

Home is a Holy Place: Brief Background

Home is a Holy Place is an initiative of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in response to *Listening 2004: My Family My Church*. *Home is a Holy Place* aims to:

- develop greater awareness and understanding of the graced, blessed and holy reality of Christian marriage and family life;
- incorporate this awareness and understanding into the life and work of the church at home, in the parish, and within diocesan and national Church structures.

The Bishops identified *Home is a Holy Place* as a priority following a year of listening to families' experiences at home, in the world and in the church. Whilst families clearly drew on their faith in God to sustain their daily lives, there was little evidence that they were being affirmed by the Church in the spirituality of their homes. During diocesan family listening days, conversations around domestic spirituality tended to focus on prayer life and parish-centred activity. *Yet God's presence at home can be seen in countless other ways*, such as in the everyday acts of service and in the teaching and communion of the home.

The vision of *Home is a Holy Place* is both simple and complex. From the start we accept that the assertion that home is a holy place can be a challenge, not only for those whose home experiences leave a lot to be desired but also for those who resist any appropriation of private life by outsiders, even by the Church. When families talked about their lives during *Listening 2004* it became very clear that there are not two kinds of family – one 'broken' or hurting, and the other happy or 'successful'. Each and every family has their own share of both joys and grief, both hopes and anguish. Yet throughout *Listening 2004* we heard repeatedly of the great love that family members have for one another: steadfast love that often endures great challenges. The call to *celebrate family* must recognise the extent to which *all families*, with, in and through both their blessings and their brokenness, are still places of living love.

Home is a Holy Place is an innovative and challenging project. We acknowledge the newness of marital and family spirituality as an area of enquiry within the Church. In establishing core principles within this resource we invite couples and families, supported by their local faith communities, to en flesh them with personal experience. We affirm the role that single people will play in this process, since they too belong to families. We affirm the importance of involving family members both young and old, from all stages and phases of the family life cycle. Reflection on personal family experience, in the light of Christian scripture and tradition, is the key to seeing our homes as holy places.

Home is a Holy Place is not the only response to *Listening 2004* identified by the Bishops. It was preceded by *Everybody's Welcome* which aims to support parishes in becoming more friendly, family-sensitive and welcoming for all kinds of families. It will be followed by *Passing on the Faith*, an initiative to explore what it means to pass on faith in God and how parents and grandparents can best be supported in this. If your parish has not yet reflected on *Everybody's Welcome*, it would be very important to do so before commencing work on *Home is a Holy Place*. Many of the challenges of *Home is a Holy Place* can be met by developing a deeper sense of belonging and care for all within the parish.