



MARFAM FAMILY YEAR PLANNER 2024.

THEME: OUR WORLD, A FAMILY OF FAMILIES

THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY: AUGUST – SEXUALITY, A FAMILY GIFT.



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Abbreviations: Pope Francis: LS = Laudato Si. AL = Amoris Laetitia. FT = Fratelli Tutti. EG – Evangelii Gaudium. PCF = pontifical Council for the Family. FC= Familiaris Consortio. Quotations are used from Old or New Testament passages of the time. The longer scripture passages can be read for greater insight.

SHORT OVERVIEW FOR “THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY” AUGUST 2024 : God looked on his creation and was pleased. Particularly good was the ability for creation in almost every life form, to continue and evolve through its sexual 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 in marriage as a sacrament. As an ideal it is often poorly presented and understood. Sex and sexuality are still often a taboo subject or seen negatively. The consequences of this resulting in sin have resulted in many situations such as gender-based violence and abuse. Complementarity and equality of men and women is of growing importance in every society in our day. Gender-related changes and the presence of LGBTIQ+ persons is also a social reality not accepted by everyone. **Pope Francis:** *God himself created sexuality which is a marvellous gift to his creatures. It is not a means of gratification or entertainment, it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously in his or her inviolable dignity. It is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation but also possesses the capacity of expressing love, precisely in which way the human persons becomes a gift. AL150. In assessing the environmental impact of any project, little attention is paid to studying reproductive patterns and some species face extinction. LS35. Each person, regardless of sexual orientation ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration. AL 250.*

August 1. Treasure. After a session with the bishop all the diocesan groups dealing with issues around sexuality felt challenged to reflect and study the topics raised. Further formation workshops were planned for them and for parishioners as part of a diocesan family ministry programme on “Catholics, the Church and Sex in the Modern World.” Knowledgeable speakers on different aspects would be invited to lead the discussions, which would include the role of sexuality in nature.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Matt 13: 47-53. Pope Francis. In AL responses to the two pre-synodal consultations spoke of a great variety of situations and the new challenges that they pose to families due to stress, time, distractions and fears about the future: heterosexual marriage, same-sex unions, temporary unions, women’s rights, role of fathers in families and various forms of gender ideology. AL 50- 56. ACTION AND PRAYER. Find a way to address relevant sexual issues in the family.*

August 2. Rayhab, a social worker was invited to facilitate discussions on gender balance in the work place. She began by asking, “How open as individuals, but particularly as men and women, are we to change? Is there a need for change?” Some people looked sceptical, some were frowning, others looked interested. She explained, “With a focus on strengthening families and considering that change has come about in society, adjustments have to be made. People may tend to resist change until they are forced to do so by circumstances.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house.” And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. Matt 13:56-58. Pope Francis. We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability but de facto or same-sex unions for example may not simply be equated with marriage. No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can*

ensure the future of society. But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages? AL 52. **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Consider what has changed in this area in your experience over time? Have you adjusted well?

August 3. “Do you ever feel as if your life is in danger?” Mrs Porteous asked. “I have this feeling that they are just waiting for me to die so they can have my money.” The group were a shocked at this outspoken statement but to be honest there was a fear in some of them that their children, grandchildren or carers were abusing and exploiting them, if not necessarily planning to kill them off. “But that might happen too you know, deliberately by poisoning but also through neglect, not helping us older people to eat well, take our medicine and get a little bit of exercise.” “And what about if I should get really sick? I think we should consider a living will.” Nature can seem to be cruel to its older and eweajer members, letting them die. We humans don’t have the same respect for the life of animals and plants as for ourselves.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Salome, prompted by her mother asked, “Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”*
Pope Francis: *Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide; in many countries they have been legalised. AL48 Violence within families breeds new forms of social aggression, since family relationships can also explain the tendency to a violent personality. AL 51* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Is sexual harassment or abuse an issue you should address at home?

August 4. 8th Sunday Year B. Fr Ignatius reminded the congregation that when scripture uses “man” it really means “person,” male or female. “We all realise that we're not the same. especially when it comes to power in our relationships. South Africa is still a patriarchal society but can we say that men are more corrupt or have stronger desires towards the other sex? Evidence would tend to show that is so, but maybe it is not good to generalise. A committed relationship demands integrity from both partners. Working towards that is what God expects.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Put off the old man that belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts and be renewed in the spirit of your minds and put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Eph 4:23-24.* **Pope Francis:** *Can we really ignore or overlook the continuing forms of domination, arrogance, abuse, sexual perversion and violence that are the product of a warped understanding of sexuality? AL153.* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Is sexual harassment or abuse an issue you should address at home?

August 5. Inclusive language. Martin opened up the topic with a look at exclusive or inclusive language. “Let's take a look at the rally in the gospel and these 5000 men, besides women and children. Would they really have gone without taking any provisions with them? That seems a very unwomanly thing to do. Was there only one woman or 22 or could it have been a man who brought some loaves and fish, or a child given them by his mom? The story illustrates God’s concern for us, for our human needs and spiritual needs, because they were not expecting to be fed. The fact that the gospel notes 5000 men first and then adds the others shows the world-view of the time. Women were not on an equal plane with men. In other instances Jesus himself does challenge gender stereotypical thinking.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Jesus said, “They need not go away, You give them something to eat.” Those who ate were about 5000 men, besides women and children. From Matt 14:13-21.* **Pope Francis:** *Certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women. AL 54* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Do we as the human family respect the rights and dignity of other creatures sufficiently or manipulate them for our interests? .

August 6. Transfiguration.. Preparing for Women’s Day Rayhab suggested a special awareness. “Some gender topics are challenging from a negative point of view; we are well aware of oppression, exploitation and abuse, but there is also a positive challenge, for commitment in gender relationships. This doesn't happen naturally and needs a lot of hard work.” Tracy, one of the group shared, “Today’s feastday, the Transfiguration, is one of my favourites. The three apostles chosen by Jesus to witness his transfigured self were overcome with wonder and exclaimed. 'Lord it is good for us to be here.' That is my hope and dream for all relationships.”

Reflect, share, scripture: *Jesus was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun and his garments became white as light. And there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, “Lord it is well that we are here.” Matt 17:1b-9.* **Pope Francis:** *Erotic love must be seen as a gift from God that enriches the relationship of the*

spouses, revealing the marvels of which the human heart is capable. AL 152. **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Celebrate the gift of erotic love as appropriate.

August 7. Racism and sexism. Angela referred to a discussion on discrimination with some of the catechists. As they were a mixed cultural parish Fr Joseph was interested in their opinions and he had shared some of those in his Sunday homily. "Deep down inside ourselves how do we look at men and women of different races and cultures? Do we respect a German woman differently from a Nigerian woman? Do we take a Chinese man or a Zulu more seriously? What is our attitude towards people but also towards them as "gendered" people? I think that in the last twenty years we have become more accepting and tolerant but I don't know if that applies to the sexes. Jesus lived in a racist society too, where Canaanites were not acceptable to the Jews and for a Canaanite woman to approach him for her sick daughter might even have been a shock. Is there discrimination between different species in nature?"

Reflect, share, scripture: *Jesus said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." The Canaanite woman replied, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered, "O woman great is your faith! Let it be done as you desire." Matt 15:21-28.*

Pope Francis. *The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear and within families there is a growing reciprocity.* AL54 **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Do an examination of conscience on the issue of racism and sexism.

August 8. Individualism. At one of their family sharing times the Joseph family had shared and discussed their own favourite scripture passages. John said he often thought of the words of Jesus, "Who do you say I am?" Ann chose, "I will hold you in the palm of my hand." After others had shared on their passages they agreed to make up a slogan "ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL" and a poster of their all-time favourite because it spoke of so many things. **"I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people."** **Reflect, share, scripture: Jer 31:33.** *Extreme individualism weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute.* AL33 **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Allow everyone to share on their favourite passage.

August 9. Women's day. SA. Rayhab, the facilitator, took up a new topic. "Today we look at the fact that all religions from the most primitive until today have certain laws, rules, norms and standards, in other words a moral code. To live a good life as an individual man or woman or also as a couple demands sacrifices. The group members were given time to think and share. "I think I have carried my cross with dignity." "My cross is still very hard." "My cross was taken away from me after we joined AA and Alanon to deal with the alcohol abuse in our home." "I thank God that our marriage is good, but pray to him to give me strength."

Reflect, share, scripture: *If any man or woman would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Matt 16:24 (using inclusive language).* **Pope Francis:** *Families often experience problems when one of their members is emotionally immature because he or she still bears the scars of earlier experiences. An unhappy childhood or adolescence can breed personal crises that affect one's marriage.* AL 239. **ACTION AND PRAYER.**

PRAYER FOR THE WOMEN OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Almighty God, a

You are father and mother to us, your children.

We thank you for the particular and special gifts you have given to women, the gift of nurturing life, of sustaining and supporting life, the qualities of compassion, commitment, generosity and a willingness to share.

As they progress towards their rightful place in society we request your blessing on all women

that they may continue also to hold their rightful place in the family.

that women and men together may build a society which will bring

about the Kingdom You have promised us.

We call on Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who nurtured and cared for her son and now reigns with Him in heaven to inspire the women of South Africa,

to pray with them in their joys and in their struggles,

and to intercede for them with her Son.

Mary, Queen assumed into heaven, patroness of South Africa, pray for us.

August 10. Addictions.. Life was hard for Petru as a single mom and she had never had a stable relationship since her teen years when she had become addicted to alcohol and her daughter had been born with foetal alcohol syndrome. Rayhab, the social worker, shared her concern about Petru and a number of such cases she had to deal with because they were rejected by their families and came to the social workers for help.

Reflect, share, scripture: *A man came to Jesus and said, "My son is an epileptic and suffers terribly. I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him. Jesus rebuked the demon and the boy was cured instantly. Jesus said to the disciples, "O you of little faith." From Mat 17:14-20. Pope Francis: Drug use was mentioned as one of the scourges of our time, causing immense suffering and even breakup for many families. The same is true of alcoholism, gambling and other addictions. Society and politics fail to see that families at risk "lose the ability to help their members." AL51. ACTION AND PRAYER.* Consider your attitude towards addiction. Is it a sin or a disease?

August 11. 19th Sunday Year B. On the Sunday after Women's Day Fr Joseph said it shouldn't be just one day as there were so many issues that needed attention. It's not just about marching, toyi-toying, making demands or remembering past grievances or successes. "I wonder what Jesus would have said or done. We know that Jesus did have women friends. Pope Francis speaking about women had said, *"The qualities of gentleness, of particular sensitivity and tenderness, which is abundant in the female soul, represent not only a genuine force for the life of families, for the irradiation of a climate of peace and harmony, but also a reality without which the human vocation would be unfeasible."* Fr Joseph encouraged the participation of women working at all levels, out in the fields as well as in positions where important decisions are made, saying all these roles should uphold women's special presence and attention in and for their families.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you with all malice and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. Eph 4:31- 32. ACTION AND PRAYER.* Make a point of celebrating the specialness of the women in your life.

August 12 . Taxes. On a very practical level the groups were discussing taxes. There is income tax, sales tax, e-tolls as road tax but there are also different grants. "We give, but it is mostly others who get. Is that fair?" "I think the principle of the common good is a "good" one. For me it even puts a positive spin on the fact that life isn't fair." "Don't women on the whole carry heavier financial burdens as so many of our families are headed by single mothers?" "But what about young girls, who they say get pregnant just so that they can get a child grant, which they don't always use for the baby?" "Shouldn't all that be balanced out for the common good?" "I think we need to look more holistically at family units rather than separately at men's or women's perspectives. What about family income tax and family grants?"

Reflect, share, scripture: *"The collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, "Does not your teacher pay the tax?" Matthew 17:22-27. Pope Francis: 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. 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. AL 44. ACTION AND PRAYER.* How well do I act for the common good versus my own wants?

August 13. Child rape. A serious topic needing an urgent response was abuse and rape of children. "Are our children precious to us, are they a fruit of our love to be guarded and protected?" "But should we not consider all children in the same light?" "How?" "Child rape can of course never ever be justified but how can it be explained? What could be going through a child rapist's mind? Surely that is an unnatural act? Is there some substance-induced behaviour or pornography underlying this?" Rayhab, the social worker, agreed to organise professional input on this subject.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 18: 1-5. Pope Francis. Societies experiencing violence due to war, terrorism, organised crime are witnessing the deterioration of the family, above all in large cities where the phenomenon of street children is on the rise. Sexual abuse of children is scandalous when it occurs where they ought to be most safe, e.g. in families, schools, communities and Christian institutions. AL 45 ACTION AND PRAYER.* Is "child-safeguarding" in our parishes working well?

August 14. Sibling relationships. The family and youth groups presented insights into sibling relationships too. Rayhab said, "Think of your own families. Is there rivalry between brothers or sisters and brothers, or jealousy, or resentment or possibly even sexual abuse or serious conflict for one or other reason? The intimacy in family units is unique among all other human relationships and should be cherished rather than abused." Claire said "I personally admire the young people who manage their own child-headed homes, but I also know that they do need much more help than they get. It is not fair on teenage boys and girls to be responsible for younger siblings when they themselves have hardly developed their own personal identity. Sometimes children are just left behind in a different town, alone or with a carer or relative."

Reflect, share, scripture: *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his faults between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen take others along with you that every word may be confirmed. Matt 18: 15-20.* **Pope Francis.** *We see the care and love that surround a little brother or sister who is frail or disabled. Children do need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers and sisters. This can be quite demanding and is a true school of socialisation. AL 195.* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Is there enough parental support for sibling relationships? What can be done?

August 15. (The Assumption is transferred to the Sunday.) **Money.** Everyone discussed the issue of money and its many implications for conflict and distress in the area of sexuality. Giving money instead of love is only too common in families where parents cannot make time for their children. Money may be paid to ensure silence where there is abuse. Sugar-daddies or "blessers" give money for luxuries to teenage girls, also known as "sugar babies," in exchange for sex. "I find that term really offensive" Jane said "This is just a form of prostitution." Where there is extreme poverty women and girls may resort to selling their bodies. Even parents sometimes sell their own children and women become surrogate mothers for financial reward. Trafficking of girls is an increasing problem as they may be abducted or unwittingly lured into the situation. **Reflect, share, scripture:** *The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts. One was brought to him who could not pay. The servant fell on his knees imploring him, "Lord have patience with me."* Matt 18:21-19:- **Pope Francis.** *Migration, extreme poverty and other situations of family breakdown sometimes lead families to sell their children for prostitution or organ trafficking. AL 46.* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** What are some answers to these type of issues in our own homes?

August 16. Marriage crises. Paula shared, "Sexual issues, especially pornography can and do have an impact on couple relationships but we as individuals and couples seldom bring them to the Church. Are we embarrassed or think we won't be listened to or accepted?" "There are competent experts who are able to speak to life from a "God-perspective," Joan replied, "but it is also good to consult professionals to help us explore our concerns and experiences, e.g. childhood abuse in the past and its present effects."

Reflect, share, scripture: *"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause"? Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one.?"* Matt. 19:3-12. **Pope Francis.** *Situations will arise involving human weakness and these can prove emotionally overwhelming. One spouse may not feel fully appreciated, or may be attracted to another person. Jealousy and tensions may emerge or new interests that consume the other's time and attention. These and many other things rather than threatening love are so many occasions for reviving and renewing it. AL 237.* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Are you dealing well with any crises you experience?

August 17. Children and divorce. A serious topic needing a response from the group too was the question of children and family violence. Rayhab shared her experience as a social worker. "Divorce almost invariably has a negative impact on children in a whole variety of ways but so does the experience of ongoing violence. Divorce is very common today and we need to ask if it is chosen too quickly. Careful discernment with qualified and competent counsellors and also mediation can be very helpful in deciding on the best course of action." Everyone agreed in principle but all were aware that it is a difficult situation to deal with, especially alone and when one is feeling really desperate.

Reflect, share, scripture: *"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away. Matt 19:13-15.* **Pope Francis.** *At times separation becomes morally necessary as a last resort, when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, from disregard and indifference. AL241* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Is this reality taken into consideration often enough. Can sharing of experiences in trustworthy faith groups help?

August 18. Assumption Sunday. (20th Sunday) The Catholics in the group were given a chance to explain to others their devotion to Mary, also because August is Women's month after all. Different people shared how they saw her as a powerful queen, a mother, a sorrowing mother, at times possibly angry at events in her life and that of her son. She had experienced exile, and losing a child is very painful as some had also experienced. Some people liked the "gentle woman" that we see on Christmas cards. All agreed with the words she herself used, "The Lord has done great things for me." The sharing was enlightening for all and they agreed a patroness can be all those things.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed: for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name. Luke 1:46-49. "Mary, Queen assumed into heaven, patroness of South Africa, pray for us." **Pope Francis:** Like Mary, they are asked to face their family's challenges with courage and serenity in good times and bad, and to keep in their heart the great things which God has done. The treasury of Mary's heart also contains the experiences of every family which she cherishes. AL 30 **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Make a point of sharing on devotion to Mary and trying to build it more strongly even if not all family members are Catholic.*

August 19. Materialism. Joann raised the topic of materialism and even vanity. "I was thinking of the rich young man who was asked to sell all his possessions and follow Jesus. We always think of a young man but would it not apply equally to a woman? Are women more materialistic, more vain, more interested in clothes and nice things than men, or are their desires just different? I think that this challenge that Jesus issues is probably one of the most difficult ones to respond to. Quite honestly I think most people I know would "go away sorrowful" whether they are rich or poor if asked to give up everything." "We know that Pope Francis often declares: 'I would like to see a church that is poor and is for the poor.'

Reflect, share, scripture: *"If you would be perfect go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. The young man heard this and went away sorrowful. Matt 19: 16-22. **Pope Francis:** We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. AL39. **ACTION AND PRAYER.** It could be quite a challenge to do a reality check on one's purchasing habits.*

August 20. Money management. The conversation in the group came back to possessions and money management again, a sore point with many. Men complain that women are spenders, women complain that men are mean and irresponsible, drink or gamble. "My husband refuses to tell me what he earns." "I need to ration the money I give to my wife because she just spends it all." Comments came from all around the groups. Are there gender traits when it comes to managing finances or is it to do with one's ideology, be it traditional, socialist or capitalist? And maybe not everyone is called to give up all worldly possessions. That is a special calling. But everyone is called to have a proper balance. Wealth and greed and corruption can be problems at any level.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Jesus said, "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." Matt 19:23-30. **Pope Francis:** 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 a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. LS 202. **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Try out to set up and keep to a budget even for a short time to test one's management skills.*

August 21. Work. The speaker began, "Equal work for equal pay," is a popular slogan and goes to the heart of much of the gender question today. "But should there be rules about the type of work men and women can do?" "Women cannot or would not necessarily want to do hard physical labour. Are we not built differently physically and mentally to work differently too?" Other relevant points were raised but again the conclusion was that it had to do with balance and attitudes. "It even starts at home with the way we teach our kids, boys and girls, about money and give them pocket money or expect them to contribute their time to making things work in the family." "And not necessarily in stereotypical ways," Robert added. Everyone was encouraged to go and discuss the issue further with their children at home.

Reflect, share, scripture: *The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. Matt 20:1-16. **Pope Francis.** Masculinity and femininity are not rigid categories A rigid approach does not help children to appreciate genuine reciprocity. Taking on domestic chores or some aspects of raising children does not make a man any less masculine or imply failure, irresponsibility or shame. AL 286. **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Review together your family's attitude and actions around the issue of work.*

August 22. Wedding feasts. They discussed, “Why would someone not want to go to a wedding especially a traditional one that goes on for a day or two with lots of food and drink, I wonder.” “Maybe too busy.” “Can’t afford to dress up.” “Not really interested, or in the people involved.” Reasons came from men and women. “I think it’s mostly men, who don’t see such religious or cultural things as relevant, same as why are there so few men in church these days?” “But they do enjoy the feast part apart from the religious or cultural activities.”

Reflect, share, scripture: *The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son and sent his servants to call those invited but they would not come. Matt 22:1-14. Pope Francis. Catechesis is a proclamation of the word and is always centred on that word, yet it also demands a suitable environment, an attractive presentation and the use of eloquent symbols. Every dimension of the person should be inserted in a communal journey of hearing and response. EG 166* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** What is your attitude towards wedding feasts, do they promote a positive attitude towards marriage or are they just excuses for eating and drinking together with friends?

August 23. Although the group discussions were not intended to be specifically religious the subject often came up. Many biblical sayings have been proverbs or norms in society. The commandment “Love your neighbour as you love yourself” and its two parts is taken very seriously today with a great emphasis on self-esteem and one’s own healthy self-image. At the same time balance in a couple relationship is also very necessary. Maysie said she didn’t want to be anyone’s doormat and that has happened too frequently in the past. Joel stated, “I think women are becoming too overbearing nowadays. We men just can’t handle that.” Portia added, “We really need to teach our kids constantly to keep the right balance.”

Reflect, share, scripture: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself. Matt 22:36-40 Pope Francis: The ideal of marriage cannot be seen purely as generous donation and self-sacrifice, where each spouse renounces all personal needs and seeks only the other’s good without concern for personal satisfaction. Authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one’s own vulnerability and needs and to welcome with sincere and joyful gratitude the physical expression of love. AL 157* **ACTION AND PRAYER.** Is this positive attitude towards sex a good way to promote marriage and all healthy relationships?

August 24. What started as a bit of a free-for-all debate did come to a conclusion that these matters need to be addressed. “It is not done in our culture for a man to sweep the house and serve his wife and family at table. I could never act like a servant,” one man announced. “What will my friends think,” he added. Others commented, “Are our gender stereotypes determined by others, or do we make our own decisions?” “They say peer pressure is great for young people, but I think it is just as hard for us men,” Most of the men agreed and one added, “Also in polygamous families how can a father be fully available to a larger number of wives and children?” “Are culture and traditions ever meaningfully addressed in the Church and should we as family people raise these issues for consideration?”

Reflect, share, scripture: *He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Matthew 23:1-12. Pope Francis: The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear and within families there is a growing reciprocity. Some societies still maintain the practice of polygamy; in other places arranged marriages endure. In many places the practise of living together before marriage is widespread, as well as cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry. AL53-54. ACTION AND PRAYER.* Has cohabitation before marriage become a societal norm. is it OK with you?

25 August to 6 October. MARRIAGE SEASON and SEASON OF CREATION. MARRIAGE REFLECTIONS Week 21 - 27 Year B. As was suggested by SECAM (The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar) after the 1994 African Synod, the Sundays of weeks 21 to 27 in the year B have since 1997 been promoted as a time to focus on marriage. This was adopted too by the SACBC for a time. MARFAM continues to incorporate this focus into THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY for the Sundays as well as the weekdays of this time. MARFAM also promotes THE SEASON OF CREATION the interdenominational ecological awareness project from September 1 to October 4 which has been adopted by the Catholic Church. This will also be incorporated where appropriate in THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY during this time. The Sunday Reflections are based on the Sunday Readings. The daily reflections are general issues around marriage with passages from scripture or Church teaching and a word from Pope Francis or other Church writings.

August 25. WEEK 1, 21st Sunday. Husband and Wife are like Jesus and the Church. Eph 5:21-32, John 6:60-69. Fr Peter had decided that during these weeks he would focus his homilies on the sacrament of marriage and its practical

aspects. He started by saying, "In the last century much has changed in the roles of men and women, within their marriage and in all aspects of life. Women's liberation has given women far greater freedom, but has also had a great impact on the men. Each couple has to resolve the balance for themselves in all the areas of their relationship, their roles, their work, money, time and friends. Who is the boss in your home? How comfortable are you both with the situation? I invite you to go home and give this whole important scripture passage your serious attention.

Scripture: 'Give way to one another in obedience to Christ.' Ephesians 5: 21-32. **Pope Francis:** *The essential message about marriage to everyone is that it should not be a negative relationship of subjection but a positive one of total commitment and self-giving. This reciprocal submission is seen as a freely chosen mutual belonging marked by fidelity, respect and care. Sexuality is inseparably at the service of this conjugal friendship, for it is meant to aid the fulfilment of the other.* AL156

Questions for SHARING AND ACTION - for couples, individuals or groups.

- What does (my) marriage in the Catholic Church really mean to me?
- How can I support married couples for the good of the Church and society?
- As a married couple what contribution are we making to Church life? Are we acting responsibly, to one another, our children and the community?
- Sexuality is not only a gift to the human family but is the essential life-force of plant and animal species too. Sexuality is God's plan for ongoing creation.

Conclude with a moment of prayer

26 August 27th Marriage is..... Ask any group of people, young or old, married or single to define marriage and you may come up with a wide range of responses. In one group some said, ... for happiness, for children, for friendship, for love. Marriage is lots of give and very little take, a partnership, fun, hard work. Marriage is the only way to survive the hazards of modern society. Marriage is something that can make people love one another and can sometimes make people hate one another. Marriage is the longest thing one goes into without knowing what is on the other side. Marriage is a neglected sacrament, but a sexual sacrament. In nature in general there is a variety of forms of male and female relationships, with some creatures mating for life while others don't have that quality.

Before getting started on these reflections it is a good idea to reflect seriously on one's own attitude towards marriage. How has your attitude developed? What has been your life experience of marriage around you? Are you open to deepening your understanding and appreciation?

Reflect, share, scripture: *The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.* *Gaudium et Spes 48.*

27 August. Remote preparation, the family and role models. Preparation for anything important in life is necessary. The Church describes preparation for marriage in 3 phases. The first phase, remote preparation, happens in the home and family, mainly through modelling by parents and other married couples. "I want to be like aunty Rosanne and uncle Jim," Doris told her friends at school. "I like the way he treats her like a lady. I wish my mom had someone to be like that for her." Paul kept quiet. Everyone in his house was always being told to shut up. Mabel laughed as she shared, "My mom and dad celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary and we had a super party, but I wonder why mom cried." As in human families the young in animal families are taught and learn their way of life from the older generations. Nature is ordered in this way.

Reflect, share, scripture: *A Christian lifestyle, witnessed to by Christian families, is in itself a form of evangelization and the very foundation of remote preparation. It is in the family, the domestic church, that Christian parents are the first witnesses and educators of the children both in the growth of "faith, hope and charity", and in each child discovering his or her own vocation.* *PCF Prep 28.*

28 August. Proximate preparation and youth. Sabie always included a session on marriage in her confirmation class. She would begin by asking the youth when they intended to get married. Quite a lot of girls and boys said they didn't want to marry at all. Some girls thought of a beautiful wedding and two youngsters who happened to be going out together said

they had talked about it. "No sex before marriage" they had been told. So together the class discussed God's plan for continuing the human race, and even how all of creation is ordered. "We've all seen adolescent creatures having to learn their place." Sabie led them to consider the fulfilment of men and women in an enriching, committed, faithful, lifelong relationship. George thought, "Wow, I never saw it like that before. It sounds very good but sure is a big responsibility. When I'm 30 I think I might be ready for that." The developing sexual relationships of adolescent animals is obvious in their behaviour, but they act more from instinct.

Reflect, share, scripture: *The period of proximate preparation generally coincides with the period of youth. It includes what pertains to the pastoral care of youth and is concerned with the integral growth of the faithful. This cannot be separated from the framework of the family as if young people make up a kind of separate and independent "social class". It should reinforce the young people's social sense, first with regard to the members of their own family, and orient their values toward the future family they will have. PCF Prep 33*

29 August. Immediate preparation. Adam and Beth had been engaged for a year and had lived together for two years when they heard about Catholic Engaged Encounter and were told they were expected to experience the weekend programme. "But I am not a Catholic and I don't want them to preach to me," Adam told Beth. They did go with some trepidation but found the weekend most enriching. "We did learn about God and the Catholic Church but also learned much about ourselves and our expectations of marriage," Adam concluded. "It was good too to think seriously about our wedding day to make it really special. I now understand that a Wedding is a Day and a Marriage is a Lifetime. I promise to do my best to make it so for us." Observing the difference in animals and humans it is clear that humans ought to have a strong moral sense in their behaviour.

Reflect, share, scripture: *This preparation for the sacrament of Marriage should be the culmination of a catechesis which helps engaged Christians to retrace their sacramental journey intelligently. It is important that they know that they are uniting themselves in marriage as persons baptized in Christ, and that they should behave in conformity to the Holy Spirit in their family life. PCF Prep 53*

30 August. Newly weds. The marriage preparation team had tried a number of times to start a newly-wed group. They knew that the first few years of marriage were often the hardest and breakdown was high in those early years, even if couples had lived together beforehand. The young ones were always so busy with their work and their social lives. But the team also knew that the sell-by date of marriage preparation after-effects was about 5 years so they persisted. When one couple hit on hard times and brought some friends along too to their preparation mentor couple a programme using the approach of Date Nights was introduced very successfully.

Human beings are likely most emotionally and psychologically challenged but even within some forms of animal life, e.g. elephants the adults or matriarchs will guide the younger members in their behaviour.

Reflect, share, scripture: *Especially in the first five years of married life, it would be desirable to follow up the young couples through post-marriage courses, to be carried out in parishes or deaneries. FC 66.*

31 August. Marriage maintenance. 'Marriage is made in heaven, but it requires maintenance here on earth.' In their SCC faith sharing group they normally shared on how the Sunday readings could apply to their lives. After a marriage enrichment programme Ann and Michael suggested they look into the issue of maintenance from time to time. "It's like looking after your car or another precious possession", they said. "We had quite a major overhaul but maintenance is also keeping it serviced and clean and even beautifying it. I like my mag wheels and the wheels nearly came off our marriage without the required maintenance. There are different ways of servicing a marriage and quite simply strengthening our communication has been a great help." Many animal species live communally, with senior members supporting the wellbeing of the group. Sexuality is a clear life-force in all of creation and a healthy and functional approach needs to be promoted and protected in Church and society. .

Reflect, share, scripture: *The pastoral care of the regularly established family requires the commitment of all the members of the local ecclesial community to help the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission. For the family to be ever more a true community of love, it is necessary that all members should be helped and trained in their responsibilities as they face the new problems that arise, in mutual service, and in active sharing in family life. PCF Prep 69. Pope Francis: In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life. We receive an integral education which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. LS 213*

September THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY will continue to focus on marriage, family and care of all of creation.