

ily on a mission

That was not all. The prayer of the church, the great sweep of the Psalms, wove in and out of the ordinary family routine.

And there was the parents' prayer entrusting each child and the whole family to God. This occasioned one of my earliest insights into ministry within the family.

I learned from these friends how children can be a means by which parents learn of trust — the trust among family members and ultimately trust in God.

There was an occasion when I was distressed because family finances precluded sending our children to the new Montessori school, the first in our area. I expressed great worry about this to my friend. She wisely asked if I thought that God, who is so good, had preordained only certain ways for the development of our families.

As I recall it, she said: "You need to trust that God will be with you when it comes to doing what is best for your children."

Her attitude encouraged my husband and me to undertake the Montessori methods at home — something we enjoyed as much as the children did.

Now that our own children are grown, I see how certain beliefs influenced us all. Among these is the conviction that the family is a

primary place for coming to see that all are called by God to contribute to the world because of —

- Who we are, that is, compassionate, ethical, spiritually "tuned-in" persons;

- and what we do, how we use our talents.

I believe a key to the family's vocation is in the training and support of the different members' particular vocations. In a way, each one is on a mission.

When I think of our own children now — one in the theater, another digging in an archeological site, another teaching history, another translating Russian — I see them committed to principles of peace, justice, harmonious living; committed, I would say, to God's kingdom.

The Christian family also is called to care for some human need in the wider community. This is not to say that each family member must work in a soup kitchen or tutor refugees. For when any family members minister to others, they act on behalf of the whole family as well.

Finally, the family is the natural place for learning to move beyond private goals for the good of all. If the lesson is learned well, the church and society are enriched.

(Mrs. Leckey is director of the U.S. bishops' Committee on the Laity.)

about the Christian family

and submissive to their husbands raise the hackles of many who see the role of today's woman in a different light. What is behind these words, which were written to women around the end of the first century?

Christians had grown in number and were visible in society. But, as mysterious members of a religion forbidden by Roman law, they had to meet in the privacy of each other's homes.

What is mysterious provokes the imagination. So other people imagined all sorts of things about the Christian community.

Christians were accused of the strangest kinds of behavior. Their meetings were whispered about as wild orgies, with wife-swapping the order of the day. People who heard garbled versions of the Eucharist — about partaking of the body of Christ — said the Christians were cannibals.

Yet Christians had to live shoulder to shoulder with people who didn't understand their religion. They wanted to be accepted and respected. They wanted to attract others to Christ.

Accordingly, Christians had to do everything in their power to project an image that would counter false impressions and unjust accusations.

This led them to stress their discipline, order, circumstances dictated this approach. The Christian family was fulfilling its vocation as defender of the Christian community.

Again, in First Timothy, we read: A wife "will be saved through childbearing" (2:15). Obviously, bearing a child does not ensure automatic entrance to heaven. But at the time this letter was written, heretics were condemning marriage and childbearing as evil (1 Timothy 4:3).

Thus the Christians countered that vicious teaching by stressing and demonstrating the goodness of both marriage and motherhood.

The Christian family has to meet the challenge of the times — in every age.

(Father Castelot teaches at St. John's Seminary, Plymouth, Mich.)

FOOD...

...for thought

A family's life can reach into a vast network of relationships:

- relationships of family members with each other — husband and wife, parents and grandparents, brother and sister;
- relationships of family members with co-workers, other families, teachers, parishioners, classmates.

Are there opportunities to carry out a family's Christian vocation within that network of relationships?

Consider this story about how a family's vocation might take shape at home:

Clinical psychologist James Kenny was speaking with pride about his wife Mary working to become a certified public accountant. It took some doing on both their parts, especially during the two months of her internship when she lived with their oldest son in Indianapolis, Ind., he said.

During that period, Kenny took over the parenting of the children still at home in Rensselaer, Ind. The Kennys have 12 children.

For Kenny, helping his wife pursue her dream is part and parcel of married life. While accounting might not interest him much, he thinks couples need "to be open to differences" and willing to learn from each other.

Sometimes it pays to reflect on the realities of your life now,

suggests Jean Haldane, Lay Emeritus of the Episcopal Academy in the Episcopal Diocese of California. She spoke during a 1984 consultation on adult ministries at the Cardinal Spellman Retreat Center in the Bronx, N.Y.

Lay people are in for a "wonderful surprise" when they see that their ordinary interactions with others can be part of their Christian ministry, Ms. Haldane observed.

She told of a woman who came to a workshop apologizing for her lack of experience in ministry: "I've never had time to do Altar Guild, teach in the church school, etc."

But, Ms. Haldane continued, by the workshop's end the woman exclaimed: "You mean, looking after my mother for the last 20 years is part of my ministry?"

Where is the opportunity for carrying out a Christian vocation in a family's daily life? Is it in helping each member of a children's scout troop to develop his or her special talents? Is it in fostering interracial or interreligious understanding in ordinary life contexts? Is it in meeting some special need or fostering a special goal for one's immediate family?

Where do you think the family's Christian vocation leads?

...for discussion

1. Do you regard your role and your contributions as a family member — grandparent, parent, spouse, child, etc. — as a vocation? How and why is the home a challenging forum for Christian living?

2. Father Herbert Weber thinks a home is a place where people are accepted — welcomed — in their imperfections. What does he mean? Is this easier said than done?

3. What are some ways a family can reach outside itself to others? Do you see this as part of a family's Christian vocation?

4. How do parents, catechists and teachers, scout leaders and others help different children develop their different talents and abilities? How important is this?

SECOND HELPINGS

The most difficult thing that Jesus asks of us is that we love as he loved, writes Franciscan Sister Paula Rippe in "Called to Be Friends." Factors that foster development in many human relationships are explored in the numerous short chapters of this easy-to-read book. Christianity, the author states, is based on two great commandments which stress the need for God's love as well as for the love and friendship of human companions. Some people, she suggests, have had more assistance in seeing the difference between these two needs than their relationship. Interestingly, she stresses ways in which human relationships can even promote the individual's growth and self-understanding. She discusses the skill of listening, unrealistic expectations of others, the meaning of commitment, prayer, and other topics. (Ave Maria Press, Boardman, Ind. 48005, \$3.95.)