



“Not Easy But Full of Meaning” What Did Families Say During Listening 2004?

Last year the Bishops of England and Wales asked families to talk about what life is really like for them: their joys and sorrows, their hopes. Over 15,000 families responded. Every diocese listened to them in one way or another. So what did families say?

Family Life in a Changing World

Families are under a lot of pressure: too little time, too much to do just living, working and caring for each other, not enough understanding, help and appreciation from society or the church. We heard a lot about loneliness and not being welcome. Materialist values portrayed on TV and in the newspapers don't help. But families said that faith in God and a prayer life does. So too do patience, humour, tolerance and good family communication. Families are grateful for today's health, social and educational benefits. But their greatest blessing by far is that of simply being together as a family.

“James scored a goal and only the childminder saw it.”
“There are 3 and now 4 generations to cope with: elderly parents often need more help when the younger family needs help.”
“The main difficulty? Competing demands on our time: from work, children, leisure, even church!”
“I have a big family - 6 children & 15 grandchildren. I'm a widow. It's lonely very often. Family are busy.”

The full report covers five important areas:

- **Values: media, materialism and peer pressure**
- **Balancing family, work and home**
- **Changing family structures**
- **Mobility and communications**
- **Hurting families**

Family Life and Living the Faith

Families talked a lot about faith in God and how it provides structure and strength, meaning and hope in their lives. But they also said that faith and religious practices are difficult areas, especially where families disagree, children reject the faith and family members are excluded from full participation in the Mass.

“Families are the best thing on earth. It doesn't matter if you break up, if you are a different skin colour or how people are, it just matters that you love them.”
“The friends we have at church enrich our lives, and give us spiritual support for the right choices.”

“An awful lot of young people see the Church as irrelevant - not just those who have not been taught or brought up properly.”

“If only the Church could free us of the constant question ‘Where did we go wrong?’”

“It is God who has called us to a Christian marriage, who supports us and helps us to grow as persons in our family life, and who in and through our family relationships draws us into communion with God, Father, Son and Spirit.”

“I feel unable to talk about religion or church matters. My children ridicule my prayer life.”

The full report covers six important areas:

- **Valuing faith in God**
- **Communicating faith in God**
- **The lost generations**
- **Sharing faith in God at home**
- **Family spirituality**
- **Family faith at home and in the parish**

Our Beliefs and Pastoral Practices

Church teaching, especially on divorce and remarriage, was talked about. Some families requested greater generosity, forgiveness and welcome from the church. Others asked for more information and clearer teaching. Most recognised the importance of the parish as the place where we should all be known, loved and welcomed for who we are, where different experiences of family life are respected and where moral and practical support is available.

“We should be as forgiving in the broader Church as we are at home with our own families. We shouldn't let our values slip but be honest with people. We have to offer acceptance and challenge.”

“It is difficult and stressful to bring our autistic child to church, both for us and him.”

“Family life will always seem second best when celibacy is held up as the ideal.”

“As a single person, I find nothing applicable to my circumstances in this form.”

“We have been unable to have children and feel such a failure at Mass.”

The full report covers seven important areas:

- **Engaging with ‘real’ or ‘ideal’ families?**
- **Valuing difference**
- **Consistency of pastoral practice**
- **Gender, sexuality and fertility**
- **Single people**
- **Inter-church families**
- **Divorce and the Eucharist**

What next?

Families had many practical ideas. Local action was a priority, though it needed support. Many volunteered to be part of the follow-up. So in April 2005 the Bishops of England and Wales agreed a plan to meet families' needs in three stages over the next three years:

Welcoming, family-friendly parishes (2006)

- to offer understanding, friendship and support
- to be a source of help in times of need
- to encourage and celebrate all family life whether married, widowed, single, divorced, separated, with children or without

"The challenge is to build highly loving supportive communities within our parishes for all of us, including our families."

Marital and family spirituality (2007)

- to share the holiness of our homes as places of life, love, service, teaching, fellowship, witness and prayer

- to celebrate the presence of God as love in all loving family relationships

"A broader understanding of marital and family spirituality among both clergy and laity will be fundamental to the success of any future work by the church in support of family life."

Helping parents and grandparents to passing on faith in God (2008)

- to provide more support, tools and resources
- to respect the role of the home and to see where it fits in with the school and the parish
- to provide comfort and healing when necessary

"Parents expressed a need for more help in raising their children in the Faith, both in terms of deepening their own understanding and being able to integrate it into the life of the home."

The Bishops of England and Wales would like to thank everyone who took part in any way in Listening 2004: My Family My Church

Read the full report at www.catholicchurch.org.uk or order a hard copy from the Catholic Communications Service: price £3.99. Reports of individual diocesan family listening days are available online at www.listening2004.org.uk

Order Form

I would like to order ___ copy/copies of 'Not Easy But Full of Meaning' and enclose a cheque for £___ made payable to CATEW. (Please enquire about a bulk or diocesan discount)

Name..... Email.....

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Please place me on an emailing list for further information about the Listening 2004 follow up.

I am particularly interested in actively supporting the Welcoming Parishes / Family Spirituality / Passing on Faith follow up.

I am happy for my contact details to be passed on to my local coordinator of family ministry.