

A Report on Home is a Holy Place at Good Shepherd Arnold October/November 2008

We chose to have 5 sessions of 1 and half hours on a Sunday afternoon (3.30-5.00)

The titles of the sessions were:

1. What does home mean to you?
2. How do you and your family show love for one another?
3. What are the challenges in your family relations?
4. When are you most aware of God in your family experiences?
5. Nourishing Home as a Holy place and what Next?

Week 1

Fr John Sherrington led the **first session** and we had 37 present. This is roughly the format-

- ➤ In small groups we introduced ourselves and told of our family makeup and background. This was quite interesting as most of us know our fellow parishioners by face and maybe name only. It was also a good ice breaker as generally people like to talk about themselves!!
- ➤ Then Fr John asked the question - What does home mean to you? Answers mostly described the more pleasant side of home and home life.
- ➤ He then asked what are the concerns (relating to family and home)? The expected answers came.
- ➤ We also looked at our hopes for this programme.

We had prayer, song and scripture reading as well as reminders of how Jesus liked to be "at home" He was 30 before he left his home of Joseph and Mary and he did like to visit Mary, Martha and Lazarus home and dined with several folk.....

We viewed the introduction only of the DVD almost at the end of the session.

Week 2

The **second session** was led by two parishioners and was different in format. 38 people were present. We had small groups again.

We looked at the question: What does Holy mean? This was not developed very well and we missed the opportunity to emphasise the fact that all we do is holy etc.

Another question "How do we show love in the family? This really showed the holiness of Family life (but the point was missed) Not a great session and we worried about who would come back the next week!!

At the end of that session we asked people to bring with them for the following Sunday an object that represents love for them at home.

Section 1 of the DVD was shown

Week 3

This **third session** was led by two different parishioners and again there was a different format. 40 people were present. We had an "altar" to receive the objects/icons and asked each person (who had brought same) to come forward and say

a few words about the why this spoke of love for them and then place it on the altar. That was quite moving and we offered prayer of thanks.

This session was about challenges in family relationships. We asked them to have a quiet time and reflect on **What is your prime personal concern/challenge NOW?** We stressed they would not have to share this with anyone.

In groups they were asked “What are the influences both inside the home and those (sometimes subtle) which invade from outside which bring about these concerns/challenges”? The answers given were very varied and comprehensive.

We then asked “What are the personal ways and family traditions which help us to combat these influences”? This brought a wealth of spirituality and traditions –We had an international gathering of people from Malta, Poland, Hungary, Italy and India as well as the 4 nations!

At the end we asked people to bring to mind that one concern they had had at the beginning of the session and gave each person a stone to hold to represent that. After scripture reading we invited them to place their stone near a lighted candle (The light of Christ)

We did not show the DVD at all on this session

Week 4

This **fourth session** was held after a break of 2 weeks (half term) and we had a huge drop in numbers (27). Another parishioner led this and again a different style. As the title suggested it was more about personal testimony. How God had acted in people’s lives –the miracles big and little and was very revealing of a deep faith and spirituality. The leader was a young family man and his description of how he communicates love to his wife and children was simple and profound. It was so refreshing as he was so obviously at ease with this. (Most of us oldies would be embarrassed to express these sentiments especially in the parish setting!!!!) It encouraged others to be more open and tell their stories of God’s action in their lives.

Sections 2 and 3 of the DVD was shown

Week 5

For the **fifth session** we had Sue Sanderson (Diocesan Project Worker) to lead us in How do we nourish Home as a Holy Place? and help us with what we could do to take all this forward. Sue’s approach was again very different. We didn’t have small groups. She invited us to respond in an open forum. We discussed Awareness of the holiness of everyday life, also prayer in the home and how we might adapt according to age of children etc. She did a very good exposition of the celebration of Sacrament in the home. Taking 4 or 5 of the seven sacraments she helped us see that these are carried on in our relationships in the family/home. It was good to see that connection between Church and Home.

We then looked at How we could take things forward and that was/is very promising. A group of about 12 met after Mass on Sunday and they have big ideas already. So Glory be to God. They are arranging to involve families in meeting in their homes with a travelling crib during Advent for a short prayer service and social. We will also have an international family event early in the new year

Some personal reflection- albeit early days!

Demographics of attendees varied enormously- Young couples with and without children, middle aged couples whose children had left home, Grandparents, Widows, Single people. We had many who had not been to any parish event before.

The young couples brought their children 7-8 in all and we had catechists to help them engage with the subject too –Some very interesting drawings!

People liked to engage with one another and talk about what is real for them- their home and their family.

There was a real sense of parish family.

Downsides

It wasn't easy to move the subject on (made more difficult by the different leaders) ? The time was too short and we always finished the session with the feeling that if only we had more time....

Because we were such a large group and even in small groups there was a reluctance in some to be open and personal - there were some delicate moments.

Most of this was due I think to a feeling of maybe shame that "my family doesn't match up to the church ideal" and also a recall of an event in their lives. That's where more time was needed. After the 3rd session on challenges when the leaders told their own story there was some opening up and many expressed afterwards that it was good to know that other families experience the same troublesand they come to the same church!!!

Personally I would like to continue with this programme as there is so much depth both in the subject and the participants to explore. But action speaks louder than words and meetings and I am confident that we have now the beginning of something really great.

MP 22.11.08