



2022 MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER

Theme: OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

MARFAM – MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE RENEWAL MINISTRY

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Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG = Evangelii Gaudium CV = Christus Vivit

OVERVIEW AND EXPLANATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME, THE MONTHLY THEMES AND DAILY THOUGHTS

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET: The annual **MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER** is an introduction and part of an ongoing multi-faceted family education and spiritual formation programme for families and about family life. The 2022 theme, continued from 2021, has a family as well as an ecological focus. The print version is an A3 poster. A digital image can be downloaded and saved or printed. This leaflet can also be downloaded and printed or forwarded. The overall programme has **MONTHLY THEMES**, **DAILY THOUGHTS** and a **WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER**. These are published on the website and are also emailed to subscribers on request for a donation. Send request to info@marfam.org.za. They are posted on social media. Other booklets and workshops are offered.

MONTHLY THEMES are based on current family realities and address various areas of family life, e.g. love and marriage, parenting, grandparents, youth, heritage, loss. A broad ecological awareness of God, creation, human, animal and plant families is built in. Themes are linked with the liturgical calendar and South African national and popular commemorations.

DAILY THOUGHTS, using a SEE-JUDGE-ACT approach for family faith reflection and sharing, consist of:

1. A look at life.
2. An extract from the scripture of the day.
3. Extracts from Church teaching using writings of Pope Francis.
4. Invitation to action and prayer.

Two areas of concern Pope Francis has addressed at this time, are marriage and family, as well as ecology and climate change. The Church offers programmes related to his letters *Amoris Laetitia* - The Joy of Love and *Laudato Si* - on Care of our Common Home. The AMORIS LAETITIA year culminates in the WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES in June 2022. The LAUDATO SI ACTION PLATFORM is an extensive formation programme for all sectors of the Church community, with families the first sector for implementation. The latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and other writings are also included in our DAILY THOUGHTS. Our 2022 publications come after another very difficult year and we continue to deal with challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, mass vaccination calls, poverty and financial insecurity. Climate change and its effects contribute too to high stress levels and challenges to our faith.

Many societal changes have resulted in growing diversity of family forms; parenting, male and female and marital relationships. Pope Francis recognises and addresses all people and families everywhere, Christian and of other religions. He places great emphasis on ecology, a family of families that includes flora and fauna. As is now well known, human behavior has harmed creation, resulting in global warming, general climate change and disastrous consequences; floods, drought, extreme heat and rising sea water levels.

Now it is our responsibility as the human family, beginning in the home, to deal with current realities, make amends and, collaborate with other initiatives, promote family spirituality and incorporate care for all of creation as promoted already 800 years ago by one of Pope Francis' great models, St Francis of Assisi. Through promotion of *Amoris Laetitia* and a collaborative involvement with the Laudato Si Action Platform these are included in MARFAM'S current goals and objectives.



A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH from *Laudato Si*.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Trinity, community of infinite love. You are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love that we may protect all life and beauty. Fill us with humility, peace and joy that we may live as brothers and sisters harming no one. Encourage us in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Praise be to you! Amen

JANUARY. Beginnings. "In the beginning....." are the first words of our Bible. In the beginning before the world, the sun, moon, stars, animals, plants and humankind were created there was only God, as Trinity, a community of love. But God had a passion to create, to share, to love and so every created thing came into being.

The desire for creation, co-creation and re-creation was implanted into every creature and so our world has evolved. Humankind was given the task of being stewards of creation. That includes responsibility for our own families and all the families of creation. But has humankind gone too far, and overridden the role of creator out of love and begun to create for our own selfish ends? How can we discern our impact on creation in the coronavirus and climate change and begin once more in every area of our lives?

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain in their own symbols and narrative language profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality, They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth. These three vital relationships have been broken both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. LS 66 As never before in history common destiny begs us to seek a new beginning. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life. LS207 Earth Charter

FEBRUARY. Love gives life. God, the creator, is a lover and it is the love of God, as Trinity, that is life-giving, creating life continually, sustaining and renewing what has been created. Our task and gift as human beings and life-givers is co-creation with God from conception to natural death but in particular in the nurturing and caring for children. By its nature, of total and lifelong commitment, marriage is the ideal love relationship. Love of nature and creation is a means of sustaining life in its various forms. God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross. The Gospels clearly present the example of Jesus who proclaimed the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores God's original plan. (cf Mt 13:3)AL62. Our human life-giving task is to nurture life in all its stages from conception until natural death. However, we know from experience how vulnerable life and love can be. Dare we say that love is necessary for life. When there is no sincere love expressed as a deep concern for others in our families and for the common good, life does continue, but not "to the full" as Jesus said. "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. John 10:10.

Loving human relationships of commitment and care are mirrored and carried forward in care for creation. Caring for trees and rhinos and yet rejecting unborn human life and the needs of the destitute and poor is not fully lifegiving. Every creature is the object of the Father's tenderness. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of God's love and in its few seconds of existence God enfolds it with his affection. LS 77.

MARCH. Family Rights, a Lenten focus. The right to life should be paramount and in some form it is enshrined in most Constitutions, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Church's Charter of Family Rights. All human life, as individuals, but also as family units, is precious from the first moment of existence until natural death. Rights extend to safety and protection from harm.

Concern for animal and plant life has become a growing concern and "extinction means forever" is a true consequence of lack of care and commitment. A culture of life approach should not only focus on the perspective of justice, but also of love and positive relationships. All of creation should be interrelated. We speak of the "butterfly effect." "When a butterfly flaps its wings in Dublin the energy it sets in motion can result in a tornado in far-away Pietermaritzburg. This right to protection of life and fair treatment of all life forms as a universal right is still far from being realized today.

Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person endowed with basic and inalienable rights. It calls for the welfare of society, social peace, stability and security provided by a certain order. LS 155. The rights of some to free enterprise and market freedom cannot supersede the rights of peoples and the dignity of the poor, or respect for the natural environment, for to make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. FT 122. In the current reality of today family can be seen as a way station only helpful when convenient, or a setting in which rights can be asserted while relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desire and circumstances. AL34

APRIL. God is Family. Holy Week and Easter. God, as Trinity is family, the perfect community of love, and every human family, not only as individuals but as a unit, is an image of God and is called to mirror the relationship of the Trinity. St Francis in his Canticle to the Sun, praises God in these words: "Most High, omnipotent good Lord, to thee be praise and glory, honour and blessing. We praise you Lord for all your creatures, for brother sun, sister moon, brother fire, sister water, mother earth and all creation. To you O Lord do they belong, you created them and they bear your likeness."

The inanimate creations, through their being, offer their praise. Humankind is especially gifted with the additional power of understanding, to love but to hurt and to forgive, because of love. Through bearing pain, in a unique way we share in the Paschal mystery of Jesus and offer honour to the Trinity. How has the image of the Trinity been disfigured as fire, water and wind have now become such destructive forces? How have we contributed to this? Are we ready to repair the damage?

Within the family which could be called a domestic church individuals enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity. AL86. The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit infinite bond of love is intimately at the very heart of

the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three persons, acting as a single divine principle leaving its mark on all creation. LS 238-239

MAY. Parents form Families. Whether it is a study of botany, biology, human physiology or spirituality, the gift of co-creation with God, in nature, should be recognized as one of God's greatest gifts. It is the male and female in many areas of nature, a man and woman, ideally through a loving committed relationship, who continue God's creation as well as its sustenance and nurturance.

Parents, human as well as animal, have the task of forming and educating their offspring. This has taken different forms throughout history and in the various species. An intimate bond is created by parenting figures and their offspring. The ideal of the love of their father and mother for each other too is an important gift to children. Effective human parenting is amongst the most complex relationships today, because of changing conditions and values. Unfortunately little training is provided for this important task. We dare not also forget the human capacity for good and evil seen so clearly in relationships.

The gift of a new child entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life. God allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity. AL166. Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time will we be able to shield them from harm. Vigilance is always necessary and neglect is never beneficial. Parents have to help prepare their children and adolescents to confront the risks of aggression, abuse or drug addiction. AL 260

JUNE. Children belong in Families. Birth, childhood and growth during adolescence are the most vibrant stages of life in all of creation, human, animal and plant as we recognise that family relationships exist too in the animal kingdom. Vigorous growth and regrowth happen in phases that can often be stressful and conflict-filled. However, ideally in a family, the young need conscious protection, care and support to monitor and direct their youthful energy towards full and responsible maturity.

Pope Francis tells youth: Young people intensely feel the call to love; they dream of meeting the right person with whom they can form a family and build a life together. This is undoubtedly a vocation which God himself makes known to them through their feelings, desires and dreams. "Christus Vivit," letter to Youth 259. It is true that the difficulties they experience in their own family can lead the young to ask whether it is worthwhile to start a new family, to be faithful, to be generous. I say that it is worth your every effort to invest in the family, there you will find the best incentives to mature and the greatest joys to experience and share. Don't let yourselves be led astray by those who propose a life of rampant individualism that in the end leads to isolation and the worst sort of loneliness. CV263. Young people experience setbacks, disappointments and very painful memories. They feel the hurt of past failures, frustrated desires, experiences of discrimination and injustice, of feeling unloved and unaccepted. There are moral wounds, the burden of past errors and guilt for having made mistakes. Jesus makes his presence felt amongst these crosses and offers them his friendship. CV 83

JULY. Grandparents are families' roots. At the opposite extreme to youth is old age. In a forest the eldest tree, in an animal troupe the oldest and wisest members, all are respected and guarded by their offspring and the community. Grandparents belong in families and are its historical memory. Not all grandparents are elderly, many are active in their own lives, while many others play a great role in the lives of their children and grandchildren. A joy to each. At the same time in the great circle of life there is a time for everything, for birth and death, for coming and going, for remaining and leaving. All should be done with patience, consideration and acceptance. Violence towards the elderly, a hurtful negative trait can happen in human families but also in other realms of nature.

Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren and many people testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents. AL 192. Our contemporary experience of being orphans as a result of cultural discontinuity, uprootedness and the collapse of the certainties that shape our lives, challenges us to make our families places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of a collective history. AL 193. "The prayer of the elderly can protect the world, helping it, perhaps more effectively than the frenetic activity of many others. In these difficult times for our human family, sailing in the same boat, across the stormy sea of the pandemic, your intercession for the world and the Church has great value. It inspires in us the trust that we will soon come to shore." July 25 2021, Day for Grandparents and Elderly

AUGUST. Sexuality, a Family Gift. God looked on his creation and was pleased. Particularly good was the ability for creation to evolve through its reproductive capability. Because of the special attributes of humans, including free will, human sexuality is a special gift and blessing. In its most profound expression within marriage, it has the potential to mirror the unity of God-love as well as its creative power. Although this is an ideal, it is often poorly presented and understood. Sex and sexuality are still often a taboo subject or seen negatively. The consequences of sin, i.e. disobedience and the fall of our first parents (Genesis) have resulted in less than ideal situations and, too often, abuse. Dealing with issues of women and men in isolation ignores their complementarity. In every aspect of creation too there are anomalies that allow mutation and growth, or change and breakdown in systems. Changes in gender-related matters are being experienced, causing confusion and at times rejection as different attitudes exist.

Every human person must learn with perseverance and consistency the meaning of his or her body. Sexuality is not a means of gratification or entertainment it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity. AL151. In assessing the environmental impact of any project, concern is usually shown for its effects on soil water and air, yet few careful studies are made of its impact on biodiversity, as if the loss of species or animals and plant groups were of little importance. They can no longer migrate or roam freely. Little attention is paid to studying their reproductive patterns and some species face extinction. LS35

SEPTEMBER. Our World of Families. Many new insights have been incorporated into our way of thinking in recent years in particular the awareness of creation and our responsibility for the CARE OF OUR COMMON HOME which Pope Francis outlines in his encyclical LAUDATO SI. Certainly the MARFAM theme OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES is beautiful image and necessary insight into understanding, the wonder of the whole human family as well as the family forms found in nature.

We, the human family, in its various forms, with different religions, political ideologies and experiences of wealth and poverty are the greatest threat to our world's security and stability today. Every other family in creation will suffer because of the way we have treated this common home. Is this the heritage we are leaving to our children and is our individualist and consumer culture doomed to remain a negative influence or how can it be redeemed?

A fragile world entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power. LS 78. Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, a living dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment. Ls143. There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes a historical process which takes places within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture. LS 144

OCTOBER. Family on Mission. Every single family of any description, from a human one-parent family, to the ancient colossuses of trees in our forests, and the tiniest of creatures in the sea, has a role to play to sustain our world, as a family of families. We, the human family, uniquely have the power to deliberately choose our sense of mission. We cannot afford selfish greed, or hurtful violence, but are called to adopt God's mission of love, love of creation and of all creatures. It is a massive mission, demanding commitment and all our resources, but it alone has the potential for healing the harm we have done to our world and its ultimate salvation. St Francis, the patron saint of ecology can be our inspiration on our mission.

Evangelisation would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. EG181. The family is an agent of pastoral activity through the explicit proclamation of the Gospel, their witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to diversity of people, protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families and commitment to the common good. AL 290. The Earth Charter challenges us, "let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life. LS 207

NOVEMBER. Family Losses and Endings. Losses big and small are inevitable experiences in daily life. Birth, growth, decline and death are the natural cycle of all of creation. For inanimate creatures it may be a painless letting go of one's place in the sun, or a cataclysmic event. Death and decay are in some instances also a source of renewal of the land.

Extinction is a serious concern in the animal and plant kingdoms. For us as humans, created with special capabilities and gifts to love and hurt and forgive, this time of the year is a special gift to remember life and death and their Creator. For those of us who believe life is not ended at death but resurrection and reunion are our ultimate hope. The 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic on top of many disastrous effects of climate change has reminded us of the vulnerability of our world and all its creatures.

If we accept death we can prepare ourselves for it. Let us not waste energy by dwelling on the distant past. The better we live on this earth, the greater the happiness we will be able to share with our loved ones in heaven. The more we are able to mature and develop in this world, the more gifts will we be able to bring to the heavenly banquet. AL 258. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is first and foremost our concern. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn. LS 160

DECEMBER. Family, still Hope for the Future. What does it mean to be a family of families and be hope for the future? Each human family is unique and different, with our own special relationships, our love, joys and anxieties. We thank you for the inbuilt sense of family, of belonging to one another and to our Creator.

St Francis in his Canticle of the Creatures gave us an insight that all the elements in creation, the sun, moon, stars, fire, water, earth and even death are brothers, sisters and the earth is our mother. They and all the creatures, animal and plant that make up OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES, in their own way pay homage to God, their Creator. Gratitude and praise are expressions of the wonder and awe we humans experience at God's gifts of creation, while acknowledging that we alone can address the challenges that must lead to hope for a future filled with peace and joy.

Toni Rowland December 2021.

