



## 2023 MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER

Theme: OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

### OVERVIEW AND EXPLANATIONS MONTHLY THEMES.

These THOUGHTS are available on [www.marfam.org.za](http://www.marfam.org.za), facebook and twitter and can be e-mailed to you on request. Send request to [info@marfam.org.za](mailto:info@marfam.org.za).

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



### OVERVIEW AND THEME FOR THE YEAR : OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

Our 2023 publications come after another very difficult year. Although Covid-19 is still hovering about, other issues, the economy – poverty and corruption, and some weather-related disasters have impacted negatively on many families. In the last 3 years most families will have experienced losses such as jobs, food and financial stability, resulting in higher stress levels and also challenges to our faith. Other challenges of climate change and political instability and, on a more family focused level, loss of biodiversity, all require prayer and action in and for families who are at the coalface of life. Our vision of The Church as a Family and The Family as the little Church still underpins our ministry and is applied to current issues. Using the ecological theme OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES is highly relevant. Two focus areas of Pope Francis, particularly at this time are marriage and family, and integral ecology, each with programmes related to his encyclical letters *Amoris Laetitia* - The Joy of Love and *Laudato Si* - on Care of our Common Home. The later encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* and other writings are also included in quotations in our DAILY THOUGHTS.

The **LAUDATO SI ACTION PLATFORM** has celebrated its first anniversary. It is an extensive resource vehicle with its six goals, and families as the first sector for implementation. This involves a family focus in at least two different ways, i.e. a recognition that everything is related and the reproductive capability of “family” as God’s chosen method in ongoing creation. Another way is the call to active implementation by human families in places such as home, school, workplace and the overall public domain. The six goals are at the same time formation vehicles for family spirituality. **The Laudato Si’ Goals:** The Response to the Cry of the Earth. The Response to the Cry of the Poor, Ecological Economics. The Adoption of Sustainable Lifestyles. Ecological Education. Ecological Spirituality, Community Resilience and Empowerment.

**The MONTHLY THEMES**, address various areas of (mainly human) family life, e.g. love and marriage, parenting, grandparents, youth, sexuality, heritage and loss. They are linked with the liturgical year and daily scripture readings, the national calendar and popular commemorations and can be well used to build parish family ministry and also justice and peace programmes. Themes are developed with a broad ecological awareness of God and creation, human, animal and plant families.

**THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY** develop the themes with the **SEE-JUDGE-ACT** approach: 1. look at life, 2. daily scripture reading and 3. a relevant quotation, mainly from Pope Francis. 4. Action and Prayer should follow. As a form of faith sharing, for individuals, families or groups it is also a synodal journey of community engagement and participatory action. THOUGHTS are published daily on the website, emailed to subscribers and posted on social media.

**OTHER CURRENT RESOURCES:** Weekly e-newsletters, booklets on particular family topics and for liturgical seasons. Workshops and programmes can be offered on request on CARING FOR PARISH FAMILIES, in general or specific themes.

**A WORD ABOUT MARFAM.** FAMILY MATTERS!!!, has been MARFAM’S vision and message for +25 years. As a movement it remains small but much has been done to create awareness of the importance of the CHURCH AS FAMILY - the image of the 1994 African Synod, and the FAMILY AS A DOMESTIC CHURCH - from Vatican II. A variety of publications, programmes and workshops have been offered over the years some of which are still available.

Many societal changes have resulted in growing diversity of family forms, marital relationships, parenting and sexuality. Pope Francis is referred to widely. He recognises all people and families everywhere, Christian and of other religions. He places

great emphasis on ecology, a family of families, including flora and fauna. Human behavior has harmed creation, resulting in global warming, general climate change and many disasters; floods, drought, extreme heat and rising sea water levels. Current realities are built in to programmes. It is our responsibility as the human family, beginning in the home, to deal with reality, make amends and collaborate with others to promote family spirituality, enrichment and healing and incorporate care for all of creation. MARFAM collaborates with the LAUDATO SI ACTION and the various family movements.

## **JANUARY. Family 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 through this ability 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, changing stewardship from care to ownership and control?

Let us reflect and discern on the particular topic of family beginnings in human and all of creation. How can we discern our impact especially on biodiversity through our harmful behaviour? How can we begin once more in every area of our lives?

***Pope Francis:** 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 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 and 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.

Our human life-giving task is to nurture life in all its stages. 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.

***Pope Francis:** Love always gives life. Conjugal love does not end with the couple. The couple in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity. AL 165. God’s indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning, even through the way of the cross. AL62. 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 of every member of a family in particular women and children who are most vulnerable.

Concern for animal and plant life has become a growing concern in thinking of biodiversity. "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 is interconnected and the right to protection of life and fair treatment of all life forms in their families i.e. ecosystems as a universal right is still far from being realized today.

***Pope Francis:** 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 Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. Families have the right to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains. AL44. 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*

## APRIL. God is Family. Holy Week and Easter

God, as Trinity is family, the perfect community of love, and every human family, as individuals and as a unit, is an image of God and 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." How has the image of the Trinity been disfigured as fire, water and wind have now become such destructive forces? 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.

***Pope Francis:** The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fulness of God which has already been attained by the risen Christ. All creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival which is God, in that transcendent fulness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. LS83. 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, 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 and preparing them for adulthood. This has taken different forms throughout history and in the various species. An intimate bond is created between 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 both good and evil seen so clearly in family relationships.

***Pope Francis:** 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. Parents have to help prepare their children and adolescents to confront the risks of aggression, abuse or drug addiction. AL 260. Men and women of our post-modern world run the risk of rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today's self-centred culture of instant gratification. Parents can be prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption, which then affects their children who find it increasingly difficult to acquire a home of their own and build a family. LS 162*

## **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 any family, the young need conscious protection, love, care and support to monitor and direct their youthful energy towards full and responsible maturity.

***Pope Francis:** It is true that the difficulties the youth 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 which is recognized with respect in many cultures and families. The older generation is guarded by their offspring and the community, in an animal troupe as well as human society. 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 is all too common and can happen in human families but also in other realms of nature.

***Pope Francis:** 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*

## **AUGUST. Sexuality, a Family Gift.**

We know that God looked on his creation and was pleased. Particularly good was the ability for creation to continue and evolve through its sexual reproductive capability in almost every life form. 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, gender-based violence and abuse. Dealing with issues of women and men in isolation ignores their complementarity and the value of unity..

Changes in gender-related matters are being experienced and brought into the open and the reality of persons who identify as LGBTIQ+ too often still causes confusion and at times rejection as different attitudes towards this remains common.

***Pope Francis:** 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. Little attention is paid to studying their reproductive patterns and some species face extinction. LS35. We affirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while every sign of unjust discrimination is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. AL 250*

## **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 outlined by Pope Francis in his encyclical LAUDATO SI. Certainly the MARFAM theme OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES is a meaningful image and necessary for understanding the wonder of the whole human family with its many cultures 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 our actions. Is this the heritage we are leaving to our children and is our individualist and consumer culture doomed to remain a negative influence? How can it be redeemed especially during this Season of Creation from 1 September to 4 October.

***Pope Francis:** 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.*

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## **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 its creatures. It is a massive mission, a calling to missionary discipleship to every family, demanding commitment and all our resources, spiritual and practical: Reduce, Recycle, Reuse, Refuse. St Francis, the patron saint of ecology can be our inspiration on our mission.

***Pope Francis:** 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. Our mandate is to go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. 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 of daily life. Birth, growth, decline and death are the natural cycle of every element 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 COVID-19 pandemic on top of many disastrous events resulting from climate change has reminded us of the vulnerability of our world..

***Pope Francis:** 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. For human beings to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, to degrade the earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the earth of its natural forests, destroying its wetlands, and contaminating the earth's waters, its land, its air and its life, these are sins against the natural world, ourselves and against God. LS8.*

## **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 our Creator for the inbuilt sense of family, of belonging to one another and to our God. Family-mindedness is the cause of our hope.

St Francis in his Canticle of the Creatures gave us the insight that all the elements in creation, the sun, moon, stars, fire, water, earth and even death are brothers and 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 and fulfill the hope for a future filled with peace and joy.

***Pope Francis:** 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*