

Blending fresh ingredients into your recipe for life at home

By Katharine Bird

Counselor Mary Roemer Kusbach keeps a cup filled with Magic Markers in her office at the Family and Children Center in Mishawaka, Ind. Often, during a family counseling session, she asks a child to choose a marker for each family member. Then she asks the child to set the markers out in a pattern on the floor to represent family relationships — as the child views them.

The results vary, Ms. Kusbach says. But in families with relationship problems, as often as not, the markers for the parents and possibly an older child are clumped together at a distance from the younger children who are grouped by themselves.

"Now put them the way you want the family to be," is the counselor's next instruction. Invariably the child puts the markers in position so "everybody is close together," she says. One child placed the markers in the shape of a star. All the members were reaching outward, "but each still was touching" the other family members.

How people relate to each other has a direct connection with the satisfaction they find at home, Ms. Kusbach indicated. Several other counselors agreed with this assessment.

"We all need to feel loved and cared about — that we make a difference to someone else," explained the Rev. Rod Landes. Though some people find this at work or in clubs, the Presbyterian minister continued, many others count on those at home for it. Mr. Landes is a counselor with the Pastoral Counseling and Consultation Centers of Greater Washington, D.C.

Creating a home which is a center of refreshment doesn't happen by chance. It starts with people caring enough about each other to find constructive ways of relating, the pastoral counselor stressed.

For instance, individuals "need to work out the logistics of living together," Mr. Landes said. This includes negotiating differences when they arise. If no negotiating is possible, he added, people are likely "to get openly angry or stiff and distant" with each other. If home becomes formal and uncomfortable, it can be a place no one wants to go, he remarked.

For Celeste Kearney, a counselor in Fairfax, Va., the home is a "safe place to try out life." If individuals are confident of their standing at home they will "express themselves freely," she em-

phasized. They can be criticized without feeling they are being rejected personally. The key here, she thinks, is "not to criticize the person" as such.

Discussing different points of view at home is valuable, she added. It "sharpen[s] up views" and helps to clarify opinions. Such interaction enables us to grow, she believes.

Another ingredient for a happy home environment for Ms. Kearney is healthy competition. In non-nourishing homes, competition is not healthy. The focus becomes, "If I win, you lose," she said.

Ms. Kearney explained that a few years ago she returned to school to work on a graduate degree in counseling, with the backing of her family. Suddenly she found herself competing for grades with her school-age children. Fortunately, she said, it never became a question of who can beat the other since "all of us wanted to do well."

In creating a happy home atmosphere, Ms. Kusbach considers warmth and flexibility essential ingredients. She looks for a home where it is "easy to laugh" and where people can relax. The right kind of flexibility is important, she said, because it helps people develop the capacity to tolerate surprises and respond to changing family demands and expectations.

(Ms. Bird is associate editor of Faith Today.)



Families

Even the early Christians grappled with 'environmental

By Father John Castelot

The early Christians in the Greek city of Corinth had a question for St. Paul. It concerned a mixed marriage of those times.

What was to be done if one spouse in a pagan marriage decided to become a Christian? It seems that some Corinthians insisted the Christian spouse should then separate from the pagan.

But Paul's view was different. He thought the couple should remain together unless the non-Christian partner made it impossible for the spouse to live in a Christian way. Here is his reason:

"The unbelieving husband is consecrated by the believing wife; the unbelieving wife is consecrated by the believing husband. If it were otherwise, your children should be unclean; but as it is they are holy." (1 Corinthians 7:14)

Paul is using the terms "consecrated, unclean, holy" not in their usual sense of being in or out of God's favor. Rather, he is thinking of a prior stage, the result of living in a good or bad environment. More than we perhaps realize, we are influenced by the atmosphere and the value system of our society.

If that atmosphere and value system are right, the chances of living good Christian lives are very good.

That is why the unbelieving partner in the marriage and the children of the family are "consecrated." They are living in a household whose atmosphere and attitudes are Christian.

An important element of such an atmosphere is prayer. When God is brought consciously and formally into family life, it makes an impact on the home. When

love is perceived as really living in the family, it will almost certainly be a loving family. Nothing can lead to that perception better than praying together — simply, unaffectedly — before and after meals, at the end of each day, whenever the family feels a special need.

There is a dramatic and fairly lengthy story about this in Scripture. It is the story of Cornelius, the Roman centurion in Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles. He is described as "religious and God-fearing." This phrase reveals that Cornelius, although a pagan, was strongly attracted to Judaism.

Cornelius and others like him would have been welcomed into the synagogue. The biblical account shows that he distributed alms to the poor too.

Cornelius prayed often; his entire household followed his example.