



## *Adjusting Our Sails*

“We must be vigilant and sensitive to the conditions around us, adjust our course accordingly and allow the winds of change to propel us forward. We cannot change the wind, but we can – and must – adjust our sails. (Michael McQueen – Winning the Battle for Relevance)

30 November – 1 December 2019

### *An Introduction to Adjusting Our Sails....*

Recently, members of the Passionist Family Group Northern Leadership Team attended the Amoris Laetitia (Joy of Love) Task Force evening at Wynberg. This evening was for organisations associated with marriage and families. On the night, Archbishop Mark Coleridge spoke about looking at new ways to be church and ways to bring God’s love to one another. Archbishop Mark indicated that the Church needed to explore new initiatives to ignite our faith and pass our faith on to our children.

Over the last 36 years we have introduced the Passionist Family Group Movement (PFGM) to over 40 parishes in Brisbane and Queensland. Today, the PFGM still remains active in 19 of those parishes. Over the last two years, the PFGM Northern Leadership Team, made up of lay people and Fr Ray Sanchez CP, have visited many parishes. We have provided renewal weekends and/or other resources to assist them in re-igniting the flame for Family Groups. It is noteworthy that in most parishes, when new groups have formed, there has been an increased number of younger families joining.

It could be argued that amidst the challenges younger generations may have in contemporary society, Jesus message of “love one another as I have loved you” is one that still speaks to them. Perhaps their interest in Family Groups may be because the fundamental principles of the Passionist Family Group model to love, care and support others is congruent with Jesus message.

We believe younger generations should be encouraged and supported to have courageous conversations about ways to share their faith and build community. Our belief is consistent with one of the statements from the Plenary Council feedback. We refer to the statement about the ‘baby boomer’ generation needing to listen to younger Catholics. This was certainly our rationale for providing a facilitated space for these conversations to take place between a younger cohort.

### **Challenges and Gifts in Contemporary Society were also Explored.**

Some of the gifts young people believed they can draw upon today included:

- Pope Francis
- Their ability to question.
- Instant communication through social media.
- Interest in Social Justice.
- Awareness and acceptance of difference.
- A Church of Love, not fear.
- The gift of understanding -we have a loving forgiving God.
- Hope is a gift – if there is nothing else left, there is hope.



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### ***The Weekend Experience***

After sharing our vision, the National Passionist Family Group Movement Coordinating Team decided to invest time and funding into exploring the faith needs of younger families in our communities today. On the weekend, 30<sup>th</sup> November to 1 December, a pilot program for younger people was conducted. The weekend was facilitated by Philomena Billington. This was a live-in weekend, with the theme of 'Adjusting Our Sails'. It was held at Santa Teresa's Spirituality Centre, Ormiston.

#### **Aims for the weekend included:**

- To ascertain whether younger adults in contemporary society, consider they have a need for greater social and extended family support.
- To explore participants views on how modern families/individuals integrate faith into busy lives.
- To consult with the group re ways to engage people from younger generations when promoting the PFGM vision.
- To explore ways of re-shaping the existing PFGM model into a model that speaks to younger generations.
- To invite interested participants to continue their involvement in creating a new way forward into the future.

Participants included the two (2) generations younger than the baby boomers (i.e. 25 – 55 years old) who have at some time experienced being in a Family Group. Members of the PFGM National Team and the Adjusting our Sails Project Team also attended. There were 13 parishes represented from seven dioceses.

The weekend began with a moving 'Welcome to Country' by Margaret Grenfell, an elder from the Quandamooka people. As we gathered outside, looking out to Stradbroke Island, Margie also acknowledged the link between the Passionist Priests, who arrived at Stradbroke Island in 1843 as missionaries. Prior to his failing health and subsequent death last year, Fr Peter McGrath, founder of the Passionist Family Groups, would often visit their community at Easter and deliver some lovely services during his time on the island.

Once the Adjusting our Sails weekend began, it became clear from the beginning that people were convinced that Passionist Family Groups are relevant in their lives. They attended the weekend to form stronger relationships with each other and to find ways to take this Movement forward into the future. Participants worked very hard and came up with new ideas and affirmed many tried and tested ideas. By the end of the first day, it became evident that we needed to look at three areas:

These included: **Promotion; Membership of the PFGM; Ways of Being Family Groups**

Small *interest* groups were formed to come up with ideas to address the three areas. Below is a summary.....

#### **Membership of the PFGM;**

- Family Groups Motto – A family for all – everyone is welcome.
- Encourage younger families to assist in forming new groups
- New members to be aware that if the Family Group does not suit, there are options to join other groups.
- Try larger or smaller groups
- Flexibility how groups are formed – extended family, young families, young people, senior people

#### **Ways of being Family Groups**

- Meet regularly – try weekends away
- Be open to more flexible ways of being a Family Group
- A Yearly Planning Meeting in January – organise monthly functions with members taking responsibilities for different activities – update contact list.
- Establish and plan and the method of communication for your group.
- Use Social Media for communication
- Outreach – contribute beyond the group. E.G Christmas Hampers, Vinnies
- The power of sharing our stories
- Family Groups are living family – feeding our families with faith
- Leading by example
- Being understanding and accepting of all.

**PASSIONIST  
FAMILY GROUP  
MOVEMENT**



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## Promotion

### National Level

- Webpage
  - Access to resources: - Brochures, Business Cards, Calendar, Contacts, Information Packs – Renewing Family Groups, Introducing Family Groups into schools, Formation/ Workshops, Template Programs for Short Presentations and Power Points, Ideas for Parish Newsletters.
- Use of Social Media to promote and communicate the relevance of Family Groups to Family Group members and the wider community.
  - Facebook (National), twitter, Youtube

### Parish Level

- Personal Invitation is the most powerful
- Advertise [www.pfgm.org](http://www.pfgm.org) for resources
- Parish Family Group Event – Sausage Sizzle after Mass, Cuppa & Chat.
- Use parish and school newsletters to share stories and promote Family Groups and promote Family Group events.
- Church Noticeboards advertising events – all welcome!
- Community Noticeboards – inform the wider community of the Passionist Family Group Movement
- Social Media – facebook, twitter etc
- Parish F.G.s renewal weekend – contact National Leadership Team 0407 175 508
- Family Groups organise morning tea after Mass (e.g. once a month)
- F.G. members speaking at Mass or at school assemblies.
- Engage with Prep Families, Baptism Families, Sacramental Programs to promote and invite people to join a Family Group.
- Come and try day – invite people to come along to a F.G. outing – no commitment attached.
- Parish Family Group Video – photos and the message of the Family Groups shown at Mass
- Promote International Family Group Day 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in May.  
<http://www.pfgm.org/international-family-group-day/>



## In Conclusion

Phil described the attendees on the weekend as faith filled people and how our communities are richer for their presence and leadership.

There is increasing data that many churches, religious institutions and church organisations have started becoming less relevant to the needs and lives of their local communities. Michael McQueen, an Australian social researcher states that: “Organisations that are relevant to their time and to the needs of their respective communities will always attract new members naturally and effortlessly”. The aim of this weekend was to bring people together to have open and courageous conversations on our Church today and the relevance of the Passionist Family Group Movement. The resounding message through this weekend was, **“Family Groups are still very relevant and fill a hole in society and our spiritual lives”**.



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