

LIFE, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SUNDAY

# FAMILY | FOOD | FAITH

Enhancing the aroma and flavour of your family life.





# CONTENTS

- 5 INTRODUCTION
- 7 FAMILY MEALS –  
MORE THAN  
PHYSICAL  
SUSTENANCE
- 8 THE SOCIAL VALUE OF  
FAMILY MEALS
- 11 CONCLUSION
- 13 PRACTICAL TIPS
- 15 THE FAMILY TABLE –  
CONVERSATION STARTERS
- 16 RESOURCES



“

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, “Stay with us . . .” When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him . . .<sup>1</sup>

# INTRODUCTION

---

This booklet is designed to encourage families to make time for shared meals and to offer some practical guidance that will help strengthen relationships – with each other, with neighbour and ultimately with God.

When we ‘break bread’ and eat we do more than serve merely bodily sustenance. In sharing food and drink, we satisfy a spiritual hunger as we feed ourselves physically. When Jesus came among us he said that we cannot live on bread alone;<sup>2</sup> however, he also proclaimed himself to be the Bread of Life;<sup>3</sup> his first public miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding feast;<sup>4</sup> and heaven itself is described as a feast.<sup>5</sup> To this day, Jesus continues to make himself bodily and personally present under the forms of bread and wine in the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, eating together as a family is a spiritual activity. The roast lamb and unleavened bread of the Jewish Passover and the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey are part of the rich Hebrew tradition that we inherit. For us, family, food and faith are linked.

While having a spiritual significance, family meals also have some very practical social benefits. Social science highlights the physical, social and emotional benefits of eating together. When opened to others beyond the immediate family, shared meals become an important tool for teaching generosity and social responsibility.

We hope this booklet, the videos and other resources linked to it, can help to enhance the aroma and flavour of your family life.





“

If families don't share a moment together around the comfort of their own table, to share the blessings of the food and each other, and to thank God for these blessings, then grace withers away, and the idea of "family life" remains only an idea.<sup>7</sup>

# FAMILY MEALS

---

## MORE THAN PHYSICAL SUSTENANCE

Food is inextricably linked to our faith and sustenance to the soul. Indeed, all traditional cultures including our own have placed great significance on the deeper meaning of eating together.

As the two disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered,<sup>8</sup> when we welcome Christ to our table – as we do with a simple grace before our meal – we participate in something more profound than just eating. When we unite eating with praise and thanksgiving, we more closely unite the present with eternity. In a way, we begin to draw the aroma of heaven into our homes. And although a family meal is no substitute for the Eucharist, the two tables are in a sense linked.

From the time of Moses, marking the Sabbath with a special meal was integral to the way of life of the people of Israel. That distinctive family meal continues to play an integral role in maintaining and passing on the faith within the Jewish tradition as it did in Jesus' day.

Taking up Christ's call to "Do this in memory of me",<sup>9</sup> the first generation of Christians began meeting in family homes to break bread.<sup>10</sup> The early Fathers of the Church considered the 'Domestic Church' – the faithful within family homes – as central to the life of the wider body of Christ. By extension, the family meal then is in a certain sense, part of the liturgy of the Domestic Church.

While there is an infinite difference between the celebration of the Eucharist and an everyday meal, when we break bread as a family, and consciously welcome God to the table, a communion of food, family and faith is created. It points us to the heavenly feast, which is at the heart of our identity as the family of God.

It is not surprising then, that this timeless truth woven into our faith tradition is being reinforced by social science research.

## THE SOCIAL VALUE OF FAMILY MEALS

---



“

If a family doesn't gather regularly around a meal, then how does the "idea" of a "close-knit family" get fleshed out?<sup>11</sup>

For families, especially those raising children and teenagers, social research underlines the irreplaceable value of family meals. For almost two decades, the National Centre for Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University has researched patterns of addiction and substance abuse. In a 2011 report they noted that the single strongest predictor of children reaching adulthood without abusing drugs and alcohol is the frequency of family dinners.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, researchers at Harvard and Washington Universities have found that children whose families eat five or more meals together each week, demonstrate consistently greater vocabularies and linguistic skills than children in households eating two or



less.<sup>13</sup> There is also a strong correlation between the frequency of family meals and eating habits, academic results and psychological and emotional well-being – especially among teenagers.<sup>14</sup>

Being attentive to our children and building solid relationships through the seemingly mundane routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner meets another concern of parents. It helps to address the lure of the superficial and potentially harmful world of ‘virtual friendships’ and the advancement of digital technology and media.

In Pope Francis’ recent exhortation, *The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*, he notes that these forms of media cannot replace the need for more personal and direct dialogue, which requires physical presence or at least hearing the voice of the other person. “We know that sometimes they can keep people apart rather than together, as when at dinnertime everyone is surfing on a mobile phone ...”<sup>15</sup> He believes a family that hardly ever eats together, or does not talk at the table, but watches television, or looks at a smartphone is “barely familial”.<sup>16</sup>

The sincere inter-personal sharing that takes place around a table provides children with an experience of genuine care, which technological substitutes can ultimately never match. When the kitchen table fails to provide a connection of minds and hearts, an internet connection can seem like a good way to fill the void. In the long run, however, social networking sites simply can’t match the power of a table that combines love and laughter with a good laksa or lasagne.

The benefits of eating meals together are well worth the effort according to co-founder of The Family Dinner Project, clinical psychologist and family therapist, Dr Anne Fiscal. She says, “If you think of family dinner as a time to nourish your family, prevent all kinds of problems, increase your children’s cognitive abilities, and provide pleasure and fun that they can build on for the rest of their lives, a nightly meal is an efficient use of time.”<sup>17</sup>



## CONCLUSION

---

What we share at the table has a spiritual effect as well as a physical one. According to the Psalmist, all creatures look to their Creator to provide them with food at the proper time.<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis reminds us: Jesus often taught at the table, and at times portrayed the Kingdom of God as a ‘festive banquet’. He also chose a mealtime – at supper – to give his disciples his spiritual testament embodied in the gift of his Body and of his Blood as saving Food and Drink.<sup>19</sup> The Apostles taught that God wants all our food to be received with thanksgiving and consecrated by the word of God and prayer.<sup>20</sup>

When we gather as a family around the dinner table, we have an opportunity to be present with each other, and with God, who nourishes body, heart, mind and soul. We recognise that a satisfying meal is as much about the people as what we eat. Sharing family meals not only benefits children in terms of their physical and academic well-being, but also builds character and conveys important social and emotional benefits at the same time.

Family meals help us to learn, to listen to others, to try new things, to share both our food and ourselves personally, to serve, to wait, to practise kindness and consideration, to solve conflicts and to thank God for all of his goodness. We pray that shared meals become a great source of joy, love and communion in your family and with God.



## PRACTICAL TIPS

---

Knowing that none of our families are perfect means we can all improve. Each day we can make small steps to strengthen our family, especially when it comes to sharing a meal together and making God present during this time. Here are some suggestions of how that can be done:

- Make the Sign of the Cross and say grace – a short prayer of thanks and blessing – before and after each meal. Remember to pray for those who have little, or nothing to eat.
- Express gratitude to God by inviting each person at the table to share one thing about their day that they are grateful for and to thank God for those blessings.
- Share a family meal at least five times each week. If you can't manage five, how close can you get? Remember, breakfast and lunch count. Perhaps create a family poster or chart that displays how often you share meals.
- Invite a neighbour, relative or someone from your parish or school who you wouldn't normally eat with, to share a meal. If possible, combine this with the next point.
- Make Sunday special – attend Mass as a family and make the meal afterwards different to the rest of the week. For instance, bring out the fine crockery, open a good bottle of wine and invite others to join you.
- While enjoying a meal together, be conscious of listening to each other and taking turns to contribute to the conversation. Ask questions.
- For those who are single, widowed, separated or divorced, and living alone, family meals can be a difficult and painful experience. These states of life, however, also provide an opportunity to love and reach out to others, or to gratefully receive the hospitality of those reaching out to you. We encourage you to extend a dinner invitation to family or friends, neighbours or people in your parish or local community groups. Likewise, be open to saying yes to any invitations that come your way to join in a family dinner or community gathering.







# THE FAMILY TABLE

---

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

While beginning a family dinner with the highs and lows of our day can be a good place to start, a well-worded question is also an easy and effective way to connect after a long day. We hope the following ‘conversation-starters’ will help spark a deeper conversation about the things that matter to your family, as well as bringing joy to the dinner table.<sup>21</sup>

- If you could only eat three foods for the rest of your life, what would they be?
- What would you do with your time if all electronics were taken away?
- If you could have dinner with anyone from history who would it be and why?
- If you could stay up all night, what would you do?
- If you could change one thing that happened today, what would it be?
- If you could take only three things to a deserted island, what would they be?
- Name one thing that you love most about each of your family members.
- If you could create a new tradition for your family, what would it be?
- If you had to join the circus, what act would you like to do?

## RESOURCES

---

### VIDEOS



On a recent visit to Melbourne, chef and priest, Fr Leo Patalinghug, shared some helpful insights on family, food and faith. He also gave a cooking demonstration that has to be seen to be believed!

[www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily](http://www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily)



This Masterfoods ad asks family members: *Who would you most like to have dinner with?* The results will surprise and delight you.

[bit.ly/2wBZZII](http://bit.ly/2wBZZII)

### WEBSITES



Fr Leo Patalinghug's Grace Before Meals is a world-wide movement, which aims to bring families back to the dinner table and be nourished body, mind and soul. The website features cooking lessons and tasty recipes.

[www.gracebeforemeals.com](http://www.gracebeforemeals.com)

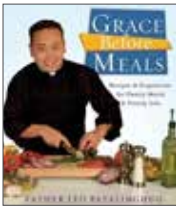


The Family Dinner Project aims to help families around the dinner table to improve the quality of mealtime interaction with tips for overcoming obstacles such as conflicting schedules and suggestions on how to engage everyone in conversations.

[www.thefamilydinnerproject.org](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org)

## BOOKS

There are a number of cookbooks available that link recipes with feast days, liturgical seasons and other Christian traditions. Here are a few that may be helpful.



*Grace Before Meals: Recipes and Inspirations  
for Family Meals and Family Life*  
Fr Leo Patalinghug



*Spicing up Married Life*  
Fr Leo Patalinghug



*A Book of Feasts and Seasons*  
Joanna Bogle



## ENDNOTES

---

- 1 Luke 24:28-31
- 2 Matthew 4:4
- 3 John 6:48
- 4 John 2:1-11
- 5 Revelation 19:9
- 6 Luke 22:19-20
- 7 Grace Before Meals: Recipes and Inspirations for Family Meals and Family Life, Fr Leo Patalinghug, Doubleday, USA, 2010, page 167
- 8 Luke 24:31
- 9 Luke 22:19
- 10 Acts 2:46
- 11 Grace Before Meals: Recipes and Inspirations for Family Meals and Family Life, Fr Leo Patalinghug, Doubleday, USA, 2010, page 167
- 12 [www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/importance-of-family-dinners-2011](http://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/importance-of-family-dinners-2011)
- 13 [www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/family-dinners-build-language-skills/](http://www.greatschools.org/gk/articles/family-dinners-build-language-skills/)
- 14 [www.jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/485781](http://www.jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/485781)
- 15 Pope Francis, The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia), 278
- 16 Pope Francis, Wednesday Audience, St Peter's Square, 11 November 2015  
[w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151111\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151111_udienza-generale.html)
- 17 [www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/)
- 18 Psalm 104:27
- 19 Loc. Cit, Pope Francis, Wednesday Audience, St Peter's Square, 11 November 2015  
[w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151111\\_udienza-generale.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151111_udienza-generale.html)
- 20 1 Timothy 4:3-5
- 21 [www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation/conversation-starters](http://www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/conversation/conversation-starters)

Published by:  
Life, Marriage & Family Office  
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne  
PO Box 146, East Melbourne, VIC 8002  
t: (03) 9287 5587 • e: [lmf@cam.org.au](mailto:lmf@cam.org.au)  
w: [www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily](http://www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily)

This resource has been produced for Life, Marriage & Family Sunday 2017.  
© Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne 2017.  
Design by Christine Lai, Design & Print Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

# PRAYERS

---

## GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts,  
Which of thy bounty, we are about to receive,  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

---

Blessed are you, Almighty Father,  
Who give us our daily bread  
Blessed is your only begotten Son,  
Who continually feeds us with the Word of life.  
Blessed be the Holy Spirit,  
Who brings us together at this table of love  
Blessed be God, now and forever.  
Amen.

## GRACE AFTER MEALS

We give thee thanks, Almighty God,  
For all thy benefits, who lives and reigns,  
World without end.  
Amen.

---

Leader: Blessed be the name of the Lord  
All: Now and forever.  
Amen.

  
Life Marriage  
and Family Office

CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE  
OF MELBOURNE