

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

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The Pastoral Letter *Unleash the Gospel* is about how we can cooperate with the Holy Spirit to rebuild the Church. The point is conversion of hearts and changing “our culture such that every person... through personal encounter with Jesus Christ, embraces his or her identity as a son or daughter of God and... is sent forth as a joyful missionary disciple.” This is a broad view. The *focus* is on **the family**. Words like “family,” “children” or “father/mother” appear 125 times! This Sunday celebrating the Holy Family is a perfect time to consider the vision for families in *Unleash the Gospel* and ask, how can we act to help make our families **holy** families?

Unleash the Gospel (Guidepost 7) says that families are “the very heart” of all our efforts. “They are the first and most important setting... the ‘domestic church’ - the primary social unit in which life in Christ, the life of the Church, is experienced and lived.” The family is also the primary social unit of parishes, no matter how a “family” is made up: a person or persons living in a single household, homes with or without children, with one or two parents, multigenerational households, or extended families: *All become holy when Jesus is at the center of the relationships among family members.*

Unleash the Gospel outlines priorities for ministry to families, to help parents in their calling to raise children in the Faith and Sacraments, and to help care for families in all their needs. Families are called to live in and witness to the Gospel, “to exercise radical generosity in inviting others to share in your family life, even if you are well aware that it is not perfect. For instance, consider engaging in a ministry or ongoing service project *as a family*, so that others can witness how you relate to one another and how you raise your children.” Consider making *that* a family new year’s resolution!

A long list of proposed Action Steps in *Unleash the Gospel* for parishes and the AOD will help families as steps are implemented. Yet the path to holiness in families begins now with simple daily gestures of love. In this new year, let our families reclaim their Christian identity by committing to: attending mass as a family; creating time for the “family meal” without distraction to reclaim its sacred nature; regular family prayer and scripture reading; making reconciliation a lived reality in our homes through sacrifice, forgiveness and mercy; and modeling Christ’s love by reaching out to neighbors with a welcoming spirit and generosity in service to others and in sharing our faith.