

Family Groups



PASSIONIST FAMILY GROUP MOVEMENT

A Ministry of the Passionists

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2021

To our Passionist Family Group family.....

We pray that you are safe and well!

When we penned our message for the autumn newsletter, we were feeling optimistic that we were on the road to resuming a lifestyle similar to that which we enjoyed pre-Covid.

This Winter Newsletter comes to you at a time when Covid-19 has reminded us of its potency and many forms. We are particularly mindful of the residents of Greater Sydney and beyond who are in lockdown as they endure a prolonged and severe outbreak of the illness. We are also conscious of the residents of South Australia enduring lockdown and those in Victoria in the midst of their fifth lockdown since the pandemic began. Even those who are not presently experiencing lockdown are continuing to find their lives greatly impacted by the pandemic.

At this time we can reflect on one of the great tenets of our Movement: 'A Family for All'.

In one sense, this pandemic makes it that much harder to be family as it limits our ability to meet and greet each other in person. Likewise, we all have stories to tell of the difficulties we have experienced in being family to our own immediate families as well as to our parish families. We invite you to please share those stories with us in the hope that we can reproduce some of them in future newsletters; we have no doubt that they will be inspiring to others.

The isolation resulting from the need to manage the pandemic makes it even more challenging to feel a sense of community and belonging, especially for new members, the lonely and the marginalised in our parishes.

Perhaps, rather than batten down the hatches in our Passionist Family Groups, now is the time to reach out and invite fellow parishioners into our groups so that they can experience more fully that sense of belonging that comes with being members of a welcoming Christian community.

Take care,

Frances and Michael, Gwen and Russell, and Mary and Dennis

Life is better
with friends :)



Our Movement's Birthplace: 48th Anniversary

*St Anthony in the Fields,
birthplace of the PFGM
celebrated 48 years of the
Family Groups on Saturday
May 1, 2021 with a special
Mass, celebrated by their
recently appointed Parish
Priest, Fr Satheesh Antony
OSH.*



Central Team Weekend - from Tony Guterres

In May 2021, the PFGM's Central Team members from the dioceses of Parramatta, Maitland-Newcastle, Wollongong and Sydney met for three days at Doran House in Stanwell Park on the NSW coast. Due to unexpected family commitments, the members from Canberra and Goulburn were unable to attend. The weekend is now an annual event to enable the leaders to support each other in their local ministries.

This year's gathering included a lengthy discussion of a basic question: *"What is the spirituality flowing through the Passionist Family Group Movement?"* An earnest and lively discussion led to the conclusion drawn from stories in which 'strangers' became friends.

We described our Spirituality as drawing people towards us by being welcoming. Various strategies were mentioned with emphasis on the welcome at Mass and personal invitations to Family Group events, especially those held in our homes.

In our Passionist Family groups, we give and show compassion by our efforts to share, support and listen, thus nurturing in people a sense of belonging. Loving commitment grows from the sharing of stories and of experiences, i.e. getting to know each other. Finally, such commitment is strengthened via newsletters, listening, prayer chains when in people are in need and acknowledgement of birthdays and significant events.

Also, the group discussed the oft-heard misconception that Family Groups are "just social". We recalled Paul Casey's article from years ago that discussed the traditional sacraments as largely social occasions but asserts that Family Groups bring the sacraments to life in people's daily lives. (See Paul's updated article on the next page of this Newsletter.)



L to R: Tony & Annette Guterres, Marg & Paul Casey, John & Pauline McGrath, Elizabeth & Dennis Farrar
The Central Team's photo was taken in the "cultivated bush" just near Doran House.

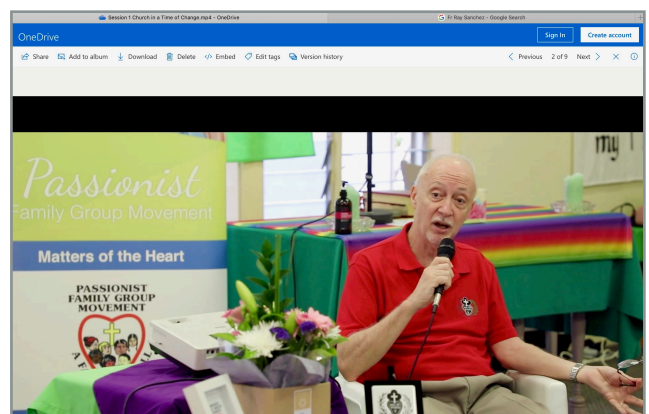
New videos on PFGM Web Site

from Russell Winterscheidt of the National Team

'Family Groups in a Changing Church and a Changing World'

These videos were taken from a presentation given by Fr Ray Sanchez CP in October 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fr Ray explores the impact that COVID-19 has made on our Church and our World.

*To access the videos go to the PFGM Web Site at www.pfgm.org – select **Resources** – select **Videos** - select **Family Groups in a Changing Church and a Changing World**




Passionist Family Groups Are More Than 'Just Social' by Paul Casey

The Passionist Family Group Movement aims to build Christian community through the development of extended families. The focus is on caring for, accepting and loving one another. Despite the clear Christian aims of the movement, some critics are dismissive, loosely criticising Family Groups as 'just social'. Here is my response to this charge, with acknowledgment to many ideas gleaned over the years from the PFGM's founder, the late Fr Peter McGrath cp.

Every group is, by definition, social. So, any community, such as a weekend Mass community, is social. Wherever two or three people are gathered we have a group, and it is necessarily a social group. If the group gathers in Christ's name, it is still social. So, Family Groups are certainly social, just as the congregation at Mass is necessarily social. Is there anything inherently wrong with being social? What is limiting about a Family Group being social? Let's consider the nature of Family Groups in terms of the sacraments.


In **Baptism** we are welcomed into the Christian community. It is a social sacrament. In Family Groups all are welcome. No-one is rejected on any grounds. This is the essence of the Christian community. Family Groups are the sacrament of Baptism in action, accepting people as they are.




 In **Confirmation** we receive the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us. Guidance and strength, insight and wisdom, come not only from praying, and not only from an ordained person, but from anybody in the community, anywhere. The Spirit blows where it will. In Family Groups we support, guide, and strengthen one another in good times and bad. One aim of family groups is for people to get to know one another better, and it is through the deepening of relationships that we can better help, guide, and strengthen one another when confronted with personal and family problems.


In the **Eucharist** we share Christ with one another in a mysterious and intimate way through eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ. It is not surprising that the major Family Group functions involve the sharing of food and drink. It is through such sharing that communities grow. However, look at many weekend Mass congregations. They share in the Body and Blood of Christ, but then share little of anything else with each other. Family Groups aim to break down barriers, so that the Eucharistic celebration is indeed a celebration by a whole community. The sharing of food and drink at Family Group functions develops what begins at Mass, and, in turn, leads to the Mass being a more meaningful, community celebration.



 In **Reconciliation** we confess our faults and weaknesses, and ask forgiveness for sins of commission and omission by which we have offended God or our neighbour. Family Groups recognise human weakness, and encourage people to forgive and accept others, so that they too might be forgiven their faults.

 **Anointing of the Sick** offers strength to the ill. One of the major functions of Family Groups is caring for the ill. Through visiting the sick and their families, and providing assistance with such very practical matters as meals, this sacrament is made ongoing and is shared in by those caring.



 In **Matrimony**, a couple receive the grace to love and support one another in good times and in bad, to be faithful to one another, and to raise their children in a loving and responsible manner. Family Groups aim to strengthen family bonds in a time when family life is being fragmented.

In **Holy Orders** people are ordained to lead the people of God, in part by the administration of the sacraments. As indicated above, Family Groups extend the sacraments into the daily world, and so continue and develop the work of ordained people.



In conclusion, Family Groups are certainly social. And so are the sacraments. Family groups help the sacraments live in people's everyday lives. When it comes to spirituality, don't underestimate the social.

(Paul has assisted his wife Margaret in their roles of Family Group leaders and coordinators for close to forty years. In addition to considerable life experience, Paul has degrees in Theology [STB and an STL] and Psychology (BA Hons I, an MA, and a PhD). Finally and notably, contrary to the teaching of St Paul, he defers to his wife in most things.

Donvale Parish, Melbourne, Victoria: Gurney Family Group



Our weekend away in **March 2021** in **Seymour, Victoria**. "We were blessed with sunshine and very warm weather over the Labour Day weekend , in March, which our Family Group spent in Seymour at the caravan park. We had a wonderful walk after lunch on Saturday and had a light lunch outside at **Fowles Winery** on Sunday."

"Later in March our F G supported our parish fund/raiser - a Bogan Bingo evening..... our group loves dressing up for themed events !"
-Trish Gurney



Mortlake Parish, South-west Victoria: 30 Years Celebration

Our two Parish Groups came together on April 18, 2021 for High Tea and a pleasant Sunday afternoon to celebrate our 30th Anniversary. There was lots of reminiscing of good times spent together and remembering those members who are no longer with us.

We continue to support each other and meet monthly for social get-togethers.

Here's to another 30 years!



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With the celebration cake are Pam Smith, Tony Phillips, Now Smith & Jenny Phillips

New Head for Passionist Family Group Movement in New Zealand



Mr Paul Traynor (brother of our Fr Brian Traynor), is the newly-appointed Passionist Family Group Movement National Coordinator in New Zealand. He is pictured here at his Commissioning with retiring Directors John & Mary- Ellen Leen and Linda & Paul Darbyshire.

Paul plans to reinvigorate and grow the almost-40-year-old organisation by reaching out to younger families, and inviting those from other cultures to join their family across Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Mr Traynor noted that the Church in New Zealand is facing many challenges, including declining attendance, the decline of Pakeha ('white' New Zealanders as opposed to Maori persons) attendance and involvement, the different cultures beginning to dominate the parishes, as well as the amalgamations of parishes, which results in the loss of local community.

Mr Traynor said that Passionist spirituality is "very much the spirituality of being ordinary. It's in the ordinariness of life that we find God . . . our struggles, our pains, our sorrows and our joys, they all come in the ordinary things of life," he said.

Mr Traynor said the Passionist Family Groups are "just ordinary people trying to be like Jesus: supporting, caring, loving, forgiving one another, just as the early Christians did".

He said their approach is not a panacea, nor is it the only way to do things.

"The emphasis we have is: Before you can believe, you have to belong. And we're providing a place where people belong," he explained. "Isn't that what the early Church was? It's a gathering of people who remember the presence of Jesus in their midst, and try to live out his message in the best way that they can."

Adapted from an article by [Rowena Orejana](#), reproduced with permission of 'New Zealand Catholic' published on July 11, 2021.

BRIAN'S BLOG:

Why come back?

The COVID pandemic and repeated lockdowns have meant a significant proportion of people have not come back to parishes masses. It is clear than many will never return to regular participation of this kind. US theology professor Steven Miles recently raised the question, 'Why would people come back to their parish Mass?

Citing his own family experience, Miles said, "In a short period of time our family discovered we were not missing Mass at all. We missed the Eucharist, of course. But we had a home Liturgy of the Word every Sunday. Our liturgy was better. We were active ministers, all of us. We took turns proclaiming the readings. We renewed our baptismal promises each week. We heard reflections on the Scriptures from some of the most thoughtful Catholic women and men everywhere in the world."

Miles added that, "Home church was church long before there ever was parish life". After a few months his family began to realise that they had not heard from their parish (except twice for financial appeals). The expectation seemed to be that parishioners show up on Sundays and if not, there is no contact! So, he asked, 'Why go back?' Slowly an answer came to him. He had missed the noise of crying babies, of footsteps in aisles, of laughter coming from the foyer; the mess that means 'Here is everybody!'

Parish life without relationships makes little sense. Jesus calls us into fellowship and that fellowship is not dependent on who turns up for Sunday Mass. Our pandemic experience is a call to find creative ways to stay in touch with one another, especially those in our Passionist Family Group. We have to nurture relationships. Like plants they do not survive or grow without nourishment. We can particularly seek out those who might be alone, unwell or in need. If we focus on 'being' church more than 'going to' church, we will look after one another and we will want to tap in again to the mess that means 'Here is everybody'.

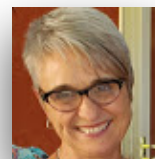
- Brian Traynor CP

PFGM & the Ecclesial Communities Consultation

Celine Bowman, a member of the PFGM's Northern Team, recently represented our Movement at the *Ecclesial Communities Consultation*, hosted by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (BCELM), via Zoom. Almost 100 representatives of various lay communities and organisations from all over Australia explored ways of identifying, networking and supporting communities into the future.

At this consultation, Celine presented information about the PFGM, outlining our Aims. Afterwards, as requested, Celine submitted further information as to what contribution we believe that we can make to the mission of the Church in Australia:

- *Meeting the very real need that people have to belong, through creating "extended families" within Parish communities.*
- *Building connection and a sense of belonging for all (Family Groups are diverse – not just made up of families)*
- *Be an example of a caring & supporting faith community for our children*
- *Becoming more active and involved in Parish life, thereby supporting our priests in their work (e.g. One Family Group kept their church functioning while waiting for a minister to be appointed)*
- *Bringing diverse people together in meaningful ways, creating acceptance and knowledge of other cultures and life situations*
- *Ecumenical outreach – groups in Anglican and Uniting Churches*
- *Provide a way to maintain ongoing connection as follow-up on other programs e.g. Alpha*
- *Evangelical - We have witnessed and experienced the FG as a wonderful way to bring together people with spouses and partners from other and no faith beliefs, in a non-threatening way.'*



Celine

Archbishop Julian Porteous, Bishop Delegate for Ecclesial Communities said the event, believed to be the first of its kind, was significant in that it brought together people from a diverse range of groups, each with their own unique gifts. "This is a moment of encouragement and inspiration and a clear indication that the Holy Spirit is present and active in the Church here in Australia," he said. "Communities are a very particular gift at this moment in our history... I'm hoping ... we can build those relationships between the bishops and the various ecclesial movements, and through this we'll be able to work closer together, more in harmony with one another and together advance the life and mission of the Church in Australia."

Celine commented of the Zoom Consultation: "With so many involved, it was difficult for us all to be able to have our say to the whole group. We broke into small groups to share and to discuss how the bishops could support us and how we could support each other.

The main outcomes for me were:

- *There was a strong suggestion that all groups be included in a directory endorsed by the Bishops*
- *Groups want to feel known and supported*
- *Groups would like to feel that they complement each other rather than being in competition with each other*
- *There are many, many organisations out there!'*

MID-WINTER BLUES

The mid-winter blues
begins in your shoes
Then crawls up your legs
To your knickers
Your heart goes all glum
as the life in your bum
Gets weaker and
everything flickers.

Yet a wee nip of Scotch
and a rain storm to watch
Are pleasures that
carry you through;
Or the gurgling gutter,
some fresh bread and butter
With a warm plate of
old-fashioned stew.



We pray...

...for all members of our Family Groups and, especially, for those who are unwell and all those affected emotionally, physically or financially by COVID lockdowns throughout Australia and the rest of the world.

Especially, we pray for members who have passed away recently and for their families & friends.



For more about the Passionist Family Group Movement:

Website (Australia): www.pfgm.org

Website (New Zealand): www.passionistfamily.org.nz