The eye of a child

a beautiful sunset
Look at God’s painting
In the sky
Ooh. . . . .
Wasn’t it good of God
To do that.

Is God driving the Moon?
Yes my Dear.
I would like to go
and see God.

I need bigger feet
To fit into my shoes!

Well the size of my sleep
Depends on how big my day was.

What we treasure most in our lives is our family. As parents, we regard our children as our greatest gifts and sources of joy. They are blessings given to us by God. We spend most our lives trying to provide a good home life for our children.

We strive to create an environment that is both supportive and stable, an environment in which our children can grow, mature and develop their true potential. We also try to instil in them the traditions and values that are important to us as Catholics, and have been part of our heritage. This is a life-long commitment of love and dedication, which we undertake freely and unselfishly. This issue of Living Loving Learning aims to help parents recognise ways in which the faith can be shared through the everyday events of family life. It does so in two ways. It suggests moments within daily family life when faith can be shared. It offers practical examples of sharing with our children the faith of the church.

Family life is an ideal place for children and parents to learn how to practice God’s presence and discover God’s gift in one another. (Meehan 1995 p.17)

The family is called to be a place where the Gospel and its values are lived and explained as part of normal daily life. As parents, we are called first and foremost to strive to live the Gospel ourselves each day. We are called to inspire and teach our children to live in similar ways.

We try to foster within our children an understanding of our Catholic faith that goes beyond attending Mass on
Sundays. We encourage them to discover and to learn about God in the everyday events of daily life.

**What are teachable faith moments?**

Teachable moments are those within family life when parents can express and nurture faith in our children. During each day, there are many valuable moments to teach about Christian faith.

Some moments may be used to remember that God is present in our homes, caring for and loving us. Other moments can be used to teach about Jesus, his teachings and the values of the Gospel.

Teachable moments give occasion to pause, to reflect and to teach the values of the Gospel. They allow family members to discover God in the midst of daily life.

**When do teachable moments arise?**

Teachable moments arise daily. Most are spontaneous, though some need to be planned.

Spontaneous moments may be the result of children asking questions as they grow, learn and discover new things. They may be sparked during everyday dinner table conversations.

The struggles of our teenagers as they search to understand themselves can also lead to spontaneous teachable moments. So can the love shared between spouses, and the death of a loved one.

Spontaneous teachable moments can include driving home from school, walking along the beach or walking through the park. Among the most important are family celebrations, family rituals, family prayer time and family worship.

**Planned moments**

Teachable moments can arise also from planned family activities. These include occasions when the family comes together to celebrate Christmas, Easter, or a special occasion such as a birthday or a Baptism. Again, planned moments can include meals, prayer time and other family rituals.

These occasions provide opportunities to share ideas related to the meaning of the occasion. Christmas provides opportunities, for example, to recall the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus. Easter provides opportunities to recall the risen presence of Jesus. Birthdays celebrate the gift of the lives of loved ones, and baptisms welcome new members into the Church as God’s special family.

( *Family Rituals and Family Prayer will be the focus of the next two publications of Living Loving Learning Series.*)

**The family meal**

The family meal provides many spontaneous and planned opportunities to teach about Christian faith. As members gather together, we share not only the meal, but, more importantly, the stories of our day. We communicate our joys, sorrows, achievements and disappointments.

Through conversations, we share our concerns with those who are dear to us. We offer each other support, guidance and encouragement.
The family meal can provide experiences that are important for the faith development of children. Among the most important are those that help them to understand elements of the Mass.

When helping our children prepare, for example, for their First Holy Communion, they can learn that, just as we gather as a family for the family meal, the family of God gather to celebrate the Eucharist. They can learn too that, just as we share and listen to stories around the meal table, the family of God listens to stories about God, Jesus and his teachings during the Eucharist.

At the family meal we gather to eat and drink to nourish and strengthen our bodies. During the Eucharist, we gather as the family of God to receive, in Holy Communion, the Jesus who nourishes and strengthens us spiritually to live as he taught.

We pray the Grace around the family meal table, thanking God for what we are to receive, and asking God to help and bless those in need. The family of God pray in the Eucharist, giving thanks for God’s blessings, asking God’s help and blessings on those in need, and telling God that we are sorry for our sins.

Spontaneous meal discussions about daily events can also be important to help our children learn right and wrong. Teenagers too can be helped to reflect upon moral values as well as upon Christ’s teachings such as love, forgiveness and compassion for those in need, and upon how these relate to daily life choices they need to make.

While we can share much about our faith during the family meal, in a world that demands more of us each day, sharing a family meal together can be a major achievement. Different pressures mean that some families do not have the opportunity to share a meal with every other member of the family present. Today, we need to accept that the family meal includes whoever is home at that particular moment, and that we can achieve only what is possible.

Examples of Sharing the Faith of the Church

There are numerous ways faith can be shared in family life. Let us take five examples.

**Teaching the call of Jesus to love**

“Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

As Christians we are called to love like Jesus in the midst of our everyday lives. Within family life, one of the first lessons our children need to learn is the meaning of Christian love.
The home ideally is the first community where children experience what it means to be loved and how to love as Jesus taught. Parents teach this through the ways that we interact with our children as much as through words.

Every time we give our children or spouse a kiss, a hug or show some other form of affection, we help our children to understand concepts such as that God is a loving God, ever present every moment of the day. In turn, every time we hear the gentle words of a child such as, “I love you,” we ourselves can appreciate a little more the love and gentleness of God.

**Jesus Calls us to forgive**

*Read and reflect on the Parable of The Father of the Two Sons. (Luke 15:11-32)*

Conflict is a reality in daily life. Conflict may stem from quarrels about leaving dirty clothes on the floor, putting the water container back in the fridge empty, or disagreements about deeper issues.

At times, it may not be easy to forgive. But, as Christians, we know the Gospel challenges us to forgive as Jesus taught. If, within family life, we are reluctant to say sorry, and hesitant to forgive others, then we are not living as Jesus taught.

It is in forgiving and reconciling that love and relationships are restored. We demonstrate to our children the Gospel values of forgiveness and reconciliation, for example, whenever we are prepared to say, “I’m sorry. Will you forgive me?” for our mistakes.

Such moments provide opportunities to teach children that, in saying sorry, they are able to restore relationships with those whom they have hurt. And as children come to understand the importance of saying sorry to one another, they can understand better why doing the same is so important to restore their relationships with God.

**Jesus calls us to give Christ-like care**

*“Do for others just what you want them to do for you.” (Luke 6:31)*

The father of a teenage daughter was finding it difficult to understand why his daughter could not see the reason for a decision he had made. One night, after yet another disagreement, he walked into daughter’s room with a cup of hot milo. He sat on her bed and asked if things were okay. At that point his daughter looked at her father and burst into tears. She was confused at her father’s gesture, and yet at the same time relieved that he cared.

After a long discussion about each other’s differences and concerns, father and daughter were able to work through their fears and angers in a constructive way. With her father’s help, the teenager was able to resolve what was, until then, an ongoing issue. What can we teach about Christian faith at such a moment? What can this moment teach our teenage children about how to live a Christian way of life?

This is an example of what it means to show Christ-like care, and to share the concerns of others. It shows also that, no matter what they may think or do, Christian love is about loving people for who they are.
Christian love includes seeking reconciliation. It does not want others to feel rejected or alone, particularly when they are feeling vulnerable and struggling to piece their lives together.

By taking the time to talk out differences, to work through the resentments, fears and anger, and to forgive, we as parents nurture and form our children according to the values of the Gospel. At the same time, we are promoting family cohesion.

Such moments are great opportunities for parents to model unconditional love. As we model this over and over again, our teenager’s will develop a fuller understanding of what it means to say that God loves every human person unconditionally, and will never abandon us, even in times of crisis.

**Jesus Calls Us to Serve Others**

“Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matthew 19:19)

One example of a planned moment to teach this call of Jesus is the annual contribution to Caritas through Project Compassion. The following situation helped awaken social consciousness within a family, as a means of loving one’s neighbour as one’s self as Jesus taught.

On Ash Wednesday, a few years ago, our parish priest invited each family to take a Project Compassion box home for Lent. He explained that the money that particular year would go towards supplying water pumps for the villagers in an area of severe drought in Africa.

One family in the parish decided that one of their Lenten projects would be to contribute to the same cause. The children were small at the time, so they had to choose something that would help them to understand what contributing means.

One night around the dinner table, the parents asked the children what was their favourite dessert. They quickly replied that it was ice cream. The mother and father then proceeded to suggest to the children that, for the next number of weeks, they not buy any ice cream but contribute the money saved to Project Compassion instead.

This really confused the children. The parents then went on to explain that they would put the money that the ice cream cost in the special money box they had been given at church. They told them that the money would go to a village in Africa to buy a water pump so that the children in the village would have fresh water to drink.

The middle daughter, who was about four at the time, had no idea what a water pump was and wondered why the people did not just turn on the tap. The parents explained to her that these people did not have a tap in their homes, and that they had to travel a long way to fetch their water and bring it home for the day.

The family then discussed how it would feel to be without water, and why a water pump would be very important to the village. They also discussed the importance of helping these people even though they did not know them. The four year old started to understand, at her level, why it was important for them to help those who are less fortunate than themselves as a way of loving others as Jesus taught. Sometimes the little we go without can help a whole community of people.

This became a family project every Lent. The children each following year chose what they would give up to help others who are less fortunate.
This is an example of using moments to teach children that Jesus calls us to help others with their needs as a way of loving them. The more we allow our family to pause and to call to mind the needs of others, the more powerful will be the call to service in the lives of our children.

There are many opportunities throughout the year when we can stop and plan to love others as a family by giving to help them. In our parishes, the St Vincent de Paul Society are always grateful to receive clothes and furniture to help others within our own community live a more comfortable life.

At Christmas time, there are many appeals for food and toys. If we think as a family about what we might give, and why we give, then the Gospel message will become a lived experience for our children.

**Jesus calls us to thank God the Father**

“Look at the birds flying around: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in a barn: yet your Father in heaven takes care of them.”

(Matthew 6:26)

Family excursions can lead our children to discover the beauty and wonders of creation. God has created these for all to enjoy, and to raise our own as well as our children’s awareness of God’s ever present love in the world.

I remember one of the most wonderful teachable moments for me occurred while I was walking with my children to the park one day. Here I discovered that my children were open to the God who created all. Furthermore, I discovered that children have wonderful insights which we adults can easily lose.

It had just stopped raining, so we put on jackets and went for a walk. Along the way, we chatted about many things, none of which I remember now. Then, all of a sudden, my youngest daughter looked up and saw a rainbow. As with most children, she was in awe.

I remember her sweet little words when she said, “Mummy look at the beautiful rainbow. It reminds me of God.”

I looked up and pondered the reality. After a short time, my oldest daughter looked tenderly at us both and said, “No mummy, that is God showing himself to us.”
In this moment, the child reminded her mother about the wonder and awe that creation evokes, and identified God as Creator. We can engage in faith sharing every time we go as a family for an outing to the park or a dam, to the beach, or to the zoo.

While we walk and take the time to smell the flowers, observe the clouds, or watch the various animals at play, we can marvel at the beauty and splendour of the Creator. The same is true when we sit by the water, listen to the sounds of nature or watch a sunset.

We can call to mind God’s presence within creation as we tuck in our children at night, and recall the wonders observed during the day. We can do so in our night prayer together, as we thank God with our children for all the blessings we have received.

Recognising goodness within creation helps our children to discover God, the Creator of all.

**Conclusion**

There are many teachable moments in family life every day. Life is a gift from God.

As parents we need to become aware of the moments which provide opportunities to share faith. This means that we need to listen carefully to our children, trying not to react too quickly to a situation, before thinking through the ideas and values, which we wish to convey.

For a moment to become a teachable faith sharing experience, we need to ask ourselves what Christ is asking of us within the situation. In other words, how would Jesus respond if he were in this situation?

Through these, and the many other moments in family life, we can nurture our children’s faith in all that Jesus has taught. We can nourish their faith too in the loving and caring God, who is present in the events of daily life.

Written by Carmel Suart
Perth Archdiocesan Catechist Service

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


FOCUS QUESTIONS

• What inspired you most as you read this article?

• Name a spontaneous moment which has arisen in your family life that has given you an opportunity to share your faith with your children.

• Reflect on a moment in your life when your child has given you a new insight into the presence and action of God.

Action

• Give it a go!!
  What are the teachable moments within my family life when I can share my faith with my children?

Be pro-active,
pass this publication onto your family members and others within the community.