Sticking Together: families in good and tough times

“
To speak about family life is to speak of love with its abiding peace, its searing pain, its moments of joy and disappointment, its heroic struggle and ordinary routines. Indeed, the story of family life is a story about love—shared, nurtured and sometimes rejected or lost.”

(From the Way of Love: US Bishop’s 1994 Pastoral Message to Families).

By Janette Davidson
Diocesan Co-ordinator Family Life Ministries

National Families Week will take place from Sunday 15 May to Saturday 21 May 2011 and is timed to coincide with the United Nations International Day of Families on 15 May. This day is observed by the United Nations to mark the importance that the international community places on families as the most fundamental units of society, as well as to draw attention to the plight of families in many parts of the world.

The aim of National Families Week 2011 is to encourage everyone to think about the things that make their family strong in both good and tough times whatever their circumstances.

National Families Week provides opportunities to:
• raise awareness of family issues and the support available to families (activities and services);
• affirm and celebrate families and family values;
• recognise that families are important in themselves; they are the basic units of society and the greatest contributors to human well-being;
• strengthen family life, rituals and spiritual resources;
• develop a greater awareness of the qualities of strong families.

Family is important because it is the strongest influence on the way we grow and develop. But this is not to say that family is always full of harmony, sweetness and light. Family is the place where most people get their greatest satisfaction and joy in life. It is also where we can suffer our most intense anguish and pain.

Every family no matter how healthy and happy experiences times of trauma, pain and suffering. For some families, these times are few and far between. For other families, however, the painful times come more frequently and are much more difficult to process. Everyone is vulnerable. Everyone has difficult times.

Dolores Curran in her book “Stress & the Healthy Family” identifies:
Top family stresses:
• Economics; Children’s behaviour; Insufficient couple time/spousal relationship; Lack of shared responsibility; Communicating with children; Insufficient ‘me’ time; Guilt for not accomplishing more; Insufficient family playtime; Overscheduled family calendar.

Families who handle family stress effectively:
• Recognise stress as temporary; even positive; Work together on solutions which strengthen the family; Develop new rules such as prioritising and sharing; Expect stress without considering themselves a failure; Feel good because they deal effectively with stress.

Healthy families:
• View time as something they can control; Balance work and family life; Balance couple and personal time; Recognise the stress level and take early steps to counter; Play together; Prioritise activities.

For peace of mind, enquire about the Ann Wilson Pre Arranged Funeral Plan.

9979 5978
Chapel and Office:
Cnr Barrenjoey Rd & Darley St, Mona Vale

9971 4224
Office:
844 Pittwater Road, Dee Why

It does not help to:
Feel guilty about stress; Look for someone or something to blame; Give in to stress rather than trying to master it; Focus on family problems rather than family strengths.

Every family is a hurting family at some stage of the family lifecycle; it is part of the human condition. For many people however ‘happy/strong families’ is a difficult concept. There are those who struggle with many aspects of life including, bringing up their children alone, those who struggle in the face of domestic violence, drug abuse, loss of faith, care of elderly parents, care of disabled family members, death, those who are desperate to have a child but cannot, or those who are struggling with family breakdown, exclusion, poverty, isolation or racial discrimination. Many families however, achieve much despite their struggles. Every person is formed by both the positive and negative experiences in their family. Acknowledgement of these experiences as part of family life is an early stage of an individual’s growth.

It can take a lot of time, energy, attention and love to assist families at these times. There are many people and parish ministry groups in a parish and local community who can offer assistance and support and play a vital role in helping families through crises. Centacare, the official welfare agency of the Catholic Church in the Diocese also offers a variety of programs and services to assist children and families.

Whatever our experience of family may be (the many ups and downs), there is always the presence of God with us in these experiences; personal brokenness can be a context for encountering God and for exploring ways of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation.

There are many ways a parish and school can celebrate Families Week.

For more information on available resources please email janette.davidson@dbb.org.au or call 0409 074 908.