



## MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER 2024.

THEME: OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES



### THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY: MAY – PARENTS FORM FAMILIES.

Including Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Laudato Si Week  
International Year of the Family 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration.

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**Abbreviations:** Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia. FT = Fratelli Tutti. LD = Laudate Deum. DI = Dignitas Infinita

**OVERVIEW: MAY: Parents Form Families.** Whether it is a study of biology, human physiology or spirituality, the gift of co-creation with God, everywhere in nature, should be recognized as one of God's greatest gifts. The male and female in nature, a man and woman, ideally through a loving committed relationship, continue God's creation, its sustenance and care. Laudato Si week and Christian Unity week around Pentecost this month can incorporate a co-creation theme. All parents have the task of forming and educating their offspring to prepare them for adulthood. 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, good and evil are witnessed clearly in family relationships. The 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family can be commemorated any time but especially on 15<sup>th</sup> May International Family Day.

**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.*

**Setting the scene for the reflections.** Instead of having specific parent groups the Doornville parish decided that every parish group should focus on parenting and their task in the family. Parents don't just form a family on a practical level, but also provide the foundation and formation for an ethical way of life. After all members of sodalities, prayer groups, and all PPC ministries had parents and almost all were parents, even though they were not all married. There are young adults, teenagers living with their own parents and some grandparents and foster parents care for children too. Their wisdom was shared within the families, the groups and also with groups of families. Some talks on the three special themes were arranged on relevant topics for adults and catechism classes too.

**PRAYERS FOR THE TIME. May is the month for Mary and the Rosary. Mothers' Day Prayer and Blessing. SACBC Prayer for the election. Christian Unity Prayer – See 12 May. Laudato Si Week prayers 19 May.**

**May 1. St Joseph the Worker. Workers Day** has for the last century been a battle for the rights of workers; most often a battle between employers and employees and mainly about wages. Deacon Masibi had been a shop steward in his day and knew about this from first hand experience. Rights of women workers had been addressed with maternity leave as a norm and interestingly paternity leave has also come up. A fatherhood group had spearheaded this campaign that both mothers and fathers should have the right to bond with their baby. The parish groups found this interesting but also quite strange. "I don't want to be there when my wife gives birth." "I was present when my girlfriend gave birth," another man shared. "Both mothers and fathers are involved in conception so it is valuable for both to be there all along the way." "And for both to take responsibility as parents in all aspects of parenting work.

**Reflect, share.** *Preface of the Mission of St Joseph. It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, on the commemoration of St Joseph and to give you fitting praise, glorify and bless you. For this just man was given by you as spouse to the Virgin Mother of God and set as a wise and faithful servant in charge of your household to watch like a father over your Only Begotten Son, who was conceived by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ. Pope Francis: Labour makes possible the*

development of society and provides for the sustenance, stability and fruitfulness of one's family. AL 24. We can appreciate the suffering created by unemployment. AL 25. **ACTION:** Consider and discuss the issue of men and women's role in work and family.

**May 2.** Abigail said, "It is interesting that debates about cultural practices, like the need for circumcision to be a Christian, happened in the early church and now we have our own traditions around marriage and family practices too. I find it intriguing that Jason picked up about God putting a yoke upon the neck which none was able to bear. Does that speak to us about today's church teachings on cohabitation, contraception, abortion and LGBTQI+ or where do we draw the line? Most of those are issues discussed in *Amoris Laetitia* and in later statements and documents including the recent *Dignitas Infinita*.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our father nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." Acts 15:10-11* **Pope Francis:** *We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families and giving meaning to marital life. We find it difficult to present marriage more as a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment than as a lifelong burden. AL 37. Respect for the dignity of each person is the indispensable basis for the existence of any society that claims to be founded on just law and not on the force of power. Acknowledging human dignity form the basis for upholding fundamental human rights, which precede and ground all civic coexistence. Dignitas Infinita. DI 114.* **ACTION:** Reflect, pray and share as appropriate your thoughts and feelings as parents and kids, about these yokes.

**May 3.** Some group members shared with one another and the teens in their families, "Practising dialogue and sharing like this on how we feel about the laws and customs, e.g. lobola and polygamy and patriarchy too, that are part of our tradition, has really made me think. Who taught us, have they been explained well and do they still make sense in our day? Who is the custodian of the customary law, as the Church sees itself as the ultimate custodian of God's law with the obligation to teach us." "In the end everything has to come back to our own conscience, doesn't it?" "I'm glad that their catechist deals with difficult questions," one dad said. Others disagreed. "We as parents have that responsibility first of all and we also need Fr Joseph or an expert to help us."

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *The apostles wrote to the church in Antioch. "Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it seemed good to us in assembly to choose men and send them to you. Acts 15:24-25* **Pope Francis:** *We find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful who often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences not to replace them. AL 37* **ACTION.** Do some research on your own family traditions and practises.

**May 4.** George and Fatima could share well with others on another sensitive subject. "In our parish we have some converts from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, but unfortunately for us as parents some of our girls having married into Muslim families have become Muslims too. That is more of a challenge than joining another Christian church and many people are in "mixed marriage" families as we used to call them. Prayers and practices about how and what to cook for food, how to pray and fast are things people do at home, whatever their religion, and if we really think of our families as little churches we should sort those things out so that they don't cause conflict. Conforming to some practices as a compromise for the sake of peace in the home can be a positive or a negative thing."

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *Timothy's father was a Greek. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. From Acts 16:1-10.* **Pope Francis:** *Marriages involving disparity of cult represent a privileged place for interreligious dialogue in every day life. They involve special difficulties regarding both the Christian identity of the family and the religious upbringing of children. Bearing witness to the ability of the Gospel to immerse itself in these situations will make possible the upbringing of children in the Christian faith. AL 248. FT.....* **ACTION.** Reflect on your own attitudes towards people of another faith especially within a family.

**May 5. 6th Sunday of Easter B.** Fr George started by saying, "I almost don't need to preach a sermon, just using the words of Jesus today is an examination of conscience and a test to see how deep our faith is and how often it does lead us

to experience the joy Jesus speaks of. I would like you all to do an exercise and use it to practise the Conversation in the Spirit method and dialogue and share your thoughts and feelings with one another at home on the question, "When have you experienced that joy when obeying Jesus' commandment to love as he did?"

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full. This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you. John 15:9-17. Pope Francis: The joy of love experience by families is also the joy of the Church. AL1. Mercy gives rise to joy, because our hearts are opened to the hope of a new life. The joy of forgiveness is inexpressible. Its source is in the love with which God comes to meet us, breaking through walls of selfishness that surround us in order to make us instruments of mercy. MM 3. ACTION.* Share your experience of joy in family life.

**May 6.** Pauline commented "You know, I never realised it but Paul had a pretty bad time on those missionary journeys of his. Sometimes they loved him and wanted to make him king. Next thing they hate him and want to stone him or beat him and put him in jail. I think that being a parent over the years, with so many ups and downs, can also be like that. Don't we all agree? But still, the special moments right from babyhood into adulthood make it worthwhile. Let's all share some examples of that. I'm sure listening to one another will do us a lot of good."

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *We sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman name Lydia who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to listen and she was baptised, with her household. Acts 16:13-15 Pope Francis: "Allow me to share a family memory. My mother said, 'I have five children, like five fingers. Should they strike this one it hurts me, should they strike that one it hurts me. All five hurt me. All are my children and different like the fingers of a hand.' General audience February 2015. ACTION.* Refresh your memory on some of the special moments in family life.

**May 7. Household Conversion.** "How powerful was that preaching to make people believe, or was it because of miracles and signs?" They commented in the family as they returned from the parish mission where the preaching had been on the reading of the day. "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household. The jailer washed their wounds and took them to his house and they were baptised. Read Acts 16:22-34 Young Charlie wasn't convinced and Maysie was also worried about the household as a whole being converted. She said, "It might have been like that before but not any more nowadays. Everyone makes up their own mind." The oldies wondered whether some of the powerful charismatic preachers of today were nevertheless more likely to lead the youth out of the Catholic church than into it.

Mr Anderson said, "**Pope Francis** has an important message for youth and for preachers, 'Encountering Christ, letting themselves (young people) be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love.'" *Lumen Dei. ACTION.* Try to promote the preaching in your parish as best you can. Pope Francis keeps challenging his priests to do so.

**May 8.** Nestor was new to the faith sharing group and brought a lot of new insights. "The unknown god is an interesting and a powerful image for me as I'm still learning. Maybe we should take a good look at what Paul had to say, using the title as an opportunity to preach a God he knew quite intimately rather than someone he didn't know." "In another sense it does make me wonder whether an unknown god is more the reality for our youth," Mary-Ann, a teacher, remarked.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** "Paul spoke to the people of Athens. I found an altar with this inscription "to an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. Acts 17:15 – 18:1. **Pope Francis:** "Youth" does not exist, only young people, each with the reality of his or her own life. In today's rapidly changing world many of those lives are exposed to suffering and manipulation. They live in a world in crisis. Some live in war zones and experience violence of all kinds. Many are taken in by ideologies and exploited to destroy, terrify others, becoming hostile and distrustful. Many are suffering but some young men and women are able to move forward. Jesus does not teach you from afar, or from without but from within your very youth. Contemplate the young Jesus from the gospels for he was truly one of you. He is calling us to enkindle stars in the night of other young people. From Letter to Youth. **ACTION.** Consider how well known our God is to you.

**May 9.** (Ascension Thursday is moved to Sunday in South Africa.) A general discussion was held. “Why do we hear mostly about men in the stories of the early Church? How did it really work, what about their families and wives?” “We are used to worshipping in the parish church these days but in the very early church it was in homes where they would have the “breaking of bread” for all family members, children as well as servants and slaves.” “That was a direct inheritance from Judaism, where they still celebrate a sabbath meal at home on a Friday night.” “It’s hard to believe but I’ve also heard that in those times of persecution that followed in some families a member who was a Christian had been betrayed by others and martyred.”

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *Paul found a Jew named Aquila lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius the emperor had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them and because they were of the same trade he stayed with them and they worked together. Acts 18:1-3. Pope Francis: A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. AL183 friends and other families are part of a larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith. AL197* **ACTION.** Consider the powerful witness of couples working together with a priest in a parish or a programme.

**May 10** “It seems that religious disputes like those happening today are nothing new. At times there are serious disagreements between different Christians resulting in break-aways or conflict. There can also be dissent within one church including the Catholic church as we have seen. At the 2014 and 2015 Synods on the Family Pope Francis and some of the bishops inclined towards a more pastoral approach towards irregular unions and he was criticised by others who were committed to a more strict doctrinal approach on issues around human sexuality.” Josh commented, “That can lead to confusion amongst the people, but also challenge them to discernment themselves.”

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *Gallio the Roman governor told the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, I should have a reason to listen to you, but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. Acts 18:9-18 Pope Francis: Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teach and practise is necessary but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth. Every country or region can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. AL 3. ACTION.* Do your best to be open and create a sense of openness in your experience of Church life.

**May 11.** Anthony stated quite forcibly, “I think that couples should have a greater role to play in church as couples. Almost everywhere you find married people as individuals, as catechists, Eucharistic ministers or PPC members. Even sitting in church and going up for the collection is not done as families. You may find couples doing marriage preparation, teaching Natural Family Planning or parenting skills, but shouldn't it be a normal thing for them to be a couple in any ministry? When we did our Marriage Encounter weekend that was the kind of message we took home and it really meant something. “ Some agreed, while others in the parish thought that was a crazy idea.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *A Jew Apollos, spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus though he knew only the baptism of John. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. Acts. 18: 25-26. Pope Francis: By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. AL 184 the family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons. Through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ, in order to bear witness to the Gospel of God’s love. AL 71. ACTION.* Consider what you can do to promote couple activities.

**May 12. SUNDAY THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD B. Mothers’ Day.** Also see Christian Unity Week reflection. Day 1.

Fr Michael added a special family focus to his homily on the feast of the Ascension. He explained, “The 40 days from Easter uses a symbolic number which means a certain length of time. This period of time was used by Jesus to continue teaching the apostles and preparing them for when he would return to the Father. He promised not to leave them orphans but to send a helper to carry out their commission to go out and evangelise. Families are the first evangelisers. Together with and through the Spirit they spread the Good News of God's love to those within and then beyond the family. Parental love by both mothers and fathers, or by those playing this role is their own unique way for doing this.

How else will children understand that God is a loving parent? All mothers are especially honoured today and that includes everyone who has been a mom, a foster or adoptive mom. You will receive a special blessing. “

**Reflect, share, scripture:** “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8. **Pope Francis:** Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism. It is they who testify to the beauty of life. A society without mothers would be dehumanised for even in the worst of times they are witness to tenderness, dedication and moral strength. AL 174 **ACTION.**

#### **MOTHER’S DAY PRAYER AND BLESSING**

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of motherhood and especially for our own mothers. Bless them and all mothers on their special in their families with all good things, especially health, joy, love and laughter. Keep them in your care and protect them from all harm. We invite Mary, the mother of Jesus and our mother, to care for our families as she cared for the Holy Family and say her special prayer. .... Hail Mary .

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## **SPECIAL PRAYER SEASON 12 – 26 MAY 2024**

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) 12 – 19 May.** International programme of the Vatican and World Council of Churches with local support of Christian Unity Commission South Africa.

**Laudato Si Week 19 – 26 May.** Promoted by Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development.

**UN International Year of the Family 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary 15 May.** MARFAM adapted the UN IYF30 paper.

**Pentecost** is the central and common feast built into the commemorations.

#### **Introduction.**

WPCU reflections and prayers prepared by the Christian Churches of Burkina Fasso. See

<https://www.oikoumene.org/events/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity> and [office@christianunity.va](mailto:office@christianunity.va)

A prayer resource was provided by the Christian Unity Commission of South Africa available in all languages. Download from <https://churchunitycommission.org/>. Special intentions for all Christian churches are invited during the week.

As the three events mentioned occur at the same time and overlap a combined prayer season is promoted with a special focus on Pentecost as the common celebration between the two weeks. In addition to the normal liturgy a special ecumenical prayer service can be held on Pentecost later in the day or during the week, bringing together the current relevant themes of Christian Unity, Family life and the Care of Creation. A sample programme will be provided.

Dioceses could issue an invitation for the PENTECOST INTERDENOMINATIONAL CELEBRATION or it could be promoted and held at a local level, in parishes, by groups, sodalities, through existing ministers fraternal contacts or invitations to leaders or members of local Christian churches to meet and share this time together. Pray too for unity and for Burkina Fasso who have prepared the WPCU material and for the many countries of the world that are at war. In addition let us also remember the SACBC Election prayer for the needs of our country and the elections that will be held on 29 May.

**CHRISTIAN UNITY PRAYER.** Prepared by the SA Christian Unity Commission, available in local languages. .

Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one,  
we pray to you for the unity of Christians,  
according to your will,  
according to your means.  
May your Spirit enable us  
to experience the suffering caused by division,  
to see our sin, and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.

## WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 12-19 MAY 2024

**SCRIPTURE and THEME:** “You shall love the lord your God and your neighbour as yourself.” From Luke 10:25-37

**Background and Situation** The materials for the week have been prepared by an ecumenical team of Catholic, Protestant and other ecumenical brothers and sisters from Burkina Faso. The country is located in West Africa, has 21 million inhabitants and many ethnicities. Religiously 64% are Muslim, 26% various Christian churches, 20% are Catholics and 9% follow traditional religions. The country is experiencing a serious security crisis. After a Jihadist attack in 2016 the situation deteriorated, with terrorist attacks, lawlessness, schools, health centres and other facilities being closed. Internal conflict with a battle for control by terrorist groups led to socio-economic infrastructure being destroyed and loss of government control and the army becoming party in the conflict. As a result all religions have suffered and Christian churches were specifically targeted with some leaders killed or kidnapped. At this time a degree of solidarity is emerging between the Christian, Muslim and traditional religions with their leaders working to find lasting solutions for peace, social cohesion.

The invitation to work together on the texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024 challenged the different churches in the country to walk, pray and work together in mutual love during this difficult time. The love of Christ that unites all Christians is stronger than their divisions and the Christians of Burkina Faso commit themselves to walking the path of love of God and love of neighbour, confident that God’s love will overcome the violence that currently afflicts their country.

**The Biblical Text. Luke 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan.**

**The centrality of love in Christian life**

Love is the ‘DNA’ of Christian faith. God is Love and “the love of Christ has gathered us into one”.<sup>3</sup> The lawyer in the gospel passage immediately asks Jesus, “and who is my neighbour?” This question was disputed among doctors of the law. Traditionally, this obligation was believed to extend to fellow Israelites and resident aliens, but not to foreigners. Early Christians saw Christ as the Samaritan and the inn as the Church.

**The Way of Ecumenism.** Christians are called to act like Christ in loving like the Good Samaritan, showing mercy and compassion to those in need, regardless of their religious, ethnic or social identity. Despite their efforts to be the neighbour of all who confess the Triune God, the churches of Burkina Faso struggle to truly love each other as Christ commands. They sometimes relate to each other like Samaritans and Jews, divided culturally and theologically and living in unfriendly or hostile relationships. Continued disunity disfigures them and they acknowledge the need for ecumenical conversion, so that they can pour the oil and wine of healing on each other’s wounds. Just as the Samaritan brought the wounded man to the inn, so Christ entrusts the world’s wounded and needy to our churches, to tend their brokenness and help restore them to health. This mission in service of the world is also the pathway towards the unity which is God’s gift for God’s people.

### Daily Reflections

**May 12.** Also see Ascension Day reflection above.

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Day 1. Help us, Lord, to have a life turned towards you.** *A lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher”, he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk 10:25)*

### Reflection

The lawyer’s question challenges every believer in God as it affects the meaning of our life on earth and for eternity. Jesus gives us the ultimate definition of eternal life: “... that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Knowing God means discovering and doing his will in our lives. Every person wants a life of fullness and truth, and God desires this for us too (cf. Jn 10:10). Saint Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive”.

The realities of life, with divisions, selfishness and suffering, often distance us from God and one another. Jesus lived in intimate communion with the Father. Jesus is “the Way” that leads us to the Father, our ultimate destiny. Following the Way brings us closer to Jesus, and to each other.

On this MOTHERS’ DAY we recognize that Jesus experienced love in his human family too, throughout his life, especially from Mary, his mother. Mothers play a very powerful role in sharing God’s love in their families. Many Christians honour Mary and recognize her as an example for all mothers. As we are open to friendship and collaboration with Christians of all churches let us ask God for a special blessing on all mothers.

**Prayer for Families and Life.**

God of life,

You have created us to have life, and life in all its fullness.

Parents are co-creators with you of new life. They form families and build homes.

Mothers in a special way care for and teach their children.

May we recognise in all our Christian brothers and sisters their desire for eternal life.

As we follow Jesus' way with determination, may we lead others to you.

We pray in his name. Amen.

**May 13. Christian Unity Day 2. Help me Lord to love you, my neighbour and myself with all that I am.**

*The lawyer answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself" (Lk 10:27)*

**Reflection**

The lawyer's answer taken from the Old Testament may seem simple but can be difficult. God's commandment to love him requires deep commitment and means abandoning ourselves entirely, offering our hearts and minds to serve God's will.

We can ask for the grace to follow Christ's example, loving even our enemies. We do not choose our family or our neighbours. As parents, loving means being attentive to their needs, accepting their imperfections and encouraging their hopes and aspirations. The same attitude is needed on the path of Christian unity.

Loving ourselves means to accept ourselves as we are, conscious of God's compassionate gaze upon us, always ready to forgive. We are God's beloved creation and as we respect and seek inner peace so we should do the same with our Christian brothers and sisters.

**Prayer for Families and Life**

Lord, give us the grace to know you more deeply, in order to love you with all of our being.

Grant us a pure heart, to love and accept ourselves, our neighbour and all the families of creation.

May the gift of your Holy Spirit enable us to see your presence in every creature so that

we may love with the same unconditional love that you lavish on us all.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. i

**May 14. Christian Unity Day 3. Lord, open our hearts to those we do not see.**

*The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk 10: 29)*

**Reflection**

The lawyer wanted to justify himself, hoping that the neighbour he is called to love is one of his own kind, social status and outlook, which a natural instinct towards familiarity. This is true of our church communities too. Jesus invites us to go deeper and accept our obligation to welcome and love all our fellow Christians.

The Gospel teaches us that loving those who are like ourselves is not extraordinary. Jesus steers us towards a more radical vision. He expects us to open our hearts and walk in his way. He asks the lawyer "who was a neighbour to the man who had been attacked?" In our world today insecurity and fear lead us into mistrust and uncertainty about our relationships with others and willingness to respond to their needs.

The world of creation beyond our religions is made up of families where parents love and care for their own children and learn to love others too.

**Prayer for Families and Life.**

God of love,

Who write love in our hearts,

instill in us the courage to look beyond ourselves, and our human relationships

Help us to see the neighbour in families, people and creatures different from ourselves,

As Christians may we truly follow Jesus Christ, our brother and our friend,

who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

**May 15. Christian Unity Day 4. + International Day of Families, theme Family and Climate.****May we never turn away from those in need**

*When he saw him, he passed by on the other side (Lk 10:31)*

## Reflection

Whose responsibility is it to care for Our World as a Family of Families? Parents have a responsibility to educate their children about the urgent need to protect our environment but families as a whole have a obligation to act in accordance with all the needs observed and understood. The climate across the world has changed in many ways, droughts, floods and extreme weather patterns are more common than before as a result of our actions in society. As human families we use and abuse the resources of the natural order of creation, through lack of awareness or refusal to take action and looking away. In our homes we have to take responsibility for the harm we have done through selfishness and greed, and do our best to preserve our world and save its resources. We in our world outside, the workplace, industry, government and the economy have made decisions that deliberately avoided taking the necessary action. Together as world citizens, believers in God who is our creator and sustainer we can halt the destruction, rebuild and change our unsustainable lifestyles. Climate is a blessing, we are its beneficiaries but also its protectors. The gospel parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful lesson to us. Our world is like the man who was attacked by robbers. The priest and the Levite who passed on the other side of the road are all those who ignore or refuse to recognize the problem and who take no action. As good citizens and believers in a God of creation let us be the merciful and compassionate carer who stops, binds up the wounds and takes the injured man to be cared for, using his own resources. Will our family be that man?

### **Prayer for Families and Life.**

Loving God,

As we and our families, as parents and children, journey with you and our fellow creatures towards unity, may our eyes not look away but be wide open, and our ears be listening for the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

As we travel through life, may we stop and reach out and bind up the wounded

And as neighbours to all in so doing experience your presence in every person, every plant and animal

You who created us all, out of love, for love. Amen

## **May 16. Christian Unity Day 5. Lord, help us see the wounds and find hope.**

*He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them (Lk 10:34)*

## Reflection

The Good Samaritan did what he could for the injured man out of his own resources: he poured wine and oil and bandaged the man's wounds and put him on his own animal. He went further still by promising to pay for his care. When we see the world through the Samaritan's eyes, we see through a parent's eyes, every situation can be an opportunity to help those in need. This is where love manifested itself and motivates us to ask ourselves how we have responded to our suffering neighbour, be it a fellow Christian or not, and whatever element it is of creation, human, animal or plant. The brokenness of our world shows itself in insecurity, fear, distrust and division, in violence even death. As Christians we speak of and have rituals of healing and reconciliation, we use oil and wine and yet the wounds in the Body of Christ persist. Recognising the need for healing can begin as parents and families in our homes, spread throughout our Christian churches and with those of other believers, leading to healing of the nations and the world.

### **Prayer for Families and Life.**

Gracious God,

You who are the source of all love and goodness:

enable us families, to see the needs of our neighbours.

Show us what we can do to bring about healing.

Change us, so that we can love all our brothers and sisters.

Help us to overcome the obstacles of division and neglect that we might build a world of peace for the common good.

Thank you for renewing your Creation

and leading us to a future which is full of hope:

you who are Lord of all, yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

## **May 17. Christian unity Day 6. Lord, turn our churches into 'inns', to welcome those in need**

*Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him (Lk 10:34)*

## Reflection

The man who fell into the hands of robbers was cared for by a Samaritan, a religious reject. He saw beyond prejudice or bias. He saw someone in need and brought him to an inn, paid for his care and promised to pay more if due. In any family or human society, hospitality and solidarity require the welcoming of strangers, foreigners, migrants and homeless



people. However, when faced with insecurity, suspicion and violence, we tend to mistrust our neighbours. Hospitality is an important witness to the Gospel, particularly in contexts of religious and cultural pluralism. Welcoming 'the other', and being welcomed in turn, is at the heart of ecumenical dialogue. Christians are challenged to turn our homes and our churches into inns where our neighbours can find Christ. Such hospitality is a sign of the love that our churches have for one another and for all. In that way we move from being strangers to being neighbours.

**Prayer for Families and Life.**

Father of love,  
In Jesus, you showed us the meaning of hospitality,  
by showing care for our fragile humanity and our world.  
Help us families to become a community  
that welcomes those who feel abandoned and lost,  
building a house where all are welcome.  
May we come closer to one another as we offer the world your unconditional love.  
This we pray in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**May 18. Christian Unity Day 7. Lord, show us how to respond to our neighbour**

*Jesus said: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour?" (Lk 10:36)*

**Reflection**

At the end of the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer: "who was the neighbour to the man victimized?" The lawyer replied "the one who showed him mercy". He does not say "the Samaritan" and we might imagine that the hostility between Samaritans and Jews made that answer hard to admit. We often discover neighbours in the most unexpected people, even those whose very name or origins we find difficult to utter. In today's world, where polarized politics often set those of different religious identities against one another, Jesus challenges us through this parable to see the importance of our vocation to cross borders and walls of separation.

As with the lawyer, we are challenged to reflect upon how we live our lives, not merely in terms of whether we do good or not, but whether, like the priest and the Levite, we are neglecting to act mercifully.

**Prayer for Families and Life.**

Holy God,  
your Son Jesus Christ came among us to show us the way of compassion.  
Help us by your Spirit to follow his example,  
to serve the needs of not only our but all your children,  
and so give a united Christian witness to your ways of love and mercy.  
We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**May 19. PENTECOST. Christian unity Day 8. Lord, may our fellowship be a sign of your Kingdom**

*Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Lk 10:37)*

**Reflection**

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, whose coming we celebrate once again, we are sent out to be "other Christs", reaching out to suffering humanity in compassion and mercy. The words "Go and do likewise" – are addressed to each of us and each of our churches, to live out his commandment to love. Like the Good Samaritan towards the injured man, we can choose not to reject those who are different, but instead cultivate a culture of proximity and goodwill.

As parents how does Jesus' invitation to "Go and do likewise" speak to our life? What does this call of Christ imply for our relationships with members of other churches? How can we charitably bear witness together to God's love? As families in Christian churches when mutual trust and confidence increase, we will become more willing to reveal our wounds, including ecclesial wounds, that Christ's love may visit and heal us through each other's love and care. Striving together for Christian unity helps rebuild relationships, so that violence can give way to solidarity and peace.

**Prayer for Families and Life.**

Heavenly Father,  
we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life,  
who makes us more open to each other, resolves conflict,  
and strengthens our bonds of communion.  
May we, families and communities, grow in mutual affection  
and in the desire to announce the Gospel message more faithfully,

that the world may come together in unity and welcome the Prince of Peace.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## LAUDATO SI WEEK 2024. Theme “The Seeds of Hope.”

This year’s Laudato Si’ Week theme is inspired by the symbol for Season of Creation 2024, “firstfruits.” This week and from the experience of Pentecost let us be seeds of hope in our lives and our world, rooted in faith and love. Let us gather in community to contemplate and nurture seeds of hope for our “suffering planet” (LD 2). Laudate Deum, the later document, is a reminder about the urgency of the Laudato Si’ message and the need for both personal and cultural transformation amidst our ecological and climate crises.

**“There are no lasting changes without cultural changes ... and there are no cultural changes without personal changes” (Laudate Deum 70) .** *“Many things have to change, but it is we human beings, above all, who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, our mutual belonging and of a future to be shared with everyone. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.” LS 202*

**PENTECOST INTERDENOMINATIONAL PRAYER SERVICE** Adapt From WCC. <https://www.oikoumene.org/events/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity>. To link Christian Unity Week and Laudato Si’ and also include the commemoration of the UN International year of the Family 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary it is suggested that interdenominational prayer services be celebrated. They can be promoted and organised at any level. A suggested programme is available.

### May 19. Solemnity of Pentecost. Laudato Si Week.

Fr Bernard shared in his homily how around Pentecost the family members would reflect on the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit and consider and share what they saw in each other. “One year I was credited with the fruit of kindness, maybe that was because I had tried hard to practise self-control and not react to events negatively. Caring for the environment has always been an interest of mine. I am even kind to trees, especially when they look sad.” He smiled and invited the families in the congregation to do such an activity.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *the whole of creation has been groaning with labour pains until now. We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see we wait with patience. Rom 8:22-27. Laudato Si’ 221. God created the world, writing into it an order and dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore. We read in the Gospel that Jesus says of the birds of the air, that not one of them is forgotten before God. How can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm? I ask all Christian to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversion. In this way we will help to nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied. The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge. LS 80.*



### SOME SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES THAT COULD BE DONE IN THE FAMILY

- Spend some time together to reflect, discuss and share what gifts and fruits you see in each other.
- Let each choose the gifts and fruits they believe they need for their own lives and pray together that the Holy Spirit will bless each member with what they have asked.
- As an activity - possibly with smaller children - talk about the meaning of the different gifts and fruits, make a poster of the picture and colour it in.

**May 20. Mary, Mother of the Church. Laudato Si Week.** Mrs Davies shared in her prayer group, “What has happened to the strong devotion to Mary that was so much part of Church life and also in families. We used to pray the Rosary together when I was a child but that now seems to be done mainly women, or people on their own, but occasionally some families do pray the Rosary. I’m happy that Pope Francis has added a new feastday of Mary, as Mother of the Church.” Others agreed that it was a very good thing to promote devotion to Our Lady in their families, especially in a way that suited their own family, as a little church of the home. They decided to make this into a group project sharing their suggestions.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *After Jesus had been taken up into heaven, they returned to Jerusalem and went to the upper room where they were staying. All the apostles devoted themselves to prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus. Acts 1:12-14*

**Pope Francis:** *Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world, laid waste by human power. Completely transfigured she now lives with Jesus and treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart and now understand the meaning of all things. Hence we can ask her to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom. LS 241* **ACTION.** Consider your family's devotion to Mary.

**May 21. Laudato Si Week.** We hear a lot nowadays in motivational and coaching classes about passion and how one should have passion for one's work ideals. We also see around us how passionate people can be about their cause, whether it is protesting about unemployment, study fees or climate change. Passion can lead to action, but there are negative passions too, anger, envy and greed that make us insensitive to others needs.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? James 4:1-10. Pope Francis:* *The rich heritage of Christian spirituality is the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience and has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. More than ideas and concepts I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity. Admittedly Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but live in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us. LS 216.* **ACTION.** Is my passion correctly directed?

**May 22. Laudato Si Week.** Belinda shared that she was quite shocked one day when she was saying the "I confess" and she suddenly realised that the words "I have greatly sinned in what I have done and in what I have failed to do" applied to her personally. Not doing my chores, my homework, or making a promise and not keeping it really hurt my relationships with others, my mom and dad and everyone in our family, apart from my relationship with God. Littering and waste harm my relationship with our earth. Some of these sins are greater than others and it often depends on how much harm they do to our relationships of trust.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it for him it is sin. James 4:17. Pope Francis:* *the natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. The social environment has also suffered damage. Both are due to the same evil: the notion that human freedom is limitless. LS 6.* **ACTION.** Discuss sinfulness in the context of environmental neglect.

**May 23. Laudato Si' Week.** Catholic Social Teaching has long spoken out against unjust labour practices and exploitation of workers. Justice and Peace Desks in dioceses and parishes too have taken up that message which on the whole has not been well received, often too by families when they feel personally criticised for not paying their servants, while they may stand up for justice in the workplace. On one side it took Pope Francis to speak out more publicly on behalf of the poor and oppressed. In our country, while all political parties do express concern for the poor the EFF, the Economic Freedom Fighters are the most vocal and active in mobilising people.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *Cry now, you rich. Behold the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields which you kept back by fraud cry out. and the cries of the harvesters have reach the ears of the Lord of Hosts. James 5:1-4. Pope Francis:* *Man is the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life. Nonetheless, once our human capacity for contemplation and reverence is impaired it become easy for the meaning of work to be misunderstood. LS127 . "One expression of the attitude of serene attentiveness to others and to everything is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals. I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods and it affirms our solidarity with those in greatest need. LS227* **ACTION.** How aware am I of Catholic Social Teaching on this and other issues?

**May 24. Laudato Si week.** “How does one become a saint?” Christopher asked. “let me first ask what kind of saint,” his dad replied. “The ones we pray to.” “No, first of all we pray to God, through the saints, but only a few famous, good and deserving people are formally recognized. There are millions and millions of other men and women who we ourselves recognize. Like your grandfather, who was someone I really admired because he always stood up for justice and spoke the truth and was also a kind and generous person. I loved how your grandmother was always at his side. Their “memorial” is close to my heart as you have heard me say before.”

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *We call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. Above all do not swear, by heaven or by earth or with any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no. James 6:9-12. Pope Francis: Often is it grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren. Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realise that history does not begin with themselves but that they are part of an age old pilgrimage and that they need to respect those who came before them. They are the family’s living memory. AL192. “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. LS222. ACTION.* What should I change?

**May 25. Laudato Si Week.** Bruce had been a very troublesome teenager, got into drugs and dabbled a little in Satanism. His parents shared their experience. Mom said, “Surely it must be our prayers of intercession that rescued him. I truly believe that and I hope that the efforts I made on behalf of my son and the sufferings too, will also stand me in good stead when my time to stand before the judgement throne of God has come. I know this, it is my hope, maybe just a tiny seed, but I try to believe this because the Bible tells me so.”

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *If any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:18-20. Pope Francis: In all families the Good News needs to resound in good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way. All of us should be able to say thanks to the experience of our life in the family, “we come to believe in the love that God has for us.” AL 290. Ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, in the media, catechesis and elsewhere. I would stress the great importance of the family which is the place in which life - the gift of God - can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. Integral education enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. LS 213 ACTION.* Consider what the “seeds of hope” means for you.

**May 26. Trinity Sunday. Laudato Si Week.** Fr Brian shared his message, “The Blessed Trinity has always been a powerful image of God to me, even if I will never fully understand it. There is a kind of aura of greatness about this idea of God and three in one. I did grow to understand the concept of a community of love, total committed love, when I worked in the ministry to marriage with the couples. Then I could relate the Trinity to the example or model of a family, a couple of parents, also as an example of a community of love. I try to tell that to young people, when I speak about marriage to them and when I look at the family life of all God’s other creatures I feel truly inspired.

**Reflect, share, Scripture:** *You shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you and with your children after you and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God gives you forever. Deut 4:40. Pope Francis: The world created according to the divine model of trinitarian communion is a web of relationships. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. LS 240 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. When we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty we must praise the whole Trinity. LS 238-239. ACTION.* Reflect on what this Laudato Si week, also with a family focus, has meant and ask yourselves if this was an experience of ecological conversion for us? Are we becoming more of an ECO-FRIENDLY FAMILY?

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**May 27.** The Busisabas were a well off family, doing their best for their children to make up for their earlier losses when they had really had to scrape the barrel. They had also become faithful church goers. Sheila shared with Adam after Mass how each year when the story came round of the rich young man who was asked to sell everything to follow Jesus she felt very confused. "Do we not have a responsibility to do the best we can for our children?" she asked. "Maybe Jesus is speaking about those he has chosen to follow him as priests or religious. They do take a vow of poverty." Adam replied. "But at the same time we have learned to value what we have and are willing to share. Maybe we could consider sponsoring one young person through university."

**Reflect, share, scripture:** Jesus said, "Sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" Mark 10:17-27 **Pope Francis:** A path of productive development which is creative and well directed could correct the disparity between excessive technological investment in consumption and insufficient invest in resolving urgent problem facing the human family. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress Is 192-4 **ACTION.** Pursue your consideration about sustainable management of wealth and decide on a possible action plant. .

**May 28.** When Sibusiso decided to study for the priesthood his parents felt very proud that there could be a priest in their family. However when it was explained to them that as a member of a religious congregation even though he was the oldest son he would not be able to give his family financial support, they were quite shocked and his father even thought twice about his son's choice.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time and in the age to come eternal life. Mark 10: 28-31. **Pope Francis:** Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help to reaffirm these and keep them well grounded in reality. AL 203. **ACTION.** Discuss the implications of vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

**May 29:** Today is election day in South Africa. Every eligible citizen should take responsibility for the common good of our country and its people and go to vote. We're asked to use our conscience and choose wisely who and what party will be the "servant leaders" that Jesus speaks of today. He gave his life and asks us too to be a servant or a slave to all. Our first act is to vote, and possibly to take part in the process and in governing and supporting the government at our level.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. The Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:32-45. **Pope Francis:** the church has always held it part of her mission to promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them. 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. AL 44. **ACTION.** What is the plan on this important day for your family?

**May 30.** Ophelia said to her friends, "I have such a soft spot for beggars I just can't turn away, especially a father with a child." "One of the beggars I regularly come across is a blind man who stands at the same intersection with a young girl. Is that their job?" "Some people could think that these cases are set up to call on our sympathy, but in reality there also so many genuine cases too that need help." "I do wonder if I offered to take the blind man to an eye specialist if he could be helped."

**Reflect, share, scripture:** Bartimaeus, a blind beggar was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!." And many rebuked him telling him to be silent. MK 10:46-52. **Pope Francis:** The poor become a film clip that can affect us for a moment, yet when we encounter them in flesh and blood on our streets, we are annoyed and look the other way. Haste prevents us from stopping to help care for others. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) is not simply a story from the past; it continues to challenge each of us in the here and now of our daily lives. It is easy to delegate charity to others, yet the calling of every Christian is to become personally involved. World Day of the Poor 2023. **ACTION.** What can you and your family do?

**May 31. Mary visits Elizabeth.** Bernadette, who was a mom and a catechist shared that Mary and her cousin Elizabeth both carried special children with a special mission in life. “But you always say all children are special,” Junior piped up. “And so they are, you especially, all six of you,” and his mom hugged him. “Each of you is a special gift from God. We always wanted a big family unlike most people today and at first, like Elizabeth we didn’t think that would happen, but once we had made the break-through by carefully studying my fertility cycle, there was no stopping us.” “Yes mom, we know,” Jane said. “We do love you and dad and all these siblings, but next time you are pregnant please don’t come and parade at my school. It’s embarrassing!” “And a challenging example to the teenage girls or not?” her brother asked.

**Reflect, share, scripture:** *Behold when the voice of your greeting came to my ears the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” Luke 1:39-56.*

**Pope Francis:** *The family is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one. The task of education is to make us sense that the world and society are also our home.*

AL 276. **ACTION.** Talk to young people about the wonder of fertility and pregnancy and how special children are.