Dear Parents,

Welcome back to our new school year...another year of teaming up with you on your life-long task of forming your children!

Effective and successful executives and professionals always keep abreast of the latest methods in their industry and fields of expertise. In the same manner, we also need to continue to develop ourselves in the most important role in this life – PARENTING! Taking time to read PARENTS FIRST will be a good start if you haven’t done so yet....yes, even the back issues please.

Frankly, I’m not too worried about the mothers...it is the busy fathers that tend to miss out in their wonderful journey of FATHERHOOD. Pope Francis said that “Fathers sometimes are so concentrated on themselves and on their work, and at times on their own individual fulfilment, that they even forget the family”. I hope you find time to read again the March 2015 issue and make some resolutions on how to be the best father!

In this issue, we will be featuring the letter of Bishop Javier Echevarria on the Irreplaceable Role of Parents in the Upbringing of Children and a short write-up on Parental Authority.

We are all looking forward to another fruitful year of collaborating with you in the academic and character formation of your sons.

Happy Parenting!
IRREPLACEABLE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

Following my practice during these Marian months, I want to consider now the importance of these sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist) in the life of Christian families. May our gratitude to the Most Blessed Trinity rise up every day for these salvific mysteries that enable us to participate in the divine riches.

All of us can and should help out in the task of the evangelization of the family, in the way best suited to our personal circumstances. My thoughts go out to those who work in schools, public or private, in direct contact with fathers and mothers, with so many young people in the classrooms, and with teachers with whom they share their educational responsibility. I remind you all that your work, of primordial importance, should not be limited to transmitting a specific body of knowledge that prepares students for the future. Be concerned (I know that you have already are) to foster the integral formation of the children and adolescents in the various aspects—human, spiritual, religious—so integral to Christian education.

In first place, fathers and mothers have a primordial role here, as do, in a certain way, the other family members: brothers and sisters, grandparents, etc. It is the parents, or those who take their place, who are primarily responsible for the education of their children.

Speaking of the various family members, the Roman Pontiff said: “You, children and young people, are the fruit of the tree that is the family: you are good fruit when the tree has deep roots—your grandparents—and a strong trunk—your parents. Jesus said that every sound tree bears good fruit but every bad tree bears evil fruit (cf. Mt 7:17). The great human family is like a forest, where sound trees bear solidarity, communion, trust, support, security, joyful temperance, friendship. The presence of large families is a hope for society. And this is why the presence of grandparents is very important: a precious presence both for practical help, and above all for their educational contribution. Grandparents preserve in themselves the values of a people, of a family, and they help parents pass them on to the children.” (Address of Pope Francis to the Italian National Association of Large Families, December 28, 2014) I insist that couples to whom God does not grant children can also play an important and enriching role in the Christian formation of other homes.

How much good parents do when they take this mission seriously! So the first need is that parents and children be present at home, convinced that their home can and should be the “anteroom” of heaven and a school of charity, because the joys and sorrows of each one are the joys and sorrows of the other members of the family.

St. Josemaría passed on to us this very clear teaching, the fruit also of his personal experience. On one occasion, remembering how our Lord had been preparing him for his mission of founding the Work, he remarked: “He caused me to be born in a Catholic family, like most people in my country, with exemplary parents who practiced their faith in daily life, and who gave me great freedom right from my youth while also carefully watching over me. They tried to give me a Christian education, which I acquired from them..."
at home more than at school, even though from the age of three I went to a school run by nuns, and from the age of seven to one run by priests.” (Notes taken from a meditation given by St. Josemaría on February 14, 1964)

In the Grandparents’ home, he learned to lead an authentically Christian life, suited at each moment to the circumstances of his age; and he was deeply grateful to God at the end of his life, when he called to mind events, great and small, from those early years of childhood and adolescence. From his own situation, and from his ample priestly experience, there came the advice that he offered to fathers and mothers of families.

I would like to stress here his insistence on the importance of good example. “From the very start, children are relentless witnesses of their parents’ lives. You don’t realize it, but they judge everything, and at times they judge you in a bad light. So what happens at home influences your children for good or for evil. Try to give them good example, try not to hide your piety, try to behave uprightly: then they will learn, and they will be the crown of your mature years and your old age. You are like an open book to them.” (Notes taken in a family gathering with St. Josemaría last November 12, 1972)

It’s very important that parents—also the dads, not just the moms—teach children their first prayers. “Don’t force them to say long prayers: short ones, but every day. When they’re very small, you take their little hand and help them make the sign of the Cross. That’s something one never forgets. Your gentleness and your piety, and the piety of your husbands, of our fathers, remain deep in the soul.” (Notes taken in a family gathering with St. Josemaría on June 4, 1974)

With good humor, he remarked on another occasion “Your children shouldn’t go to bed like little puppies. I like to put it that way because it’s very clear and I can make myself understood. Little puppies lie down in a corner, and that’s all. Not so with your children. They should make the sign of the cross before going to bed, and say some words to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to God our Lord, even when their soul is not totally clean.” (Notes taken in a family gathering with St. Josemaría on October 18, 1972)

He acknowledged with a holy pride that he never abandoned, either in the morning or at night, the vocal prayers he learned in infancy: “they are few, short, pious. And thus the memory of my parents takes me to God and, while making me feel very close to my natural family, it also unites me to the family in Nazareth—Jesus, Mary and Joseph—and to that family in Heaven, the one God who is three in persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” (Notes taken in a family gathering with St. Josemaría on October 28, 1972)

As children get older, they can learn other prayers: the Our Father and Hail Mary, the blessings at meals, the rosary...And when they are old enough, it is very good for them to attend Sunday Mass, even though they might not understand much of what is happening. Thus the seed of Christian life, sown in Baptism, develops in an harmonious way. And they are prepared for First Holy Communion, which the Church advises should be preceded by sacramental Confession. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1457)

Our Father always advised bringing children to the sacraments as soon as their age permits it. Listen to the advice he gave to a mother: “You should take them to Confession soon, very soon, as soon as they reach the age of reason. And if you can prepare them yourself, do so; if not, go to a priest you can trust. It’s not true that children are traumatized by it! It’s not true that it does them harm! It did me a lot of good, and my mother took me to confession when I was six years old.” (Notes taken in a family gathering with St. Josemaría held on July 14, 1974) - Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei
PARENTAL AUTHORITY

God is the author of life, and his goodness is shown also in his authority. All created authority participates in it, and specifically the loving authority of parents. We know that the exercise of parental authority isn’t always easy, and needs to “get down” to very specific aspects of daily life. We’ve all had the experience in educating children that “If no standard of behaviour and rule of life is applied even in small daily matters, the character is not formed and the person will not be ready to face the trials that will come in the future.” (Benedict XVI, Letter to the faithful of the diocese and city of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people, January 28, 2008) Nevertheless, we also know that it is not always easy to find a balance between freedom and discipline.

In fact, many parents have a fear of disciplining, perhaps because they themselves have suffered the negative consequences that can come from imposing things on children. They are afraid, for example, that peace at home will be lost, or that their children will reject something that is good in itself.

Benedict XVI points out how to solve the apparent dilemma between setting rules and getting children to take them on freely. The secret lies in this: “Education cannot...dispense with the personal prestige that makes the exercise of authority possible. This is the fruit of experience and competence, but is acquired above all with the coherence of one’s own life and personal involvement, an expression of true love.”

The exercise of authority should never be confused with simply imposing our will on another person, or making sure we are obeyed at any cost. Whoever obeys a particular authority shouldn’t do so because of the fear of punishment, but rather because they see in that authority a reference point for knowing what is true and good, even though they may not understand this clearly yet. Authority is closely allied to truth, since it has to represent what is true.

Nevertheless, we also know that it is not easy to find a balance between freedom and discipline.

RETREAT SCHEDULES FOR FATHERS

June 11-14 (Thurs-Sun) Tagaytay Conference Center
June 18-21 (Thurs-Sun) Makiling Main
July 2-5 (Thurs-Sun) Makiling West Wing
July 6-8 (Mon-Wed) Makiling Main
July 27-29 (Mon-Wed) Tagaytay Conference Center
July 30-Aug 2 (Thurs-Sun) Tagaytay Conference Center
Aug 17-19 (Mon-Wed) Makiling Main
Sept 10-13 (Thurs-Sun) Makiling West Wing
Oct. 1-4 (Thurs-Sun) Makiling Main
Nov. 12-15 (Thurs-Sun) Tagaytay Conference Center
Nov. 28-30 (Sat-Mon) Sangandaan (Open Retreat)
Nov. 30-Dec. 2 (Mon-Wed) Tagaytay Conference Center
Dec. 3-6 (Thurs-Sun) Makiling West Wing
Dec. 3-6 (Thurs-Sun) Tagaytay Conference Center
Dec. 10-13 (Thurs-Sun) Tagaytay Conference Center
Dec. 14-16 (Mon-Wed) Makiling Main

Retreat fees (inclusive of meals):
Makiling Conference Center (West Wing)
Mon to Wed - Solo Room (P4,050); 3-in-a-room (P2,280)
Thu to Sun - Solo Room (P4,500); 3-in-a-room (P3,150)

Makiling (Main) & Tagaytay Conference Center
Fee is P5,400 (single room)

For reservations and inquiries, please contact Ms. Leila Lerios of The Philippine Foundation at 818-6004 local 201 or 0928-5063688 or email philfoundation@pldtdsl.net.

The Parents Formation Office welcomes personal write-ups about parenting principles and experiences.

Please email them to mrinawat@southridge.ph