by a team of current and active CFMers who recognize and cherish the value of marriage and family. We ask for your thoughts and prayers and we pray for those that read this article that we all recognize the value of our marriage and family and strive to continue to encourage a healthy balance.

Bob and Anne Tomonto are the president couple of CFM-USA and are members of St. Louis Parish CFM, Miami, Florida.

Family Activity Corner *by Anna Kieliszewski*

There is a song we sing at church that goes like this: “Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you? Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.” (*The Servant Song* by Richard Gillard.)

As I reflect this month on the ways we are called to be Servant, I remember most when my children were small. It was easy to get into the work of feeding, bathing, and changing diapers. At times, the whole process seemed overwhelming. How was I able to do this with two young children and still have some sense of sanity! Then I began singing the song above as a lullaby. I really liked the part where it reminded me that there were times I needed to let others be the servant and I needed to learn to receive and not always give.

Now fast forward to a 14 and 12 year old. Of course, I’m still doing many things as “Servant Mother” and there are times I ask for help and receive the response, “I have homework”, “I just came back from practice”, “I’m tired” – ok, so the list could go on and on. I am sure many of you living with teens and pre-teens can relate. But oh, how we are blessed. Thankfully there are the other times – “Can I help cook?” “Can you teach me to make scrambled eggs?” “Let me fold the laundry.” “Let me help with groceries.” “Let me clean the living room.” “Let me take out the trash.” This list continues too,

thankfully!



Through the example of servant, my children have learned to be servants just as they have seen in the example of Jesus. This gift in the lives of our family has been enriched mostly when we are serving with our CFM community. One year, our group chose to clean and rake an older woman’s yard. These children of ours who usually run when they see a rake, were joyfully joining their CFM friends in a working Saturday. Together it was a great chance to help someone out and as a parent I was so proud of our children that day.

They received the reward of the woman’s smile as she was grateful for our help. Where have you and your family served? When was the last time you served with your CFM families? How is Christ calling you to Serve? Look around! There are many opportunities that await you!

Ken and Anna Kieliszewski, parents of two children, have been members of CFM at St. Thomas of Villanova Parish, Palatine, IL since 2003.

Your Marriage the Great Adventure *by Lauri Przybyz, D. Min.*

Shaping your Marriage

No matter how long you have been married, you are still involved in marriage preparation -- not of your own marriage, but of the marriages of your children's and your children's children. We are often unaware of the power of our family of origin to shape us into the spouse we will become. The families we came from were instrumental in our development physically, spiritually, psychologically and emotionally. Our parents, and their parents before them, have had a big impact on our approach to love, marriage, and relationships. It is while children are in their earliest years, before age 6, that the foundations for successful, healthy marriages are laid. Building honesty, mercy and health into your marriage now can be your best wedding present to your future son- or daughter-in-law.

Who you are and how you have become the person you are does not happen by accident. The strengths you have inherited from your parents, you may choose to cultivate. The limitations that you identify in yourself, even though they might be rooted from two generations before you, can be changed to break the cycle of undesirable traits. We learned from our parents how to relate to others, how to love ourselves, how to be compassionate, and caring people. Or we may not have learned some of those things very well. In any case, we are not doomed to repeat our parents' mistakes, but we are prone to it. Being aware of the influences that have shaped us can help us benefit from what was good and change what was not good about our family's way of doing things.

By yourself, take some time to think about the family you came from. What did you learn about love and commitment? Did your parents make you feel "okay" or good about yourself? Were you encouraged to express your thoughts and feelings freely? Did you feel safe? Did you have someone who believed in you and who listened to you? What behaviors did you see in your family that made you feel uncomfortable? Did you learn to love, to trust, to listen and to share? What ways of relating were valuable? What do you do want to do differently in your own family? The knowledge you gain from this process will also help you take responsibility for the legacy you pass on to your own children.



Gaining new clarity about our families of origin, we can begin to understand how they were formed by their families before them. This discovery can lead us to have mercy on our parents and other family members. In gaining understanding and acceptance of them, we can in turn become more understanding of weaknesses we see in our spouse and his own family of origin – the In-laws! With your spouse, you can practice better responses to challenging situations. You can decide to be really honest with each other and listen to each other. You can work at taking responsibility for your own actions instead of blaming others. Modeling positive communication at home can help our children build healthy homes for themselves.

John and Lauri Przybysz live in Severna Park, Md., and have six children and 17 grandchildren. Lauri is coordinator of marriage and family life for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Spiritual Director's Discourse *by Father Tom Rzepiela*

As we continue into this God-given year of 2012, we must always be aware of our utilization of time as the days seem to fly by.

Yes, in our society time management is the big thing. How do we choose to use our time? What do we do with our time? What do we accomplish with our time?

Dr. Mehmet Oz, in a recent article entitled "Having Faith Is Good for Your Body As well As Your Soul" writes "Every now and then, we spot new research showing that religious faith is good for more than your soul. We believe that somehow spiritual health improves physical well-being. When faith is strong, it seems to keep your heart, blood vessels, brain and immune system younger."

"New research from Norway confirms a connection already seen in North America: the more often you attend religious services, the healthier your blood pressure is. That's true for women and men. Supreme Beings don't discriminate."

"The chicken-and-egg questions remains: Do people who frequently attend religious services already have low blood pressure? Or does having a strong, active faith somehow lower your blood pressure? Who knows? But the relationship is clearly there. People who are religiously active have healthier arteries."

"There's a lot of other intriguing evidence that faith is good for all of you. Attending services soothes stress, increases your connections to others, creates a sense of goodness in the world, makes you much less vulnerable to depression and helps you remember more."

You have made a firm decision to be active in the Christian Family Movement. And hopefully, it was a conscious faith decision. You chose to utilize part of your time as a participant in this unique faith experience. You are dedicating yourself, your time and your energy to the Observe, Judge and Act methodology. You have deliberately chosen to discuss and commit yourself to those religious values which bring God's love and peace to yourself, your family and others. You have chosen to be counter-cultural to our society in being sure that the message of Jesus is taught and lived out in our own families.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta puts it all in perspective this way: "I think the world today is upside down. Everybody seems to be in such a terrible rush, anxious for greater development and greater riches and so on. There is much suffering because there is so very little love in homes and in family life. We have no time for our children; we have no time for each other; there is no time to enjoy each other. In the home begins the disruption of the peace of the world."

Thank you for choosing to live out your faith so lovingly. Thank you for bringing Christ's love to your spouse and to your children. Thank you for helping to create sacredness in family life. Thank you for challenging our society to become more of whom they are called to be. We are all healthier – physically and spiritually – because of your choices of CFM and the living out of the way of the Lord Jesus!

My New Year's Day slogan sermon says it all – "Into Faith We Delve in Two-Thousand Twelve."

Father Tom Rzepiela is Pastor of St. Thomas of Villanova Parish in Palatine, IL.

Taking the Time to Make a Difference *by Paul R. Leingang*

An invitation to a family reunion: Are you going?

It was a pretty simple invitation.

My wife and I received a one-page notice some time ago, inviting us to attend a gathering of cousins on my side of the family. This post-Christmas celebration has been underway for many years, but we have never before been able to attend.

This year, we responded to the invitation and made the trip.

My extended family is complicated – at least it is for me. This gathering was among people in my father's family and included the people in the families connected by marriage with my father's family. So these people are among just one-fourth of my relatives.

The age differences are tremendous. I am the youngest child of my father, who was among the younger children of his parents. I have uncles and aunts who died before I was born. I have first cousins who were grandparents before I was a parent.

But we are all connected, by blood, by marriage and family, and by a common faith – at least, most of us.

One person greeted me with a not-surprising acknowledgement: "I don't know your name, but I know you are a Leingang."

In the days since the get-together, I have been thinking about how important it was for me, that we received an invitation to come to this event.

(The invitation came from Shirley, a first cousin once-removed, I think. I have to apologize for not being perfectly clear about the connection.)

As I reflect on the matter, though, I realize that Shirley's invitation was just the first in a series of many successive invitations.

“Are you going to the cousins’ reunion?” was a question – and an invitation – discussed among my brother and sisters. All five of us responded, getting to the party from three Midwestern states.

A first cousin from California came the greatest distance – and the latest event was also the first time he and his wife had attended.

What all of this is leading me to is a reflection on the relationships among the people of God. Recent Sunday Scriptures have given us some of the details of how Jesus invited disciples to follow him. A couple of brothers are in the mix, of course, since the beginnings of the greatest ever reunion of God’s family took place – obviously – in the midst of family life.

We were scattered, stretched across distances, drifting farther away from each other until we received the invitation from Jesus to enter into the New Covenant.

We talk about the family being “the domestic church” – and reflect on how the family is church. Some days, I think it might be better to reflect on the fact that the church should be family.

Sister Magdalena Casas-Nava, writing in the magazine of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, defines “the charism of Invitation.”

It is, she says, “a gift or anointing of the Holy Spirit to request from others their presence or participation in building up the Kingdom of God.”

What impresses me is the clear parallel between divine and human – or is it simply the fact that God uses human reality to guide us toward closer relationship with the Trinity?

We don’t need to understand all of the connections, how this one is related to that one, to enjoy their company.

It all starts with the invitation, and that’s the beginning of what it takes to make a difference. And then of course, it is how we respond.

Who have you invited lately?

Comments and suggestions are welcome. Email office@cfm.org or message@evdio.org.

Paul Leingang is director of communications for the Diocese of Evansville in Indiana, and editor of the Message, the diocesan newspaper. His award-winning weekly column, Taking the Time to Make a Difference, is syndicated in a number of diocesan newspapers. Paul and his wife, Jane, are members of CFM in Evansville.

Grandparents: Models, Mentors and Memory-Makers *by Deacon Gary and Kay Aitchison*

Every child deserves a grandparent who will love unconditionally, and every grandparent needs the opportunity to love and be loved. While it may not take an entire village to raise a child, it certainly takes a loving family. Grandparents are a crucial ingredient in the family mix. They have a unique connection to their grandchildren and a wealth of gifts, talents and wisdom to share with them.

For many families, family life is spinning out of control. Parents are increasingly busy, and family life is more often like a pressure cooker than a warm, bubbly stew. The demands of dual careers and an abundance of outside activities leave far too little parent-child time. Grandparents can make a huge difference to these busy families.

Grandchildren and grandparents have a very special connection. The late humorist Sam Levinson once described it by saying, "The reason grandparents and grandchildren get along so well is because they have a common enemy!"

Grandparents as Models and Mentors

Grandparents have many things to teach their grandchildren, both by their modeling and their mentoring. Having lived many years and experienced a great deal, their knowledge can ease and enrich their grandchildren's lives in a variety of ways.

Grandparents are powerful models for their grandchildren, and their actions and example often speak louder than their words. From grandparents, children learn both attitudes and values. Grandparents show grandchildren how to be good citizens; they are witnesses to their faith; and they are models for aging. Their very presence exposes children to the seasons of life and teaches them respect for other ages and stages of life.

Grandparents are made-to-order mentors. They have a storehouse of wisdom to share. Over the years, they have honed their gifts and talents, learned valuable skills and developed interests that are advantageous, educational and beneficial to their grandchildren. Their life experience can guide and teach their grandchildren.

Grandparents mentor grandchildren when they share a skill or new activity, such as baking cookies, knitting a scarf, building a birdhouse, visiting a museum, or taking a nature walk. Grandparents have an abundance of experience, which they often take for granted, and they almost always have more time than parents. Most grandchildren welcome the opportunity to try something new with a grandparent.

Grandparents Build Memories

Grandparents are ideal memory-makers. By spending time and mentoring their grandchildren, they can build valuable memories that will last a lifetime. They don't need a trip to Disneyland to do so, but they do need a willingness to share their time and talent. If you are a grandparent who wants to try something new, birthdays and holidays are opportune times. Consider making a birthday banner which the grandkids might even help create. Make one-of-a-kind personalized birthday cards with a picture of the birthday child. Give gift certificates for overnights at grandma's and grandpa's house or a special date. Write a letter to your grandchild explaining your excitement when he or she was born. Take your grandchild on a memorable trip or adventure for a milestone birthday.

Organizing an annual cousins' camp or family reunion at the grandparents' house or an away-place is a sure way to build memories. Design a family T-shirt for everyone, establish special games and activities such as a scavenger hunt, bingo game or tug-of-war that can be repeated year after year. Make special foods.

Another ongoing memory-maker is to create a family calendar each year with pictures of the family and birthdays highlighted. Invite grandchildren and their parents to submit family photos.

Grandparents can build memories by working on a joint project or developing a mutual hobby like stamp or coin collecting. Grandkids who are into sports love to have their grandparents follow the same sports teams and compare notes.

Grandparents build memories when they invite a grandchild to share in a service project or join them in sponsoring a child from another country. (Check out [Christian Foundation for Children and Aging](#).)

Today, fewer and fewer grandparents and grandchildren live in the same community. A great many of the more than 70 million grandparents in the U.S. are long-distance grandparents. Both parents and grandparents must be creative to keep the two grands connected. E-mail, Skype, texting, cell phones and snail mail become important avenues for staying in touch. The lines of communication can be kept open by sending stories, jokes, riddles or creating an on-going tale by e-mail. One grandmother's newsy letters to her grandchildren, about God, nature, and everyday family happenings, became a book: "Letters to Grand Children" by Elaine Mayer was published in 2009 by Trafford.

Grandparents are unique models and mentors. The ages of their grandchildren will determine the experiences, activities and adventures that can be shared. As children grow out of some activities, they will grow into others. Interaction with their grandparents is bound to enrich their lives and leave them with a storehouse of unforgettable memories.

(Deacon) Gary and Kay Aitchison live in Ames, Iowa and have 14 grandchildren. Over the years, they have shared with many parents and grandparents through their involvement in the Christian Family Movement.

(This article is based on a chapter from the Aitchisons' small-group discussion-program, "The Grand Adventure – A New Call to Grandparenting." More information about this 6-session program, published electronically by The Christian Family Movement, is available on the [CFM website](#)).