The Domestic Church and the Post-Nuclear Family: A Theological Analysis and Critique

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THE DOMESTIC CHURCH AND THE POST-NUCLEAR FAMILY:
A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Corey R. Harris

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A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

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A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

By
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May, 2011

Dissertation supervised by George S. Worgul, Jr., S.T.D., PhD

This dissertation is an attempt to reconcile the Roman Catholic theological understanding that the Christian family is a domestic church (ecclesia domestica) with a realistic demographic and sociological portrait of the American family while remaining faithful to Catholic moral teaching. The first chapter analyzes several works of the Magisterium from the time of Vatican II that have specifically referenced the domestic church. These documents collectively show that the domestic church is a sacramental and ecclesial reality although the theology is commonly espoused under the subheading of marriage and referencing a specifically nuclear form of family. The following chapter analyzes the thoughts of various theologians by approaching the topic thematically. Evidence is found of two distinct schools of thought: those who believe the theology of domestic church espoused by the Magisterium is by definition too restrictive and those who agree with the Magisterium’s teaching that bases the domestic church within a theology of marriage excluding non-nuclear families. The following chapter analyses
demographic trends, sociology of family, and sociology of family and religion. Demographic trends show the family moving away from a standard of nuclear form. Sociological views shows that myriad family forms are valid if supported properly. Also, religion and families are shown to be mutually supportive of each other so long as religions and families perceive positive benefits in their relationship. The final chapter argues that the term “domestic church” is a sacramental, ecclesial, sociological, and moral term. The domestic church is sacramental because of what it is (a Church) and what it does (shares the Church’s mission). To that end, it is baptism which begins membership in the Church and therefore baptism that is the root of the domestic church. As such, all family forms composed of baptized members that are not inherently contrary to Catholic moral teaching can be considered domestic churches. Families that remain excluded are done so on an ecclesial basis not on a sacramental basis. Ongoing participation in the Church and conformity in lifestyle to Church teaching are the basic requirements for consideration as a domestic church.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to Erin and Liam

This would have never happened if not for you
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Introduction

The Direction and Goals of This Dissertation

The Roman Catholic understanding of the family and the family’s place within the Church changed rather drastically in the course of Vatican II. Article 11 of Lumen Gentium re-introduces the term “domestic church” to the theological lexicon and to this day the term remains the central means of discussing the family within the context of the Church. Since Vatican II, Church documents dealing with the family and with family issues have used and the term “domestic church”. Subsequently, theologians have begun to and continue to try and place the term and the idea of the family as domestic church into its proper systematic place within a theology of family. The term domestic church, as well as the family in general, remains important concepts for Catholics in how they and the Church perceive their relationship. To this
end, I propose to seek out what has been said (and possibly more importantly, what has not been said) concerning the domestic church and use those insights to address the post-nuclear age of family in which we find ourselves today.

The Church states that the natural form of the family is a nuclear family composed of a sacramentally married mother and father with their children. Again, there is little doubt that this form of family can be a domestic church. Yet, our current reality shows us that other forms of family exist and that they are often considered valid families. This dissertation will not seek to list or give value to each and every form of family that we find in society today, as that would require much greater depth than a single work can cover. In this dissertation, I will seek to place single parents and blended families within the context of the domestic church. Attention will also be paid to the fact that multi-generation and families are far more common than in previous generations. Technology allows for far greater interaction, even religious interaction, between family members that are not geographically close.

The issue at hand is that the current theology of the domestic church is still being fleshed out by the Church and by theologians. As this work continues, issues not previously addressed properly or completely will have to be given focus so that the theology of the domestic church can be a practical theology for all members of the Church. As the teaching currently stands, there are many families that are left out and who cannot reap the theological, spiritual, and practical benefits of the understanding of the family as a domestic church. As time passes, the number of non-nuclear families will continue to grow, and the theology of the family as domestic church must grow with these changes or the concept itself will lose meaning.

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1 I will not be considering the phenomena of divorced and/or remarried couples as “blended” families. Blended families as they will be discussed within this dissertation will refer to families in which one or both parents are not the biological parent of a child or of several children shared by the parents. Discussing divorces, annulments, etc. would detract from the focus of this work as well as broaden the scope of my inquest to too large of an undertaking.
I believe that this project is necessary in our current age. The basic understanding of what a family is has shifted through time and will continue to move forward. The Catholic understanding of the family as a domestic church is a radical shift from a previously commonly understood separation between the family and the Church. The mission of the Church and the family ought to have an inclusive aim. This dissertation will seek to open the door to the idea that the nuclear family is not the sole form of family that can be accepted as a domestic church. That door will remain open to even further and deeper dialogue on the family and the domestic church.

The question remains if theologians are adequately addressing the domestic church as a theological concept. The answer to that question is both yes and no. There are many writers who use the term “domestic church” when discussing the family and its relationship to the Church. Yet, within that group of authors, only a small subset truly devotes great effort to dealing with the ramifications of calling the family a domestic church. In fact, there are surprisingly few dissertations or books that deal solely with the domestic church. The manner in which many theologians have dealt with the theology of the domestic church is simply to use the term without addressing the meaning of that term. Domestic church often remains a vestigial appendage to a broader theology of family or marriage.

With regards to the specific issue of the post-nuclear family, there seems to be two main schools of thought. First, there are those who believe that the cultural shift away from the nuclear family is a grave concern, and the tide needs to be turned back, or else we will face a more troubled society and a more troubled Church. On the other hand are those that see the shift away from the nuclear family paradigm as a positive or at least neutral evolution. These authors do not seek to discredit the nuclear family, but rather, attempt to deal with the situation as it is.
Often, these authors will attempt to shoehorn any kinship network of at least two people into a theology of domestic church. Those who see this development as positive or neutral seem to have a more broadly based acceptance of shifting theology to meet reality while those with a negative view of this shift would rather return reality back to conformity with previously expressed theologies. The fact is that the nuclear family as it is currently understood has not always been the most prevalent understanding of what a family is, and we are currently in the midst of another shift.²

The Catholic Tradition has always attempted to deal with the changes of the times. In some instances, the changes in the times were deemed to be negative, while in others the changes were met with an in turn change in theology. The implementation of the theology of the domestic church as evidenced in *Familiaris Consortio* and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* was an addressing of the changing reality in the relationship between the Church and families. The step that is proposed in this work is to deal with the fact that some non-nuclear family forms can be domestic churches while keeping in place a means of demarcation between family forms that are capable of being the smallest ecclesial unit of Church and those that cannot. The method of differentiation hinges on the fact that the concept of “domestic church” is at once a sacramental, ecclesiological, sociological, and moral definition of the Christian family.

**Chapter Outline**

**Chapter 1: The Catholic Church’s Statements Regarding the Domestic Church**

This chapter will address major Catholic Church statements on the family, focusing specifically on discussions of the domestic church, from Vatican II onward. The primary works

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² Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) is particularly good at illustrating how Christianity as well as social and economic forces have caused the standard family form to shift and change. In turn, the Church’s manner of discussing the family has adapted to the shifting realities of family forms.
that will be considered are *Lumen Gentium* #11, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11, *Gaudium et Spes* #48, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* and The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Follow the Way of Love*.

The first goal of this chapter will be to summarize the teachings as put forth in these works. The smallest unit of Church is the family and that is why it is proper to call the family the domestic church. The family is no longer considered apart from the Church, the family is now considered the Church itself. The family has a specific and different place within the Church and these documents seek to establish what that place is and why it is different. The second goal of this chapter will be to enumerate the specific tasks that the Church has ascribed to domestic churches. The primary and overriding missions of the family are the passing on of faith and the education of others (the focus is of course on the education of the family’s own children). In different ways and with different words, all of these documents speak to these two responsibilities of the domestic church. In terms of passing on the faith, the family is called to participate in the life of the Church through both its explicitly religious undertakings and in its daily life. Parents are called to foster vocations in their children and especially foster religious vocations. As a bridge between the two central tasks, the parents (and the family in its entirety) are called to evangelize by words and through actions. The family is called to live in a way that evangelizes, and parents are called to teach their children in the ways of the faith. In this way, evangelization and education are interwoven.

Finally, this chapter will address the fact that these teachings are focused on married couples and their children. Therefore, the Church is pointing to the idea that the nuclear family

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3 The primary translation of these texts will come from *Vatican Council II Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello Publishing Company, 1998) except where otherwise noted.
4 *Lumen Gentium* #11.
is a domestic church while other family forms do not possess the capability of living up to that calling. The documents from the Vatican hardly or do not mention single-parent or blended families. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops pledge to “to include more deliberately within the scope of our pastoral care an attentiveness to single-parent families, families in a second marriage, grandparents raising children, interracial families, interfaith families, and persons who are widowed or divorced.” Again, the issue is raised but not truly addressed. The documents from the Magisterium provide the building blocks of a theology of domestic church while not filling in all the gaps. The reasoning as to why the family can be called a domestic church as well as the basic mission of the domestic church is laid out. However, there are many questions concerning the domestic church that still need to be sorted out. Chief among these concerns in regards to this dissertation is “Is the nuclear family the only acceptable family model for the domestic church?”

Chapter 2: Current Theological Dialogue on the Domestic Church

This chapter will attempt to be a comprehensive survey of Catholic theologians’ discussion of the domestic church. Many authors have commented on the domestic church with differing levels of depth and focus. Because of the divergence of focus and perspective among the authors, I will attempt to bring some level of clarity as to what is being discussed as well as what conclusions are being reached. This chapter will be broken down into sections dealing with specific issues pertaining to the domestic church. Each issue will be attended to by synthesizing the research into a coherent whole of the agreements and disagreements on that specific issue.

5 *Familiaris Consortio* #77 does mention “incomplete or single-parent families” under the subheading of “Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Cases” but does not address how these families should be cared for or if these families are capable of being domestic churches.

among theologians. Of primary concern to the progression of this dissertation will be the following subheadings: Are all families called to be domestic churches? What are the mission and/or functions of a domestic church that set it apart from other families? What is the Sacramental basis for a domestic church: Baptism or Marriage? Are all family forms capable of being a domestic church? Some of these questions are answered with a certain level of unanimity while others remain disputed.

Chapter 3: Demographics, Sociology, Religion, and the Family

The state of the family is currently changing. This chapter will use hard numeric data and sociological research to illustrate that the shift away from the nuclear family model towards the current post-nuclear time has been happening for some time now. Also that this shift shows little to no sign of stopping or reversing. The number of households composed of a married couple with their children has declined drastically over the past fifty years. At that same time, the number of households composed of single parents with their child or children has grown. The numerical data will help to illuminate what the state of the family is while the sociological studies will attempt to explain why the numbers are what they are.

Sociologists can help to explain why the nuclear family model is not as dominant as it was for many years. Again, the evidence presented will illustrate that among sociologists there is also disagreement about whether this shift is a negative development or if the shift was more neutral or even positive. There is no doubt that single-parent or blended families face difficulties that a traditional nuclear family does not and some of these will be addressed. These difficulties all have proposed remedies, but these remedies will most likely not stop the movement to a post-
nuclear family model. The question then becomes if the remedies to the failures of form elevate those families to being functionally equivalent with nuclear families. The remainder of this chapter will connect the sociology of family with the sociology of religion. One of the central revelations therein is that religious participation often brings great benefit for the family. However, the family must feel welcomed by that religion to participate in it.

Chapter 4: A Theological Analysis and Critique of the Concept “Domestic Church”

This chapter will attempt to reconcile all of the divergent facts and opinions laid out in the previous chapters. Broadly speaking, it will be resolved that the sacramental reality that enables the family to be a salvific reality itself is that it is capable of being Church. Based on the promulgation found in Lumen Gentium #1, the Church itself is “is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men.”8 Hence, the family can be a church which is in its nature a sacrament. Because of this reality coupled with other factors, it is concluded that the ritual Sacrament that grounds the family’s ability to be a domestic church is the baptism undertaken by its members. Although called by Christ and His Church in baptism, neither individuals nor family units perfectly live out their mission. To that end, families need to stay on a path of greater and deeper conversion because their sacramental nature of being a domestic church obligates them to lead a more moral life. The moral life of the family is based upon its religious calling and ecclesial purpose but is required at all times in all ways. The domestic church is at all times church. This vocation is carried out in the whole of the family’s endeavors and interactions as a particular lifestyle.

The work concludes by expressing that the defining characteristic of a Christian family as a domestic church is that it participates in the life of the Church and that participation extends

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into all its works. Therefore, family forms that do not, via their structure, violate Roman Catholic Moral Teaching can be possible domestic churches. Non-ideal family formation does not exclude future ability to be a specific iteration of church in the world. Single-parenthood does not excuse that parent from religiously educating their child or children or from showing their community God’s love through direct action or through the example of their familial bonds. If a single-parent later marries a spouse who is not their child’s parent, those same moral obligations are now extended to all family members. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that “the family” in general or as a domestic church is composed of more than just parent(s) and child or a married couple. Grandparents and other family members often play a significant role in the church of the home. Families need to recognize their vocation to be church in order to benefit from participation in the Church. The Church needs to extend to some non-nuclear families the same theological and practical love it extends to nuclear families or participation will wane and the concept of the family as a domestic church will lessen if not lose its purpose and meaning.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this work will summarize the preceding chapters and will also point out any questions that remain to be answered, and address possible future advances that may be made on the topic of the domestic church.
Chapter 1: The Catholic Church’s Statements Regarding the Domestic Church

Introduction

In order to address how the post-nuclear family fits in with a theology of domestic church, the basis of the teaching as set forth by the Roman Catholic Church must be presented. To that end, this work will analyze several significant documents put forth by the Magisterium of the Church: *Lumen Gentium* #11, *Apostolicam Acuositatem* #11, and *Gaudium et Spes* #48 all of which were generated during of Vatican II, *Familiaris Consortio* and the *Letter to Families*, both composed by Pope John Paul II, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and *Follow the Way of Love* issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. While this group is not all encompassing, it is representative of the foundations, elaborations, and tensions within the current teaching. The passages generated and put forth by the Second Vatican Council brought the term “domestic church” back into Catholic Theology as well as giving the term its basis as a new prism through which to view the Christian Family. *Familiaris Consortio* contains the most in depth discussion on the theological meaning of domestic church by the Church’s teaching authorities. This document firmly established the domestic church as an ecclesial unit and the central means of conversation when discussing the relationship between the family and the Church. The *Letter to Families* builds upon what John Paul II states in *Familiaris Consortio* in a manner that seeks to help the family deal with the

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9 A complete listing of Magisterial documents commenting, however briefly, of the domestic church would include *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #71, *Catechesi Tradendae* #68, *Chrisitfideles Laici* #62, *Evangelium Vitae* #92, The Synod of Bishops' "Message to Christian Families," as well as several statements by the conferences of bishops of several countries. These statements are not included here because those that are included show the major statements of the Church on the domestic church as well as show the tensions presented in these teachings.
many challenges it faces. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the catechetical norm of Catholic Teaching and performs the function of being the central reference work of those teachings to believers. *Follow the Way of Love* is a different genre in that it is a local document which seeks to deal with the concerns of a particular time and place within the broader context of the Church. However, the US Bishops’ presentation of the domestic church is often in stark contrast to other magisterial statements on the topic and deals with post-nuclear families in a different manner. When taken together, a sometimes clear and sometimes murky theology of domestic church is presented through these documents.

**The introduction of Ecclesia domestica into the documents of Vatican II**

In a certain sense, a single bishop is responsible for bringing the language of the family being a domestic church into the documents of Vatican II and, therefore, back into Catholic theology. On December 5, 1962, Bishop Pietro Fiordelli (1916-2004) of Prato, Italy who had worked in the Christian Family Movement introduced the basic idea by posing a question (which he himself answered) during the debates leading to the generation of the documents. “Is the parish the ultimate division of the Church? No. The parish is further divided into so many holy cells, which are Christian families, which we can call, following the example of the Holy Fathers, tiny churches.”

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10 For an extended and far more in depth discussion of this topic see Ennio Pasquale Mastoianni, "Christian Family as Church? Inquiry, Analysis, and Pastoral Implications" (Ph. D. diss., Duquesne University, 1999), Chapter 1.

has an impact on two fronts. The first facet of the statement is that it called into the
council the importance that needs to be paid to the family and to marriage. As evidenced
by other statements Fiordelli made on the council floor,\(^{12}\) the intention of discussing
marriage and the family for inclusion in the council’s documents was to show the positive
nature of marriage without denigrating celibacy.\(^ {13}\) The second facet is the notion that the
family should be considered an ecclesial unit unto itself. The family does not exist apart
from the Church, but rather, the family exists within and as a functional unit of the
Church.

Bishop Fiordelli’s written proposal submitted to the Council in early 1963 again
incorporates the Church Fathers as well as giving reference to a specific Biblical text.

“Therefore, following the example of the Fathers, we can call the Christian family a
miniscule church expressing the mystery of the unity of Christ with the Church (cf.
Ephesians 5:32).”\(^ {14}\) As Joseph Atkins notes, “He applied Ephesians 5:32 not only to
marriage but now extended it to the family that proceeds out of marriage.”\(^ {15}\) In essence,
Fiordelli had attempted to reclaim ideas put forth by Church Fathers, attach those ideas to

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\(^ {12}\) *Acta synodalia*, vol. 1, pars. 4, 309-310.

\(^ {13}\) Joseph C. Atkinson, "Family as Domestic Church: Development, Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems
of Appropriation," *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 596. The Church Fathers mentioned in the passage are St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom. It is also interesting to note that the phrase used by Fiordelli is “minusculas Ecclesias” (“little” or “tiny” churches) as opposed to the phrase that the Council later agreed upon and included in *Lumen Gentium* #11 “Ecclesia domestica” or the “domestic church”.

\(^ {14}\) Reproduction of the text and translation taken from Michael Fahey, “The Christian Family as Domestic
Church at Vatican II,” in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth, Concilium Series, vol. 4 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 87. Also, the reference to Ephesians 5:32 is later combined with Ephesians 5:25 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The passage in the *Catechism* reads, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church…This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1994), #1659.]

\(^ {15}\) Joseph C. Atkinson, "Family as Domestic Church: Development, Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems
a specific Biblical text, and re-establish the family as a true church community that
operates within the Church.

The proposed text generated by the council came to be:

In hac velut Ecclesia domestica, parentes saepe sunt prumi fidei praepones, quasi munus episcopale, ut ait Augustinus, exercent, et sacras etiam vocationes Deo dante fovent.16 [In what might be called the domestic church, parents are often the first preachers of the faith, exercise a sort of episcopal function, as Augustine says, and foster sacred vocations which God deems fit to bestow.]17

This text was then modified before its inclusion into Lumen Gentium in several ways. The direct mention of St. Augustine was removed from the passage entirely and neither he nor St. John Chrysostom was cited directly or in a footnote of the eventual text. Fr. Fiordelli and others expressed doubts as to including the phrase “quasi munus episcopale” referring to a somewhat episcopal function that parents are to fulfill.18 Also, against the protestations of Fr. Fiordelli, the term “little church” or “church in miniature” was eschewed for the term “domestic church,” which would remain for inclusion in the final version of the text. In September 1964, voting took place, and the finalized text that would become Lumen Gentium #11 was ratified. And with that vote, a new manner for discussing the family and the Church had begun.

Contents of the Documents

Lumen Gentium (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) Chapter II “The People of God” #11

18 Ibid. 89.
*Lumen Gentium* #11 is addressed to the “priestly community”; a community formed and founded in the sacraments and the exercising of Christian virtues. The perspective of discussing the priesthood of the entire community seems to be pointing to the idea that the Spirit is a functional reality even outside of the institution of the Church (although the perspective given here clearly traces itself back to the Church).

Individuals are incorporated into the priestly community by their baptism. It is baptism, not marriage or holy orders, that makes a person a member of the Church. Obviously, membership finds its specific character within the community through the Sacraments of Vocation, but it is baptism that is the root of membership and mission. While this passage of the document continues to discuss several Sacraments and their place in the community, it is right here to note the foundational nature of baptism as it relates to the priestly community of all believers.

In this “first” mention of the domestic church in the documents of the council, the context of the passage is marriage. It is through marriage that a couple shares in the relationship between Christ and the Church. One manner in which the married couple is able to achieve this holiness is through the raising of children. Therefore, children have been attached to the specific holiness of the married couple and also of the family. However, the subsequent passage again retreats to baptism for the grounding of the family as a possible place of holiness. “From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy

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21 The other listed manner for the couple to attain this holiness is the generic phrase “in their married life”.
Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated through the centuries.\textsuperscript{22} In an attempt to uncover the full meaning of this passage, it must be noted that the family comes from marriage but it is baptism that makes those in the family “children of God” who are called to holiness.\textsuperscript{23} The paradox of this statement is families composed of baptized Christians who have established themselves as families prior to or outside the context of marriage.

The following statement begins the discussion of, or at least the idea of, the domestic church as a reality:

In what might be regarded as the domestic Church, the parents, by word and by example, are the first heralds of faith with regards to their children. They must foster the vocation which is proper to each child and this with special care if it is to be religion.\textsuperscript{24}

The first statement of note in this passage is the notion that not all families, even those based in Christian marriage, may be considered domestic churches. The idea that there is more to being a domestic church than being married and having children comes across quite clearly in the phrase “in what might be regarded as”.\textsuperscript{25} The second issue of note in the passage is that the domestic church is being used here to describe a very specific form of family. Namely, the domestic church is a possible family form for married couples who have and are raising children. Therefore, there is an open question as to if the

\textsuperscript{22} LG #11 emphasis added.


\textsuperscript{24} The original Latin reads: \textit{In hac velut Ecclesia domestica parents verbo et exemplo sint pro filiis suis primi fidei praecones, et vocationem unicumque propriam, sacram vero peculari cura, foveant oportet.}

\textsuperscript{25} John Paul II seldom used the qualifier “veluti” (“as it were”) as it is used in this passage. [Avery Dulles, \textit{The Splendor of Faith: The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II} (New York: Crossroad, 2003).] Ennio Mastroianni makes the point that the use of veluti is an analogical reference. This same term is used in \textit{Lumen Gentium} #1 which describes the Greater Church as a sacrament. [Ennio Pasquale Mastroianni, “Christian Family as Church? Inquiry, Analysis, and Pastoral Implications” (Ph. D. diss., Duquesne University, 1999).] These thoughts are expounded upon by Florence Caffrey Bourg. [Florence Caffrey Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 31-33.]
domestic church, as described in this passage, is simply a temporal reality for a married couple that applies solely during the period of time that they are raising their children in a Christian manner.

The domestic church’s focus of bearing and educating children also is evidenced by the mention of the fostering of vocation. Here, it can be assumed that the notion of vocation is directed at the vocation of either marriage or holy orders. Obviously, the education necessary for discernment is not only religious in nature. The children must also be educated in their views of the world so that they will see the importance of vocation. They must be given a specific perspective of human relationships that would lead them to understand the Christian nature of marriage and the importance of answering the call of a specifically religious vocation. Both vocations are means of continuation of the Church, both universal and domestic.

*Apostolicam Acuositatem (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People)* Chapter III “The Various Fields of the Apostolate” #11

*Apostolicam Acuositatem* #11 is part of the document from the council directed to the laity. The discussion of the domestic church can be found in Chapter III (“The Various Fields of the Apostolate”) under the subheading of “The Family”. While the term “domestic church” is not found in most translations, the phrase “domestic sanctuary of the Church” is included and the roots in the original Latin show that the passage is discussing the same theological concept. Following a discussion of the possibilities open to and participation of the laity within Church Communities (the parish), the turn is to the family. This transition seems to also point to the reality that the family as a domestic church is the smallest unit of the Church. While each individual parish is a

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26 “...tamquam domesticum sanctuariu Ecclesiae se exhibeat” [The family] exhibits itself as a domestic sanctuary of the Church.
functional model of the diocese, the family can be a functional model of the parish and therefore the Church as a whole.

While the subsection described here is titled “The Family,” the opening statement declares that it is marriage that is the foundation of human society. Are readers to assume that in this passage, marriage is equivalent to the family? The question goes somewhat unanswered, if not entirely unposed, as the same statement concludes by listing “married persons” and “families” separately while stating that both have a special place in society and in the Church. The following paragraphs list duties prescribed to various members of the laity given their proper station.

Internal duties of Christian [married] couples: Cooperate with grace, witness of faith, have children. With regard to how that couple should raise their children: form them to a Christian life (by word and deed), offer guidance (especially with regard to their vocation). External duties of the couple: give clear proof of the indissolubility of marriage, assert the right of those raising children is able to raise them in a Christian manner, collaborate with those of good faith to safeguard that right (in legislation), assure that civil society give proper attention to the family with regards to housing, education (of children), working conditions, social security, and taxes, protect the emigration rights of families.

Internal duties of the domestic church (The “vital cell” of society as given by God): mutual affection, family prayer, taking part in the Liturgy. External duties of the domestic church: active hospitality, practice justice, perform work for the good of those suffering. Specific actions listed as means of fulfilling those external duties: adoption,

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27 “... And so the apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for both Church and civil society.” Apostolicam Acuositatem #11. (Hereafter referred to as AA.)

28 AA #11
welcoming strangers, helping school administrations, helping adolescents\textsuperscript{29}, help engaged couples in their marriage preparation, teach the catechism, support married couples and families in crisis, care for and protect the elderly.

These lists do nothing if not illustrate that the call of the family to become a domestic church is one of action. The family’s Christian actions must not only be focused on the family itself, but must also be other-directed. Therein is the suggestion that the “world’s” place of meeting with the Church is possibly found in the interactions of the family with others.\textsuperscript{30} The family retains specific tasks within itself and within the world. Both are necessary for the family to truly become a domestic church.

Following these lists of duties are two special qualifications. The first is that in regions where Christianity is in its infancy or is in areas that Christianity is threatened, Christian families can be a shining beacon of the Church. These families can both highlight the qualities of the Church but they can also be an example of Christian marriage. The second qualification is a recommendation that the goals given to all domestic churches (families) can be accomplished more easily if families band together. Organization and banding of families can give Christians (and therefore Christian families) a stronger voice in public discourse so that the rights of the family can be better protected and served.

\textit{Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)} Part Two (“Some More Urgent Problems”) Chapter I “The Dignity of Marriage and the Family” #48

\textsuperscript{29} Are these adolescents the family’s own children? If that is the case, this duty seems redundant. If these adolescents are not members of the family expected to carry out these duties, there can be implications to those married couples who do not or cannot have their own children.

\textsuperscript{30} Luis and Hector Munoz Alessio, \textit{Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church}, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 94.
*Gaudium et Spes*, also known as the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, deals with the challenge of the modern world to long held Church teachings. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Part 2 of the document (titled “Some More Urgent Problems”) the council felt it necessary to speak on marriage and the family. The inclusion of a discussion of the family as part of the Church’s constitutional statement shows that the family was viewed, not as a separate issue, but as a central consideration of the Church’s role in the modern world.\(^{31}\) In #48, “Holiness of Marriage and the Family” the theological concept of the domestic church is again introduced. Again, as evidenced in previous documents of the council, the context of the discussion of the domestic church is marriage.

Marriage is outlined here as being instituted by the Creator with its own laws that were also handed down from the Creator. Christ comes into the life of the couple, as a couple, through their marriage.\(^{32}\) As mentioned in the discussion of *Apostolicam Acuositatem* #11, it is baptism that makes the individual a member of the Church, and brings Christ into their life as an individual. Marriage is separate in that it brings Christ into the couple’s life in a specific way that is other than their individual life with Christ as initiated in baptism. While the root of the institution is the mutual consent of the partners, the benefits of the marriage go beyond the two married persons; children born of the marriage and society as a whole also benefit from the Divinely ordered coupling. While marriage is a good unto itself for the couple, its crowning glory is said to be the procreation and education of children. The document flatly states, “The Christian family


springs from marriage."\footnote{Gaudium et Spes #48. (Hereafter GS.)} Through these series of ideas, it is evident that the council is implying that a family is not a family unless the unit involves the raising of children. In turn, the assertion translates to the idea that there is no Christian family outside of Christian marriage.

As to the relationship between the family and the Church, it is because married love is intertwined with Divine love that the marital union can be called holy. Because of the nature of authentic marital love and its connection with Divine love, authentic marital love can take part in the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church. The married couple is “consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state” in a manner that their entire lives may be “suffused by faith, hope, and charity.”\footnote{Ibid.} Children can contribute to the salvific nature of the family by contributing to the sanctification of the parents.\footnote{The obvious question raised by this idea is as follows: “Can children contribute to the sanctification of the parent(s) if the child is not a product of Christian marriage?” Furthermore, “Can a Christian married couple truly live out their marital call if they do not have children?”} The following paragraph seems to illuminate the mechanics of how the family is sanctified:

Inspired by the example and family prayer of their parents, children, and in fact everyone living under the family roof, will more easily set out upon the path of a truly human training\footnote{This same sentiment is echoed in GS #52; “The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity.”} of salvation, and of holiness. As for the spouses, when they are given the dignity and the role of fatherhood and motherhood, they will eagerly carry out their duties of education, especially religious education, which primarily devolves on them.\footnote{GS #48.}

One interesting portion of that passage is the inclusion of the phrase “everyone living under the family roof”. Presumably, this phrase can mean that there are additional members of the family (and, therefore, the domestic church) beyond the spouses and their children. If others can be included as being the beneficiaries of the sanctity of the family,
it must be asked where exactly this benefit is rooted. Is this holiness derived from the authentic marital love of the spouses or does it come from some notion of holiness attached to the family separate from the spouses’ marital bond? Perhaps this comment is a reflection of the fact that the original “household churches” described in the Bible were composed of several families and singular individuals. In either case, those receiving the benefits of the family’s holiness can be more than just the married couple and their children.

While all that has been said relates to the internal workings of the couple or the family, there is still more to be said as to how the family is to be a beacon to society as a functional model of the Church. “It will show forth to all men Christ’s living presence in the world and the authentic nature of the Church by the love and generous fruitfulness of the spouses, by their unity and fidelity, and by the loving way in which all members of the family cooperate with each other.”38 In other words, the family is not only a possible domestic church because of its inner working; the family is possibly a domestic church because it is holy and salvific for its members and also because it is a living presence of Christ in the world. Internally, the family is a means of salvation to its members due to its relationship to Divine love. Externally, the family can be a legitimate embodiment of Christ’s presence to the world. These two factors, taken together, illustrate why the family can rightly be called a domestic church.

Commentary on the Contents of the Documents

The proceedings of and documents that were generated by the Second Vatican Council gave the theological concept and lived reality of the family as a domestic church.

38 Ibid.
its citizenship in Roman Catholic theology.\textsuperscript{39} The family had been reintroduced into Catholic theology as a subject unto itself; also, it was introduced as an ecclesiological unit in a manner that was certainly novel, if not altogether unexpected.\textsuperscript{40} Because the term was placed and discussed in documents of such importance, the door was opened for theologians to begin discussing the family in an innovative manner. The family was no longer viewed solely as subject to the hierarchy of the Church. Rather, the family, as a domestic Church, can be viewed as constituting and embodying the ecclesial institution of the Church.\textsuperscript{41} Of course, this does not mean that the Church was divesting itself of any notion of being an institution. As Florence Caffrey Bourg notes, “Though \textit{Lumen Gentium} affirms the indispensable nature of the institutional elements of the church, it also clarifies that \textit{God’s spirit works in many ways that are not institutionalized}.”\textsuperscript{42} No longer simply members of the Church, the family could now be the Church in the world. As noted by Thomas Groome, “The family, within its own life and as appropriate to its own context, should carry on the standard functions of Christian ministry.”\textsuperscript{43} By announcing the family to be a functional formation of the Church, a domestic church is capable of carrying out those duties proper to the family that were often previously considered duties only proper to the institutional Church.\textsuperscript{44} The family is unique in its

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{40}] Joseph C. Atkinson, "Family As Domestic Church: Development, Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation," \textit{Theological Studies} 66 (2005): 592.
\item[\textsuperscript{41}] Bernard Boelen, "Church Renewal and the Christian Family," \textit{Studies in Formative Spirituality} 2, no. 3 (November 1981): 359.
\item[\textsuperscript{42}] "Domestic Churches: Sociological Challenges and Theological Imperative," in \textit{Theology and the Social Sciences}, ed. Michael Barnes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 264. Italics are author’s.
\item[\textsuperscript{44}] While the majority of duties ascribed to the domestic church are outlined above in the discussion of \textit{Apostolicam Acuositatem} #11, the listing is not complete unto itself. Further documents from the Church comment upon and expand the list as conceived through the Council. However, within the statements of
\end{itemize}
ability to be a messenger of the Church to the world and in its ability to “pass on” the Church from generation to generation.

The “passing on” of the faith is a central theme of how the family becomes a domestic church. All three passages from the Conciliar Documents that discuss the family as a domestic church refer to the role of parents as heralds of the faith to their children (as well as to the world). There is a clear connection between the domestic church and the procreation of spouses and the education of children. The education of children in a domestic church is said to be centered on the passing on of the faith and the fostering of vocation. In order for a parent to fulfill his or her role in a domestic church, that parent must introduce and strengthen a child’s faith as well as help them to understand the Church and their place in it. In order to foster that understanding, the parent is responsible for helping the child discern their Christian vocation. It is also of note that many of the duties ascribed to the family in Apostolicam Acuositatem #11 specifically refer to the raising of the couple’s own children as well as having a positive developmental impact on all children. By referring to children as the “crowning glory” of marriage, there is certainly a focus on procreation and children with regard to the domestic church.

The final issue to be addressed in regards to the domestic church in the documents of Vatican II is the relationship between baptism, marriage, and the family. The previously discussed documents all use marriage as the basis to discuss the family and,

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Vatican II, the family is given an expanded role as heralds for the Church in the world at large. Through the family’s words and deeds, the domestic church can give legitimate presence to both the Church and, in turn, Christ in the world.  

45 And as Lumen Gentium #11 adds, there must be special attention paid if the child gravitates to a religious vocation.  

46 GS #48
therefore, the domestic church. There is no sense that there is even a possibility of the existence of a legitimate Christian family outside of the bonds of marriage.\textsuperscript{47} If this is to be the case, then it is not baptism that establishes a “church in miniature,” rather, it is marriage that is the starting point for a possible foundation for a “new” domestic church. Yet, Lumen Gentium #11 clearly states that it is the sacrament of baptism that incorporates individuals into the Church.\textsuperscript{48} What is not made clear in these documents is if marriage is seen as a recognition of transformed obligations of faith that began at baptism by way of the new responsibilities that the individual has to his or her spouse and their child or children or if marriage brings about a new reality for the baptized person after which they relate to the Church at large in a totally new (not simply transformed) manner. The issue can best be reformed by asking if marriage or baptism is the sacramental basis for the theology of the family as a domestic church. There is no doubt that all three of the specific passages discussed in this section treat the theology of the domestic church within the theology of marriage. Yet, these same specific passages do not categorically deny that the “family” might be something other than a married couple and their child or children.

\textit{Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)}

\textbf{Introduction}

While it was \textit{Lumen Gentium} #11 that brought the term domestic church back into Roman Catholic dialogue concerning the family, it was Pope John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation \textit{Familiaris Consortio} that solidified the theology of domestic church as the

\textsuperscript{47} Not to mention the previously mentioned notion that there is no family (and no domestic church) without the presence of children in the marriage.

\textsuperscript{48} “Incorporated into the Church by Baptism, the faithful are appointed by the baptismal character to Christian religious worship; reborn as sons of God, they must profess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church.”
central means of discussion with regards to the family’s place in the Church and its function as a church of the home. Joseph Atkinson states that John Paul II’s “achievement is that he not only secured a permanent place for this concept in the Church’s Magisterium, but established it as the dominant hermeneutic by which the family was to be understood.” The document itself seeks to outline the roles that a family should concern itself with: forming a community of persons, serving life, participating in the development of society, and sharing the life and mission of the Church. While all of these roles are certainly required of each individual member of the Church, they each take on special emphasis and impact when they are ascribed to the family as a form of church unto itself.

What is described within the document is a reciprocal relationship between the Hierarchical Roman Church and the domestic church. The Church is to be an aid, source of support, and source of salvation for the family while the family is to be bedrock of the Church through its education and evangelization of others and its work in saving itself and others. No longer is the family seen as simply a functional unit that takes direction from the Church, the family is seen as a church, a domestic church or “church of the home.” The family has a special place within the Church because it is existential to God’s plan for our salvation. The mission of the family is not given by the Church; rather, it is set forth by the Creator. These thoughts are given voice by the opening paragraph of #17 of the document:

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50 Familiaris Consortio as well as other Church documents and theologians use these phrases almost interchangeably. This work will look at instances where either phrase is used within the document and within theological inquiry.
The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its *identity*, what it *is*, but also its *mission*, what it can and should *do*. The role God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family *is*; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it *is*. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, *become* what you *are*.\(^{51}\)

The primary reason that the Church has begun and continues to treat the family as a domestic church is because that is what a family *is*. *Familiaris Consortio* is not a restatement of what the family *is*; it is a restatement of what that means to the family and to the Church.

_*Familiaris Consortio* uses the phrase “domestic church” or “church of the home” in ten of its eighty-six passages.\(^{52}\) Following the lead of Mark Cardinal Oullet\(^ {53}\), I will organize these passages into three distinct groups (the basis and affirmation of the family as a domestic church, the mission of the family to evangelize and be evangelized, as well as prayer, worship and the family) and analyze the main points being made in the document. Following that exposition, some remaining issues contained in the document (as well as some unanswered questions) will be analyzed.

**Basis and affirmation of the family as a domestic church (*Familiaris Consortio* ##21, 38, 48, and 49)**

*Shared mission with the Church*

The most basic and salient reason that the family can be considered a domestic church is that there is a shared mission between the Church and the family. It would not be proper to state that the family can be the entirety of the Church, but it is representative

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52 ## 21, 38, 48, 49, 51, 54, 59, 61, 65, and 86.

of the Church in a real and tangible manner. John Paul II stated it as follows: “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church.’”\(^{54}\) The family as a domestic church constitutes a specific, but not total, actualization of the Church. The ecclesial communion that is given presence in the domestic church is understood to be symbiotic to the symbolic presence of Jesus that is presented by the Church as a whole. To say that the family can truly be a legitimate and real presence of Christ in the world certainly speaks to the notion that the domestic church shares a mission with the Roman Catholic Church. As a perspective representation of Christ in the world, the family has a duty to live out its mission as a church by performing certain tasks as a unit in the same way that the Church, as a whole, and baptized Christians, as individuals, are called to live out the ecclesial functions of being a priest, prophet, and king in and to the world.\(^{55}\) The domestic church has shared functions with those duties that the Roman Church ascribes to itself. It is a church, but a church in a family way.\(^{56}\)

In a broad sense, there are numerous ways that the family shares the general mission of the Church. The first is that the family is to be a “teacher and mother” in the same mold as the worldwide Church.\(^{57}\) These two manifestations of the family as a teacher and as a mother have manifold functions as a lived reality. With regards to the

\(^{54}\) FC #21.

\(^{55}\) As FC #50 states, “Having laid the foundation of the participation of the Christian family in the Church’s mission, it is now time to illustrate its substance in reference to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King – three aspects of a single reality – by presenting the Christian family as 1) a believing and evangelizing community, 2) a community in dialogue with God, and 3) a community at the service of man.” These three tasks of the family in relation to their roles as prophet, priest and king will be discussed throughout the exposition on the domestic church in Familiaris Consortio.


\(^{57}\) FC #38. The notion as the family unit as “mother” is also mentioned in FC 49.
manifestation of the domestic church as sharing the mission of the Church, the family is
to teach the world by and through its life as a family. This process of teaching is
accomplished through the family’s actions in the world as well as through evangelization
as a familial unit and as individual members of a domestic church. The role of the
domestic church serving as a mother in the manner of the Church is centered on the
protection of the faith and the generative act of producing new members of the
family/domestic church/Church. Just as a central motif of motherhood is to be a
protector of the offspring, the family, as a domestic church, is to protect the faith by
being a beacon of light and hope in a world that often functions contrarily to the
teachings of the Church. As *Familiaris Consortio* #4 states, “Not infrequently ideas and
solutions which are very appealing, but which obscure the varying degrees of truth and
the dignity of the human person, are offered to the men and women of today.” Part of the
domestic church’s shared mission with the Church is to protect the world and the family
from these assaults on the truth. Secondarily, the domestic church is to function as a
mother as the Church does in a manner that expands membership. A family, by nearly all
definitions, is generative. By definition, a mother is not such until there is a “child” or
“children”. The domestic church functions as a mother when it brings new members into
the Church. This function is obvious when the family has a child and that child is
subsequently baptized as a Christian. This function is also fulfilled when the family acts
as a mother to the world by nurturing and protecting the faith as well as when the family
is generative or evangelizes.

Finally, the domestic church shares the mission of the Church to build up the
Kingdom of God. “The family is placed at the service of building up the Kingdom of
God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church." One of the most basic missions of the Church is to be a historical force for bringing about the Kingdom of God. The family shares in and helps to actualize this mission. The specific tasks of the family that helps in accomplishing this mission will be detailed throughout the exposition of this document, but it is important to note that the family, as a domestic church, has a tangible and specific job of ushering the Kingdom to fruition in a real and specific way.

Obviously, this mission is not just an interior call. The Kingdom of God is not simply something that the domestic church can seek to bring about within itself. There must also be an external focus in order to truly share this mission with the Church. As the domestic church is itself the Church, all actions of that family are Church actions. “They are all drawn into the dynamics of building the Kingdom.” In order to even attempt to reach this lofty goal, the domestic church must bear an authentic witness to Christ and His Church.

The spiritual communion between Christian families rooted in common faith and hope and given life by love, constitutes an inner energy that generates, spreads and develops justice, reconciliation, fraternity and peace among human beings. Insofar as it is a “small scale Church,” the Christian family is called upon, like the “large-scale Church,” to be a sign of unity for the world and in this way to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the Kingdom and peace of Christ, towards which the whole world in journeying.

The entire world is journeying towards the everlasting Kingdom. The family can function as and share a mission with the Church in part because it has a definite role in bringing about that Kingdom. By participating in the life and mission of the Church, the

58 Ibid. #49.
60 FC #48.
family helps to build up the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{61} In this respect, the family, as a domestic church, is a living and an historical representation of the Church.

\textit{Saving self and others}

Tied in with building the Kingdom of God is working towards the salvation of the self, the family, and the world. By calling the family a domestic church, the Magisterium has established the family as a means to salvation. Salvation is found in the Church and the family can, itself, be a church in its own specific and actual way.\textsuperscript{62} Therefore, one unambiguous mission constituting the family as a domestic church that is shared with the Hierarchical Church is its mission to save both itself and others. This mission builds on the basic notion of building up the Kingdom because it is both an internal (save the family itself as well as the members of the family) and external (help to save others). Christian families “not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ’s love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community.”\textsuperscript{63} In order to look at this mission more deeply, it will be shown how the family saves itself as a Church and how (broadly) the family is commissioned to work with the Church to save others.

One of the primary means of the family to becoming a salvific community unto itself is found in the education of children. This call is most clearly seen in the case of a parent being the “first herald”\textsuperscript{64} of the faith to their children. Yet, it is not only faith that

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid. #49.
\textsuperscript{62} The idea of the family as a “place” and “vehicle” of salvation runs contrary to the thought of many Christians who perceive “The Church” as a specific building or small group of ordained persons. In this sense, the idea of the family being a [domestic] church is novel indeed. [Florence Caffrey Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 9.]
\textsuperscript{63} FC #49.
\textsuperscript{64} LG #11.
children learn from their parents. Children primarily learn their virtues (both theological and cardinal) from their parents and their extended families. It is not just a “passing on” of the faith and virtues that happens in the case of the transmission of values to children; these children are also commissioned with the mission of the family to carry on and carry out the overall goals of the family. These goals need not be specifically geared to the family of generation, but can, and often should be, geared towards the world at large. In this way, the family saves itself in the present local generation but also the saving actions will continue into further generations and out to the world. Further, this work of saving is not a one way exchange. Children often have a “saving” effect on their parents. As will be discussed further in this work, children can be a source of conversion for their parent(s). The birth of a child can be a motivating factor in returning to the Church and is certainly a motivating factor in a change of attitudes and actions of the parent(s). No longer is the individual living and acting simply for themselves or the couple, they are now living their life for the benefit of the other, namely, the child or children. In short, the education of children, and the child or children’s reciprocal effect on their parents is a central factor in saving the family and the family’s ability to have a salvific place in the world.

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65 Of course, one could as easily assume that children primarily learn their vices in the same way from these same sources.

66 FC #48 reads “Christian families can do this [building the Kingdom] through their educational activity – that is to say by presenting to their children a model for life based on the values of truth, freedom, justice and love – both through their responsible involvement in the authentically human growth of society and its institutions, and by supporting in the various ways the associations specifically devoted to international issues.”

67 Penny Edgell, Religion and Family in a Changing Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Edgell’s (and others’) research points to the fact that the birth of a child is one of (if not the) primary motivators of parents to return to the Church.
The family’s saving mission as a church unto itself, thoroughly examined in *Familiaris Consortio* #49, is also an explicitly outward facing mission. Certainly the family, as members of the Church, has a mission of saving themselves. Yet, that is not the completion of their salvific mission. The family is also called, as a church, to participate in the international community in a way befitting of their ecclesial mission. By first establishing an inner family solidarity, the domestic church can aid in a gathering of families, communities, etc. to affect a notion of worldwide solidarity that will be necessary to deal with global issues such as justice, freedom, and peace. Because families are common among all cultures, domestic churches find themselves in a particular situation to effect change that in some cases can be more effective than even the teachings of the Church itself. The Kingdom of God is for and about all peoples; living participation in the Church’s mission by the family as a “small-scale” church must also be for all humanity.

By participating in the Sacraments, the family is grafted into the life of the Church in such a way that it can share in the saving grace of Christ. Consequently, the domestic church can be a conduit of grace to the world. “By reliving the sacrificial love of Christ the family becomes a saved community and, by communicating that same love, it becomes also a saving community.” Because the family shares in the mission and activities of the Church, the family can be called a domestic church. Because the family can be called a domestic church, the domestic church can be a communicator of grace to the world.

*Relationships within the family and outside of the family*

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68 *FC* #49.
One final aspect of the foundational ideas surrounding the domestic church as presented in *Familiaris Consortio* is centered on relationships. The relationships within the family have been mentioned briefly in the previous paragraphs; namely, there exists a special relationship between parent and child.\(^{70}\) Also, it has been established that because the relationship between the family and the Church is one of shared mission, there exists a relationship between the two structures that is a relationship of common cause and common purpose. However, no relationship is perfect. All human relationships are troubled by weakness and imperfection. Because of human frailties, there is a need of constant reconciliation. While the family is called to be a “school of deeper humanity,”\(^{71}\) we are humanized by acknowledging our failings and asking for forgiveness. Families persevere through sacrifice and forgiveness.

Just as we are sustained as Catholics through the reconnection we are granted through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, families are sustained through their own reconciliations. No family is without tension, discord, and occasional conflict.*Familiaris Consortio* # 21 is right to acknowledge this fact. However, as that passage continues and correctly notes, through the Sacraments and the Church, families are able to return to their natural communion as a domestic church. Forgiveness is also tied in with the previously discussed idea of the motherhood of the Church that is shared with the domestic church. It is through resolve and reconciliation that the domestic church can continue to function as a church.

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\(^{70}\) Also, there is the obvious relationship between the spouses that is formed in marriage. Although the spousal relationship would seem to be the most basic familial relationship, *Familiaris Consortio* does not discuss the idea of a married couple without children being sufficient to form a domestic church.

\(^{71}\) *Gaudium et Spes* #52
The reconciliation that needs to take place within the family is rooted in love. As the family is rooted in God’s saving love, so are its works of forgiveness. The family’s interior acts of forgiveness can be a guide to society as to how to love in a Christian fashion. Domestic church relationships built on Christ’s love, self-giving, and forgiveness for the Church and its members, serves as a proclamation to the world. The family’s root relationships based on Christ’s love (and Christ’s love for the Church) allows the domestic church itself to be a communicator of Christ’s love. Just as the Church is founded on love, forgiveness, and reconciliation, the family’s love and forgiving relationships illustrate and exemplify its shared mission with the Church. When the family exists as a domestic church, when the family is rooted in love, self-sacrifice, and forgiveness, when the family leads this life in public, in the world, when this all happens, the Church’s mission is proclaimed to the world. It is in the family’s relationships, within itself and with the world, that the domestic church shares a mission with the Hierarchical Roman Church.

The mission of the family to evangelize (*Familiaris Consortio* ##51-54)

*Evangelize and be evangelized*

One of the central missions shared by both the Church and the domestic church is that of evangelization. The prophetic call of both the Roman Church and the domestic church necessitate that both have a common task of evangelizing. In fact, the domestic church/family, because of its function both an ecclesial and a social unit has a special function as a herald of the faith. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II went so far as to remark, “The future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the
The Christian prophetic call to evangelize is rooted in baptism and finds a special charge in marriage. While all Christians are called spread and exemplify their faith, the domestic church is called in a distinct manner to spread the seeds of faith. Individuals Christians are not only called to marriage, they are called in marriage to be evangelizers. This call is “original and irreplaceable” and fulfilling the call is central to a family being a domestic church. Yet, the call of the domestic church to be evangelizers is not simply a mission of converting others, proselytizing, or simply living as a Christian family. The domestic church, as a unit and as composed of individual members, must also continue to learn, i.e. be evangelized by the Church. The domestic church is not simply sent out to evangelize; there must always be a return to the greater Church in order for the domestic church itself to be evangelized.

Within the domestic church itself, there is a need for evangelization between members. Parents are called upon to pass the faith on to their children. This process does not happen solely through words; this process also happens when a child witnesses their parent(s) leading a truly Christian life. One instance of evangelizing through action also takes place in family catechesis. When the family attends mass as a unit, the parents are themselves being evangelized while the child or children not only hear the message of the Gospels, they also are witness to their parents’ devotion to their faith. Attending mass as a family allows the family to become “more and more a believing and evangelizing community.”

Gregory Konerman points out that *Familiaris Consortio*
explains that parents must teach their children the Gospel, faith, and love. Furthermore, *Familiaris Consortio* specifically mentions that parents are charged with dealing with their children’s lapses or their questioning of the Church. As the primary heralds of the faith to their children, parents must also be the primary shepherds of their own flock. The shepherding of children’s faith is of particular importance if the family finds itself residing in a place of strong anti-religious sentiment. On the opposing side of the charge to continue to evangelize to children during periods of doubt, parents are also called to foster vocations in their children that may focus on or contain a call to missionary work. Yet, the call to the domestic church to evangelize is also a call to be evangelized.

In order that a domestic church might be able to “welcome and announce the word of God,” the family must continue to be evangelized in their faith. Just as the greater Church needs to be in a constant state of openness to revelation, the “small-scale” church must also be open to evangelization. “Just as the larger universal Church is being built up, is being renewed, and must be ‘ever new’, so too the domestic church must be created and developed.” The Christian family continues to grow in their ability to be effective evangelizers as they continue to accept and deepen their understanding of the Gospel and strengthen their faith. Just as the members of the domestic church are to transmit the Gospel message to one another (and outward to the world), the family is also called to participate in and gain strength from the Church’s radiation of the Gospel. As evangelization is an ecclesial mission at all levels and sizes of Church, there has to be

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77 The fostering of vocation does not contradict and in fact strengthens *Lumen Gentium*’s call for parents to take special care in fostering religious vocations in their children.
78 *FC* #51.
adherence to Church teaching in the family’s lifestyle. Hence, the domestic church must be continually evangelized as it goes about its work of evangelizing.80 This process requires strong knowledge and faith, but it also requires a certain level of obedience.

*Faith and obedience*

While the family is certainly treated as a church unto itself, a real and legitimate sign of Christ’s presence in the world, the family is still subject to required obedience to the greater Church. “Christian spouses and parents are required to offer ‘obedience of faith’”81 to the greater Church. The work of evangelization is an ecclesial service. This service is not merely public in nature; this service is still a service to the Church. Therefore, the family still must defer in the nature of its evangelization to the teachings of the Church itself. The domestic church may not generate its own doctrines, ethical standards that contradict Church teachings, or other means of life that would be discordant with the promulgations of the Magisterium. The church of the home “must remain in intimate communion and collaborate responsibly with all the other evangelizing and catechetical activities present and at work in the ecclesial community at the diocesan and parochial levels.”82

According to *Familiaris Consortio*, the process of becoming a domestic church begins with baptism, but is raised to its truest form in the process and celebration of marriage. Marriage is itself a profession of faith in accord with Church teaching.

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80 Patrick Brennan notes, “The pope agreed that certain specific, unique ministries are needed for the family; but he added that the family needs not just another spate of ministries but must become the lens through which other pastoral activities are viewed and experienced.” [Patrick Brennan, "The Domestic Church and a Family Perspective," in *Reimagining the Parish: Base Communities, Adulthood, and Family Consciousness* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 115-20.] In essence, the family is to become the face that the Church shows society.

81 *FC* #51 which the document itself references as referencing Romans 16:26.

82 Ibid. #53.
Therefore, it is in marriage preparation courses, retreats, etc. that the couple begins its journey from baptized Christians to members of their own distinctive domestic churches. It is in this process of marital formation that the couple begins to or deepens their understanding of what it means to be married and how that relates to establishing a church of the home. The couple does not establish an independent understanding of the meaning of marriage and family; the couple is indoctrinated into the Church in a new and specific way. “The discovery of and obedience to the plan of God on the part of the conjugal and family community must take place in 'togetherness,' through the human experience of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ.”

Through marriage preparation and continued evangelization of the family by the Church, the domestic church learns of and deepens its understanding of what God’s plan is.

Yet, the life of the family is not simply a living out of Church teachings. In fact, the family often encounters many situations in its own life and in the world that run contrary to Church teachings. Familiaris Consortio explains that God reveals concrete demands for the family in the particulars of its life. Because the parents (and the family in total) have been evangelized by the Church, have learned the teachings as they are to be properly understood, the domestic church can respond to God’s call in a manner that is faithful and obedient to God’s plan in accordance to the teachings of the Magisterium. In the concrete, the domestic church will be able to respond to challenges because it has been evangelized in the process of becoming a married couple, in the process of becoming a family, and in the process of becoming and living as a domestic church.

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83 Ibid. #51.
84 Ibid. #51.
85 Ibid. #51.
Let there be no doubt, *Familiaris Consortio* and other Church documents are not in any way stating that the domestic church, given its nature as a legitimate representation of the greater Church, can dictate, change, or invent Church teaching. The “small-scale” church must always be obedient to the “large-scale” Church in the same way that the “large-scale” Church must remain obedient to God’s will. Therefore, the Magisterium is simply restating that it holds the place of being the most authentic source of God’s plan for the Kingdom. Therefore, although the result may be that the domestic church is being required to be obedient to Hierarchical Church teachings, the underlying reasoning is that the domestic church must always remain faithfully obedient to God’s will. This argument merely places the domestic church within the existing hierarchy of “churches” within the Church. The domestic church is subject to the parish, which is subject to the diocese, and upward from that point. The requirement of faithful obedience is certainly put forth as a requirement of being considered a domestic church; this requirement also places the domestic church within the hierarchy of the Church as a universal structure.

The conclusion being that the evangelization that the domestic church is commissioned to carry out is specific in practice, but it must be the same message that the Church makes known, and that message is the message of God, God’s will, and God’s plan.

*Local (interior) and universal mission*

The domestic church’s shared mission with the Church to evangelize is not simply an interior requirement. Denis Edwards comments, “The family is not meant to be closed in on itself, but to be open to other families and to society. The family’s social role is expressed beyond itself not only in acts of hospitality and in care for others, but also in the prophetic commitment to social and political action through a ‘preferential option for
The family is not only to aid in its own journey to become a more perfect domestic church but it is also called to be a beacon of truth to the world. As stated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* #71 and echoed in *Familiaris Consortio* #52, “The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms a part.” By extension, that family’s effect on their neighborhood creates an effect on the world. The family must participate in the world in a manner that heeds the call of hospitality and provides an open heart to those in need. As a domestic church, the family has a “new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God’s plan.”

As has been previously stated, one of the primary goals of the family is to work as a family to become a domestic church. In order for this process to take place, the family must be evangelized by the greater Church, must evangelize each other in the ways of the faith, and must evangelize the world. Parents are required to teach their children in the ways of the faith. In this process, and through life, children also teach their parents what faith means and how to live a faith filled life. This process assumes that “the characteristics typical of family life itself, [which] should be interwoven with love,

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87 The effect on the world can be seen most clearly in the transmission of Christian virtues. This sentiment is stated in *FC* #69 as, “The assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting Christian virtues which are both the starting point and goal of pastoral care.”
89 *FC* #52.
simplicity, practicality and daily witness.”\textsuperscript{90} Especially in places where civil law and culture threaten religion, the family must be a place where children can receive authentic catechesis.\textsuperscript{91}

Yet, this is not the completion of the mission. The family, as individual members, and as a domestic unit is also called to be a living Gospel message to the world. This portion of the call to evangelize is rooted in the greater Church’s overall mission to build up the Body of Christ. “Evangelization, urged on with its missionary zeal, is characterized by universality without borders.”\textsuperscript{92} This zeal can often be exemplified when the domestic church works with other families or with those who are “away” from the Church. The domestic church is charged with being missionaries to families that have lost their way and fallen away from the Church. Also, when an individual, be they a member of the family or not, falls away from their faith, the domestic church is in a special place in order to re-instill that person’s faith. The attempt to return the “fallen” family or individual may be done with direct evangelization or it may be done simply by the domestic church \textit{living as a domestic church}. There is often nothing more powerful than seeing the happiness and joy a family gains from their faithful life in Christ. “The Christian family is called to enlighten ‘by its example and its witness…those who seek the truth.”’\textsuperscript{93}

In summation, in order for the family to be a domestic church, the family must be evangelized by the Church, remain faithfully obedient to the message that it receives, and then spread that message among itself and to the world. If, as \textit{Familiaris Consortio} #3

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid. #53.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. #52.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. #54.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. #54 which cites \textit{LG} #35 and \textit{AA} #11.
states, future evangelization depends on the domestic church, the very core of the Church is perpetually linked to the well-being of the family.\textsuperscript{94}

Prayer, worship, and the family (\textit{Familiaris Consortio} #55, 59, 61)\textsuperscript{95}

\textit{Participation}

The notion of a family as a domestic church is not an event, it is a process. For a family to become a domestic church it must be an active participant in the Church and in its community. This participation is exemplified in two basic ways. First, the family, as a family, must participate in the Sacraments of the Church. Active participation in the rituals of a community is how any member continues and deepens their membership in that community. The case of the family as a domestic church is no different. Second, the church of the home must function as a church when the family is away from the Church proper. The family must celebrate their faith at home so that their participation in the life of the Church does not become disjointed from their mission of building the Kingdom of God. As \textit{Familiaris Consortio} #55 states:

This is the \textit{priestly role} which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way, the Christian family is \textit{called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community to the world}.

Yet, the family often finds trouble in linking their daily lives to the life of the Church.

The spiritual life of the family should not be separable from the family’s complete activities in the world; spirituality cannot be viewed as something apart from daily living.

It must be a guiding principle in how the family lives as a domestic church. As Gerald \textsuperscript{94}Gerald Foley, \textit{Family Centered Church: A New Parish Model} (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 25. \textsuperscript{95}It is important to note that \textit{FC} #55 does not use the phrase “domestic church” or any derivation of the term. However, this passage clearly discusses how the family becomes a sanctifying community. Were the family not considered a legitimate sign and symbol of the Church and Christ’s presence in the world, there does not seem to be a legitimate way for the family to “sanctify the ecclesial community and the world” as the passage concludes. Therefore, this passage will be considered a true comment on how the family is and functions as a domestic church.
Foley notes, “Genuine spirituality has never been limited to those actions which most people call religious. Spirituality does not make us otherworldly; it renders us more fully alive and grateful for the wonders around us that reveal God’s presence.”

Yet, it is not in those actions apart from the Church that the family can find completion in its call to be a participant. More formal and direct participation in the life of the Church is called for if the family is to fulfill its priestly function. In part, the Church exercises its priestly function through the Sacraments. Participating in these rituals allows the family to become a domestic church while it is away from the Church and to, in turn, exercise its own priestly function through self-salvation and salvific action in their community and the world.

Participation in the Church is essentially what makes a family a Christian family. To state the obvious, a family cannot be a domestic church if that family does not participate in and work with the larger church structure. Taking action within and alongside the Church opens the family, as a domestic church, to a more perfect supernatural communion with God. “The Christian family is a domestic church because the natural communion within the family is further deepened and inspired by the supernatural communion which is mediated through the sacraments and is, substantially is, the Holy Spirit.” The family deepens its communal bond as a domestic church by strengthening its supernatural bond with God. A central means to this process in a deepened relationship with the Church through participation in the Sacraments.

**Sacraments**

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“The proclamation of the Gospel and its acceptance in faith reach their fullness in the celebration of the sacraments.”\textsuperscript{98} In order that a family can become a true domestic church, it must participate in the formal Sacraments of the Church. The Christian family is called to a priestly role in the Church in a specific way that differs from the call of individuals.\textsuperscript{99} The Christian family is “vivified”\textsuperscript{100} by Christ through its participation in the Liturgy and, more specifically, the Eucharist. A family (or an individual for that matter) cannot remain a member of a community, let alone be that community, without participating in its rituals. It is through the Sacraments that the family comes to understand its mission as a domestic church. The participation of the church of the home in the Sacraments of the Church is bonded inseparably to family prayer at home. Participation in the Sacraments amplifies and centers the family’s actions at home that can constitute that family as a domestic church. “In effect, the baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis of a priestly vocation and mission for the spouses and family by which their daily lives are transformed into ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’”\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} FC #55.
\textsuperscript{99} There are those theologians who argue that as the family is a domestic church, the family itself can be a sacrament. One example of this conjecture is Maureen Gallagher, "Family as Sacrament," in The Changing Family, ed. Patricia Voyeranoff Stanley Saxton, and Angela Ann Zukowski (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), 5-13. Gallagher summarizes her argument for the sacramentality of the family based on Familiaris Consortio as follows:

1. Grace is seen as permeating all life (FC ##21, 39, 56).
2. The family is recognized as the “domestic church” (FC ##21, 49, 52) thus implying participation in the sacramental dimension of Catholic Christianity.
3. Holiness is inherent in family life (FC #21). This is congruent with the church’s theological understanding of sacramentality.
4. The family is seen to operate as community of system (FC #50). Community is an essential theological symbol of sacramentality.
5. Family and the larger church community are seen in a reciprocal relationship. This, in the context outlined above, implies that the larger church community is enriched by the sacramentality of the family and that the family is nurtured by the holiness present in the larger church community (FC ##64, 86, 50).

\textsuperscript{100} FC #55.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. #59 which references 1 Peter 2:5.
Family prayer and its relationship to Church practices

The transformation that occurs through participation in the Sacraments as stated in the previous quotation continues through the domestic church’s life of prayer. The family’s life of prayer is to be communal. Family prayer is a group activity. If a family is going to be a domestic church (a community), it must have actions (rituals) that bond the family together, transmit communal values, and give its members a communal mission. Family prayer is a central activity in accomplishing those tasks. The object of this communal prayer is to be the salvation of the family itself. This prayer should be engaged in no matter the current family circumstances (be they positive or negative). Of course, family prayer is not to be engaged in at the exclusion of private prayer. The private prayer of each member of the family is still considered an important part of each member of the domestic church fulfilling their baptismal covenant. The document lists various prayers that the family can and should engage in that would fulfill the requirements of both communal and private prayer.  

“The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.”

The family cannot become a domestic church on their own. The family needs the Church to evangelize it and as a place to engage in the Sacraments; and, even more so, nothing can be accomplished without the grace of God. Prayer is a necessary means to strengthening the family’s relationship with God. Without that relationship, there can be no means for the family to fulfill its mission as a domestic church.

102 FC # 61 lists: the recitation of the Divine Office in common and morning and evening prayers, reading and meditating on the Word of God, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, veneration of Mary, grace before and after meals, and observance of popular devotions as those which can fulfill either private or communal prayer, and recitation of the rosary as a particular form of solitary prayer.

103 FC #59.
Prayer also plays a special role in the religious formation of children. Prayer in the home can help to prepare children for their active participation in the Mass. Prayer allows children a glimpse into what it is that is being promulgated and performed in the mass. Furthermore, prayer in the home shows the child or children the connection between what they experience while at Mass with their personal, family, and social life. Not only with children, but with all members of the domestic church, there must remain a constant communion between the Sacraments and daily life. Family prayer, formal and informal, communal and personal, allows this communion to remain intact and to give guidance and direction in the family’s life as a family and in society.

Other issues (*Familiaris Consortio* ##58, 65, 77-84)

#58

*Familiaris Consortio* #58 discusses a topic that will be important to the thesis of this work: conversion and reconciliation. However, this passage attaches conversion and reconciliation to the family as an event that happens after the couple has married.\(^\text{104}\) The opening paragraph which sets the tone for what follows in the passage reads as follows:

\[^{104}\text{While FC #58 discusses the conversion of the family, perhaps the central passage on conversion in the document can be found in #9.}

What is needed is a continuous, permanent conversion which while requiring an inner detachment from every evil and an adherence to good in its fullness, is brought about concretely in steps which lead us ever forward. Thus a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of His absolute love in the entire personal and social life of man. Therefore an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers, families, and peoples, even civilization itself, by beginning from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ, may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and fuller integration of this mystery in their lives.

While this passage does not seem to be concerned with the particularities of family life, there is one central point that is relevant to all families. Conversion is a process, it is not an event. The process begins at a certain point “beginning from what they [individuals, families, peoples] have already received of the mystery of Christ” and does not end. FC #58 does not contradict the above statement, but it does seem to qualify it in a substantial way. #9 refers merely to a somewhat abstract starting point for conversion while #58 comments specifically on Baptism and Marriage. Therefore, the contention between the two passages seems to be the starting point for family conversion. What is not complicated in the two passages is that the family’s conversion is a lifelong endeavor.
An essential and permanent part of the Christian family’s sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the ‘newness’ of the Baptism that constitutes them ‘saints.’ The Christian family too is sometimes unfaithful to the law of baptismal grace and holiness proclaimed anew in the sacrament of marriage.\textsuperscript{105}

The first sentence seems to point to the idea that the family’s call to become sanctified and to be a vehicle of sanctification relates back specifically to each Christian’s call in baptism to remain faithful and to become saints. If the statement ended there, then it could be said that family’s mission rests in its collective mission as given in baptism. Yet, the second sentence of the statement seems to tie the family’s existence as a family to the fact that the parents/spouses are married. The passage gives rise to the following questions: Can the family \textit{be} a family (or a domestic church) if it is not founded in a Christian marriage? (Even after conversion or reconciliation?) Can a family reconcile itself to its baptismal call if the family is not composed of a married couple and their child or children? Is a family’s conversion possible if the parent(s) are not married?

While these questions will be explored in depth in later portions of this work, \textit{Familiaris Consortio} #58 does not even attempt to answer these questions. In fact, the two paragraphs that follow the quotation given above only speak to married couples. Christian parents are called to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means of overcoming the hold of sin. The opening of the final paragraph of the passage reads, “The celebration of this sacrament acquires special significance for family life.”\textsuperscript{106} While the following does not directly state that the “this sacrament” mentioned is indeed marriage, the discussion of conversion and reconciliation is still placed within the context of marriage. The reason being that the phrases “the covenant between husband and wife

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{FC} #58.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.} #58.
and the communion of the family” and “the marriage covenant and the family communion” are used in the explanation of that “special significance”. If what has been stated is to be accepted, one must ask if the family as an entity can be said to exist within the Church’s structure if it is not first established by a Christian marriage. Does this mean that a “family” that is not generated first and foremost by a Christian marriage is not a family at all? If the road to family reconciliation is not a possibility until marriage, then there is no family that precedes marriage.

All of these issues will be dealt with in due time, but this passage at the very least begins to establish a base-line from which to begin analysis. It would seem that the goal of the passage is not to address difficult or irregular family situations. Instead, this passage seems only to be concerned with dealing with how a family rooted in Christian marriage can bring itself back into communion with God and His Church. Conversion, like evangelization, is a constant process that also needs to be “from” God and the Church and shared within the family.

Familiaris Consortio #65 comments upon the Church’s accompaniment of the family on their shared journey to bring about manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In order for this to be a fruitful partnership, there is an urgent need for the Roman Church to support and nurture domestic churches. John Paul II makes a point of stating that the support of the family cannot be focused solely on those families that are already functioning as domestic churches. In addition to continuing to support those families that are already functioning within ecclesial boundaries, “It [the Church] will extend its

107 These “family forms” are discussed later in Familiaris Consortio (## 77-85) and outside of the context of the discussion of family conversion and reconciliation. These statements are also addressed in this work.
horizons in harmony with the Heart of Christ, and will show itself to be even more lively for families in general and for those families in particular that are in difficult and irregular situations.”

The text states that the Church will offer understanding, hope, and sympathy to those families that find themselves in difficult and irregular situations. The Church should be a place of refuge for those families that are have legitimate formational difficulties reconciling themselves to the idyllic nuclear family model that the Church espouses as normative. The Church and her teachings are to be a guide “so that they [those families that find themselves in irregular or difficult situations] can all come closer to that model of a family which the Creator intended from ‘the beginning’ and which Christ has renewed with His redeeming grace.” What is not answered in this passage is if the “model” that is spoken of is that of a nuclear family or that of a domestic church; also, the passage does not state if it is possible for those families that find themselves in those irregular and difficult situations to be domestic churches. What can be ascertained from the passage is that a family that is not functioning as a domestic church can be brought closer to the ideal through its interaction with the Church and, in turn, the Church will reach out to those same families that can be made more perfect in Christ with understanding, hope and sympathy.

“Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Situations” (Familiaris Consortio ##77-85)

As a continuation of what was stated in Familiaris Consortio #65, John Paul II included a series of passages discussing how families that find themselves in “difficult”

\[108\] FC #65, emphasis added.
\[109\] “Nuclear family” is defined as a married heterosexual couple, in their first marriage, raising children who are biologically their own.
\[110\] FC #65.
situations should be cared for. The following is the listing of examples of situations given in the text.

Such for example are the families of migrant workers; the families of those obliged to be away for long periods, such as members of the armed forces, sailors and all kinds of itinerant people; the families of those in prison, of refugees and exiles; the families in big cities living practically speaking as outcasts; families with no home; incomplete or single-parent families; families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs; the families of alcoholics; families that have been uprooted from their cultural and social environment or are in danger of losing it; families discriminated against for political or other reasons; families that are ideologically divided; families that are unable to make ready contact with the parish; families experiencing violence or unjust treatment because of their faith; teenage married couples; the elderly, who are often obliged to live alone with inadequate means of subsistence.\footnote{Ibid. #77.}

While it is unlikely that John Paul II as the author of the text or as Bishop of Rome felt that this list is comprehensive of all families living in difficult circumstances, it does provide a significant and diverse inventory of circumstances that make it difficult for a family to live as a domestic church. A truly interesting facet of the list is that only “incomplete or single-parent families” are by definition non-nuclear family forms. All of the other family difficulties listed can be nuclear families dealing with complications but can be founded upon a Christian marriage. Also of note is that all of those circumstances listed are found under the heading “family”. If “incomplete or single-parent families” are indeed families, there is an unstated possibility that those families can be domestic churches. None of the circumstances provided in the listing above is deemed “impossible” circumstances; these circumstances are considered difficulties for the family in becoming domestic churches.\footnote{The lingering question is if these difficulties can ultimately be overcome. Certainly, if the issue is a separation caused by a working arrangement it can be overcome if the spouse who is away from the family returns. But, in the case of single parents, can the difficulty be said to have been overcome in a manner that would allow that family to be considered a domestic church?}
The following passages can be divided into two fundamentally different categories: those circumstances that are difficult but allowable by Church Doctrine and those circumstances that are antithetical to Church Teaching. The passage detailing mixed marriages is sure to provide the direction pastors should take in caring for mixed faith families as well as providing direction for the Catholic spouse in that same marriage. While certainly interfaith or interreligious marriages make family life (with regard to religious practice and the raising of children in a/the faith) more difficult, they are not by their nature anathema. Likewise, families headed by a separated or divorced spouse who has not remarried can still exist within the Church provided that the individual acknowledges that their marital bond is ultimately indissoluble. As long as the individual honors their marital covenant by not remarrying, the spouse that continues to head the family can honor their family’s mission, shared with the Hierarchical Church, to build up the Kingdom of God by practicing their faith and continuing to raise any children born out of their marriage to properly live their faith. Of course, separation and divorce are considered last resorts and are to be avoided and the goal in such instances should be the resolution of the spousal conflict so that the family can return to its previous state. Ultimately, a family headed by a separated or divorced person will face numerous difficulties in its life and in its life as a Christian family. Yet, these families

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113 The passage in question, FC #78, discusses both interfaith and interreligious families. While both circumstances provide unique difficulties for the family, interfaith families are given far more attention in the passage. Interfaith families are discussed for their difficulty but also in that their foundation in Christian Baptism can be a source of strength for the family. Interreligious families are given far less attention and yet are shown greater concern. In either instance, while certainly being difficult to reconcile with the possibility of the family (as a unit) functioning as a domestic church, both family compositions discussed in the passage are allowable by Church Law provided certain provisions are made and followed.

114 Remarriage after divorce without annulment being considered impossible as an article of faith and sexual activity with a person who is not the spouse after marriage being considered adultery, the separated or divorced spouse can turn their focus to carrying out their family’s faith.
can remain part of the Church provided that they do not begin to lead a life that contradictions or is in further conflict with Church Teaching.

The other circumstances that are discussed in this section of the document are in direct conflict with Church Law. Couples and families living in a trial marriage, de facto free union, or civil union\(^{115}\) are not operating in a manner that is consistent with a Catholic understanding of the sacrament of marriage. While these family forms can be reconciled to the Church through a proper Christian marriage, they are not consistent with Church Teaching and, therefore, inconsistent with the possibility of that family living as a domestic church. Divorced and remarried persons also are living in a manner that is inconsistent with a proper understanding of Christian marriage which is understood to be indissoluble. Individuals who remarry after divorce are living in a state of adultery and have separated themselves from the Church.\(^ {116}\) Remarriage after divorce would be an insurmountable impediment to that family operating as a domestic church.

Even as there seems to be a clear distinction between those “irregular” forms and difficult situations that can be reconciled with Church teachings and those that cannot, John Paul II attaches a rather large and blanket caveat to all of the situations mentioned. *Familiaris Consortio* #85 states rather simply that there are certain “families” that cannot be considered families at all:

> There exist in the world countless people who unfortunately cannot in any sense of the word claim membership in what could be called in the proper sense a

\(^{115}\) Civil unions are separated from cohabitating couples in that fact that in a civil marriage, there is an open and public acknowledgement of commitment between the two parties. However, a civil marriage is still open to divorce and is not consistent with the Church’s understanding of Marriage.

\(^{116}\) Therein lays the essential difference between a civil marriage and remarriage after divorce. Both “marriages” are in error in regards to their understanding of Marriage. Civil marriages do not account for the necessity of the Sacramental purpose of Marriage while remarriage after divorce devalues the covenant of Marriage. However, *Familiaris Consortio* links these two improper forms of marriage in that they are both cause to deny those engaged in these relationships admittance to the sacraments, including the Eucharist.
family. Large sections of humanity live in conditions of extreme poverty, in which promiscuity, lack of housing, the irregular nature and instability of relationships, and the extreme lack of education make it impossible in practice to speak of a true family. There are those who, for various reasons, have been left alone in the world. And yet for all of these people there exists a “good news of the family.”

While it is interesting to note that in the previous paragraph of the provided passage John Paul II states that he feels that these families are “particularly close to the Heart of Christ and deserving of the affection and active solicitude of the Church and its pastors,” these groups are nonetheless not to be considered true families. The question raised by this passage is twofold: can these groups become proper families, and is there a direct causality between poverty and the other problematic issues listed.

To the first question, it would seem that there is a possibility of these groups reaching a point where they can become proper families. This entire section of *Familiaris Consortio* is written with a sense of compassion, not of sense of disregard or finality. Certainly, if poverty is seen as being the root cause for the problems that follow, those problems that keep those people from becoming a true family, then there exists a solution. Overcoming poverty is prescribed as a first step to alleviating the burdens that keep these groups from being considered families. Yet, this article relates this concern merely to the political realm. In spite of the rather understated proposed solution, there does appear to be a means for these groups to become families, and in turn, domestic churches. If a family does not face these challenges, or rather, overcomes these difficulties, there appears to be no reason why these groupings would not be considered families.

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117 FC #85
To deal with the second question, causality, it has to be determined if any or, more importantly, all of the impediments listed in the passage, independent of the others, can deem a “family” not a family. The difficulties listed in the passage that deny these groups the title of “family” are: poverty, promiscuity, lack of proper housing, irregular and unstable relationships, and lack of education with poverty seeming to be the root cause. If any, or several, of these obstacles can cause these people to be relegated to something other than a family, Florence Caffrey Bourg notes that John Paul II could be making the case that the Holy Family was not a family as he [John Paul II] admits that they [the Holy Family] were poor and, as the Scriptures tell us, sometimes lacked proper housing.\footnote{Florence Caffrey Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 63.} It would be absurd to think that the Pope was attempting to claim that the Holy Family was not a true family. If it is considered a given that the Holy Family was indeed a true and proper family, poverty and homelessness cannot be considered reason to not consider a group of people a family. To extend Bourg’s idea one step further, it can be assumed that neither of Jesus’ parents had what would today be considered an adequate education. Therefore, it can be said that a lack of education does not, on its face, declare that a family is not a family. However, unstable relationships and promiscuity cannot be ruled out so easily. Promiscuity and unstable relationships are antithetical to the family regardless of education, housing status, or income level. It is not poverty that causes promiscuity or unstable relationships; although, it must be granted that poverty certainly makes stable and faithful relationships more difficult.

With regards to this specific article, John Paul II’s exclusion of certain groups from those properly considered families is confusing at best when held in relation to the
other articles that discuss irregular and difficult situations. If the analysis provided is correct, it is not poverty, homelessness, or level of education that is problematic to the family; rather, just as in previous articles of *Familiaris Consortio*, what causes a group of people to not be considered a family is if their lifestyle or habitual actions are anathema to Church Teachings.

**Conclusion**

By instructing the family to “become what you are”, John Paul II began to elaborate on the theology of the domestic church that was stated at Vatican II. Even the phrase, “what you are” leads the reader to think about the family as it is and then understand how that fits in with the Church. The command is not for the family to transform itself into something new, the command is to better understand what already is. At the same time, *Familiaris Consortio* goes to great length to explain what the family is and has been. The family is a church unto itself; a church that shares a mission with the ecclesial body of the Church. This idea is generates a new understanding of the relationship between the family and the Catholic Church. The family is no longer understood as subject to the Church but is now understood as a participant in the life of the Church. For this relationship to continue, the family must carry on the Church’s work in their own life and in the life of their community. Procreation, both in the education of children and the building up of the Kingdom of God, is central to that mission. In sharing the Church’s mission, the family, as a domestic church, is now readily seen as a path to salvation for the family’s members as well as a sign of Christ to the world.

Yet, *Familiaris Consortio* leaves many questions left unanswered. While families are given instructions as to how to live out their Divine calling and shared mission with
the Church, there remain questions as to what exactly constitutes a true family. Are all family forms equally valid or even possible configurations of a domestic church? John Paul II clearly discusses certain forms that are not “true” families. As had been laid out here, families that exist in opposition to Church Teachings cannot be considered domestic churches. While there remain family forms that do not fit the nuclear family model that is clearly presented as the norm,\(^\text{119}\) there is not a clear pronouncement that these family forms (commented on in the document as “irregular” or “difficult”) are by their nature not possible domestic churches. In part, this tension is caused by the fact that Familiaris Consortio does not concretely state if the family’s reality as a domestic church is rooted in baptism or in marriage. In some cases,\(^\text{120}\) baptism is specifically mentioned as the root for the family’s mission to evangelize; while in others,\(^\text{121}\) marriage is clearly given as the sole sacramental point of entry for the family into a shared mission with the Church.\(^\text{122}\) If marriage is the singular occurrence that permits a family to become a domestic church, then there is a clear reason to exclude other family forms. If, as Donald Miller’s understanding of Familiaris Consortio is correct in that, “Sacramental marriage renders the family a new ecclesial unit,”\(^\text{123}\) then any family that is not formed through marriage cannot be a domestic church regardless of the baptismal status of the family’s members.

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\(^\text{119}\) While John Paul II certainly points to the idea that a married mother and father with their children being what he means when the term “family” is used, there can be no question that many communities no longer see the nuclear model as the solitary or dominant model of family. This topic will be addressed in Chapter 3 of this work.

\(^\text{120}\) FC #52 for instance.

\(^\text{121}\) FC #49 for example.

\(^\text{122}\) Florence Caffrey Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 73-75 and remainder of chapter 6 of that work. This topic will be addressed more fully in Chapter 2 of this work. The point here is merely to point out the conflict in Familiaris Consortio.

\(^\text{123}\) Donald A. Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology: From Vatican II Through "Chrisifideles Laici" (Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, 1997), 102. Miller’s statement, if valid, would also lead to the conclusion that a married couple need not have children in order to be considered a domestic church. Neither this work nor the Magisterium agrees with such a conclusion.
If baptism is the entry point of a family to becoming a domestic church, there are certainly more family forms, other than a nuclear family, that can be considered a domestic church. Even if this issue is to be settled, there remains the issue of conversion as it relates to the family and the domestic church. Can a family take an “irregular” route to becoming a domestic church? While John Paul II clearly is discussing the domestic church most often as a nuclear family that has always lived a genuinely Christian life, there is little to no account of those people and families that experience a legitimate and lived conversion in an abnormal way.

Even with the unresolved issues, it is *Familiaris Consortio* that is foundational to any understanding of the domestic church. The document seeks to establish what a domestic church is, why it is a domestic church, and what being a domestic church means to the family. The overall tone is that the Church has good news for the family and that the family itself is good news for the world. The theologies of marriage and family presented in the document become an ecclesiology of domestic church that highlights the family’s ministry as being one in the same with the family’s life. By attempting to explain how a family can and should form a community of persons, serve life, participate in the development of society, and share the life and mission of the Church, *Familiaris*

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124 Examples include: couples that have children before their marriage, single parents who later become part of a marriage, etc. In these instances, it is possible that the “new” life of the family will not be in contention with Church Teaching. Here and throughout, it will be considered a given that those family forms that exist in a constant way that is incompatible with Church Teaching (divorce and remarriage, an unmarried couple and their children, etc.) seemingly cannot become a domestic church without conversion to a lifestyle compatible with Church Teaching.

125 The conjecture here being that the cycle expected is that the individual is Baptized (most commonly as an infant), participates in the Church, receives all other expected Sacraments in their proper time, place and way, enters courtship, gets married, has children, and then lives their family life as a domestic church.

126 Perhaps the issues left unresolved are “How does a family become a domestic church?” and “Who can be a domestic church?”

Consortio established itself as the primary magisterial starting point for a discussion of the domestic church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (## 1655-1658, 1666 and 2204-2206)\(^{128}\)

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church…is a statement of the Church’s faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illuminated by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church’s Magisterium.”\(^{129}\) These words appear in the “Apostolic Constitution Fidei Depositum” of the Catechism under the subsection “The Doctrinal Value of the Text” and are the basic understanding for what the Catechism is and how it should be understood. Essentially, the teachings of the Church are presented in a way that can serve as a reference for Catholic Christians in an accessible way.\(^ {130}\) Through the proceedings of Vatican II and continued, amplified, and cemented by Familiaris Consortio, the domestic church has become a legitimate and bedrock teaching of the Church with relation to the family. It is only right that a theology of domestic church is presented in the Catechism and will be acknowledged in this work. The passages to be touched upon are two-fold. Primarily, ##1655-1658, and 1666 fall under the direct heading of “The Domestic Church” within the context of the text’s overall discussion of the sacrament of marriage and are the central promulgation of a theology of the domestic church in the Catechism. However, ##2204-2206 which comment on the “Christian

\(^{128}\) The Catechism’s specific treatment of the domestic church appears in ##1655-1658, and 1666 while ##2201-2233 discuss the family in more general terms. However, ##2204-2206 discuss “The Christian Family” and are cross referenced within the text with the passages relating to the domestic church. Therefore, for the treatment here to be more comprehensive, both sections of the text will be discussed. Also, the corresponding passages in the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (#350 and #456) will be acknowledged.


\(^{130}\) The United States Catholic Bishops list four purposes of the Catechism: 1) It conveys the essential and fundamental content of Catholic faith and morals in a complete and summary way. 2) It is a point of reference for national and diocesan catechisms. 3) It is a positive, objective and declarative exposition of Catholic doctrine. 4) It is intended to assist those who have the duty to catechize, namely promoters and teachers of catechesis. (Rev. John Pollard, "Question and Answers". United States Catholic Bishops Office for the Catechism, 4/8/2008 <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/general/q&a.htm>.)
Family” within the context of the Fourth Commandment are certainly referential to the domestic church. If, as The Compendium to the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, “in Christ the family becomes the domestic church,” is accepted, Christian families are naturally domestic churches. Therefore, both sections of the text are appropriate for discussion.

The opening of the Catechism’s exposition on the domestic church shows the connection between the current understanding of the family, the Holy Family, and Biblical texts. The mention of the family of Jesus grounds the theology of the domestic church in the familial experience of Christ. As Jesus was born into and came of age in an earthly family, families today can come to know Jesus through their experiences as members of a family. While the inclusion of specific Biblical citations is done to link the current teaching with biblical precedent, the passages that are chosen are interesting in that they do not develop a theology of family (as a domestic church) so much as they show that families are the roots of the Church. The text reads, “From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers ‘together with all [their] household.’”

This passage is followed by a second statement regarding household conversions. Interestingly, this is a stronger statement on the link between family conversion and the domestic church than can be found in any other magisterial document. The salvation that is commented on in these passages is to the entire household as a family, not specifically to individual members. These Biblical families

133 The three Biblical passages referenced are as follows: Acts 18:8, “Crispus, the synagogue official, came to believe in the Lord along with his entire household, and many of the Corinthians who heard believed and were baptized.” Acts 16:31 “And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved." And Acts 11:14 “…and all your household will be saved.”
were saved through their conversion to what came to be called Christianity by means of their baptisms and family’s subsequent faith and actions. These families (which were certainly considered “families” before their conversion\textsuperscript{134}) were not made domestic churches by marriage; the shift from “family” to “domestic church” was brought about by conversion.\textsuperscript{135} The underlying purpose of the passage is to establish that the domestic church is not a “new” theological concept; it has a Biblical basis for its being.

After establishing the historical and Biblical basis for the term, the Catechism introduces the “ancient expression”\textsuperscript{136} Ecclesia domestica or the domestic church. Again, the Catechism is not seeking to establish this teaching as a novel concept, but rather, it references Lumen Gentium #11 and Familiaris Consortio #21 as the basis for this statement. What follows is a restatement of Lumen Gentium #11 which announces the family as place where parents are the first heralds of the faith to their children. At this stage, the Biblical basis for the idea and the historic theological precedent has been established as well as the restatement of the most basic mission of the domestic church.

The next passage (#1657) begins to discuss that the family (father, mother, children, and all other members) “exercise the priesthood of the baptized\textsuperscript{137} in a

\textsuperscript{134} There is no mention here of exact family form. It can be assumed that the families discussed here would fit the basic model of a family in their given time and place. The family as a “household” is drastically different from understanding the family as defined by nuclear form. See Rosemary Radford Reuther, Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), Chapter 1 for further discussion of family forms in Early Christianity.

\textsuperscript{135} Of course, this is the assertion of this work which will be presented in a more thorough and detailed manner in Chapter 4 of this work. However, the Biblical actualities that are presented in the selected texts quite certainly are referring to families that were already founded in marriage. Therefore, the Catechism sees the Biblical basis for a theology of the domestic church not in a Biblical understanding of the Sacrament of Marriage, but rather, in family conversion.

\textsuperscript{136} This phrase is a reference to the use of the idea of the domestic church in the Church Fathers (specifically St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom) in keeping with the previous mention in this text of the Apostolic Tradition of the Church.

\textsuperscript{137} Florence Caffrey Bourg notes that the inclusion and rooting of the family’s mission in Baptism further clouds the issue of the sacramental root of the domestic church. [Florence Caffrey Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame]
privileged way.‖ The actions of exercising this privileged priesthood are given as receiving the sacraments, prayer, leading a holy life, self-denial, and acts of charity. Through these actions, the family becomes a school of Christian life and human enrichment. What is learned in this school is “endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.” The central principles entail that living as a domestic church is not an easy task. It takes great work, love, and forgiveness to lead a Christian life as a family. Also, as the parents are to be the first heralds of the faith to their children, it is the family that teaches each member how to offer one’s life to God. Earthly families teach their members how to be better members of God’s family.

The section of the Catechism discussing the “Christian Family” (##2204-2206) also opens by establishing the importance of the family to the Roman Church as a domestic church within a Biblical context. Here, the domestic church is called to be

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139 Ibid. citing LG #10.
140 Ibid. citing GS #52.
141 Ibid.
143 Again, the text here cites the same passages as in #1656, LG #11 and FC #21.
144 The passages cited are as follows: Ephesians 5:21-6:6, Colossians 3:18-21, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. What is interesting about these passages, especially in light of the family conversion passages cited in #1655, is that there is far more discussion as to how a family is to interact in these three passages. While Ephesians 5:32 is the seed text that led to the inclusion of the domestic church in LG #11, the other passages speak frequently of subordination. While not discussed in the Catechism, the issue of hierarchy within the
a community of faith, hope, and charity. Having based the Christian family Biblically and calling it to a life of virtue, the Christian family is then defined. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.” The family reflects the Father’s work of creation in the procreation and education of children. It is called to participate in the life of Christ through prayer and sacrifice. The Christian family is also ascribed the task of evangelization. While the definition of the Christian family is a new development, the mission of the family as outlined here is not new. It is a restatement of what is stated in ##1655-1658 although here the mission is tied in more formally with the Trinity and the Christian family’s ability to be a sign of the Trinity, the conclusion being that the family is a privileged community because of that ability. The Christian family is as such because it is a legitimate “revelation and realization of ecclesial communion” that is also a sign and image of the Trinity. The primary tasks that this communion of persons are directed to carry out are to procreate and educate offspring, to evangelize, and to lead virtuous lives of mutual cooperation.

domestic church is a topic that is discussed by many feminist writers when commenting on the domestic church.


146 Although it remains outside of the direct discussion of the domestic church, the Catechism does also provide an operative definition for a family. “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1994), 2202. This identical formulation can be found in the Compendium #456.] From this it is quite clear that the Church (if not simply the Catechism) asserts that a nuclear family is the only “true” family form. This fact alone does not modify what is said in the passages specifically regarding the domestic church, but it does relate to those situations called “difficult” or “irregular” in Familiaris Consortio. Also, this definition of a family seems to be in conflict with the Church’s acceptance of adoption and other “acceptable” but irregular family forms.

Taken together, these two sets of writings found in the *Catechism* seek to ground the teaching of the family’s being a domestic church in the Bible as well as in Church Tradition. #2204 seeks to illustrate the importance of the family in the Christian Scriptures while #1655 shows the Biblical precedent of family conversion as a path to salvation. The family is both a sign of the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity. The primary responsibility of the domestic church is shown in the *Catechism* to be the first herald of faith to children.\(^{148}\) The Christian family is a privileged community (vis-à-vis non-ecclesial communities) both in its ability to exercise the priesthood of the baptized and in its ability to be a revelation of the Trinity.

However, there are some issues that are not addressed in these two sets of teachings. There is no mention as to why or how the family, as a domestic church, is a “church”. The closest that this document comes to making that case is simply to quote *Familiaris Consortio* #21 and state, "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*,"\(^{149}\) a statement that is found under the subheading of “The Christian Family” and not “The Domestic Church.” The summation point (#1666) for the subheading “The Domestic Church” simply states that the “Christian home” is a domestic

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\(^{148}\) #1666 makes this a causal link. “The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called ‘the domestic church.’” This idea can be problematic if it reduces or eliminates any other duties of the domestic church as being the cause for its very being. Taken alone, this statement seems to point away from the Biblical ideals presented in the *Catechism* and relegate the family’s purpose merely to the education of children. Yet, as other documents have stated (particularly *Familiaris Consortio*), the family’s mission is also an outward facing mission. Part of what makes the family a domestic church is its work in the community and world in bringing about the Kingdom of God. The causal link presented in this statement is far more in line with *LG* #11 which bases the idea of the domestic church on the education of and fostering of vocation in children. However, *LG* #11 does not state that the education of children of children is the reason that the family can be called a domestic church. The link is also in conflict with #2204 (quoting *FC* #21) which states "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*.” The causal link presented in that teaching is that the family is a domestic church because it is an ecclesial community.

church because it is the place where children receive their first proclamation of faith. The *Catechism* makes it clear that the domestic church is a church, but not why or how the family can be considered a church. A second issue is that the *Catechism* does not in any way address family forms other than the nuclear family. While not stating that only nuclear families can be considered domestic churches, the conclusion seems to be a given as other family forms are not commented upon with regards to the existence or duties of Christian families. Finally, the sacramental foundation of the domestic church is not clearly defined in these passages. Of course, presupposing the nuclear family as the sole family model that is acceptable for the formation of a Christian family certainly seems to indicate that a family that is not formed through marriage is not a domestic church. Yet, the family’s privileged position and importance to the Church is attached to the priesthood of the baptized. Is the family formed in marriage but a domestic church through baptism? The answer remains unclear in the *Catechism*. While the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does meet its goal of linking Biblical teachings, the Apostolic Tradition, and Magisterial Teachings with the theology of the domestic church, it does not answer every question with regards to the theology it espouses.

### John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* (1994)

In cooperation with the United Nation’s proclamation of 1994 as the year of the family, Pope John Paul composed his *Letter to Families* in a show of affirmation that “the family is first and most important”¹⁵⁰ among many paths that all people travel. Issues pertaining to the family are of paramount importance to all the nations of the earth as well as to the well being of the Church. Just as God chose to enter the world through the

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[link](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html), #2.
family in the person of Jesus, so too does the Church enter the world through the family. While the letter is addressed to all families, there is certainly special attention and message for Christian families. In part, the special attention paid to Christian families is done so through the language of the domestic church. Here, John Paul II traces the use of the term back to the very beginning of Christianity\footnote{Ibid. #3.} and asks that the term remain in the fore of the family’s mind. Because of the challenges faced by families in every nation on earth, *The Letter to Families* states that the primary concern for all families (including domestic churches) is to promote the dignity of “marriage and the family”\footnote{Ibid. #3.}

One key passage in the *Letter to Families* discusses the notion that was introduced in *Familiaris Consortio* with regard to “irregular [family] situations”\footnote{FC #77-85; also discussed in this work under the subheading “Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Situations” (*Familiaris Consortio* #77-85).}. The issue is shown in this letter to be that there are various social factors and active voices that seek to show that these irregular family forms are actually normative. The full passage reads as follows:

> During the Year of the Family, prayer should first of all be an encouraging witness on the part of those families who live out their human and Christian vocation in the communion of the home. How many of them there are in every nation, diocese and parish! With reason it can be said that these families make up "the norm", even admitting the existence of more than a few "irregular situations". And experience shows what an important role is played by a family living in accordance with the moral norm, so that the individual born and raised in it will be able to set out without hesitation on the road of the good, which is always written in his heart. Unfortunately various programmes backed by very powerful resources nowadays seem to aim at the breakdown of the family. At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as "normal" and attractive, and even to glamorize, situations which are in fact "irregular". Indeed,
they contradict "the truth and love" which should inspire and guide relationships between men and women, thus causing tensions and divisions in families, with grave consequences particularly for children. The moral conscience becomes darkened; what is true, good and beautiful is deformed; and freedom is replaced by what is actually enslavement. In view of all this, how relevant and thought-provoking are the words of the Apostle Paul about the freedom for which Christ has set us free, and the slavery which is caused by sin (cf. Gal 5:1)!¹⁵⁴

From this passage, it is easy to glean that John Paul II is readily aware that social movements in many cultures are leading families away from what has been considered the norm by the Church. What is not explicitly discussed is which specific irregular forms are being commented upon in this passage. Given the primary goal ascribed to all families to protect the dignity of marriage and the family, the obvious answer is those family forms and understandings of human sexuality that detract from that dignity. Yet, as discussed in the exposition to the corresponding passages of Familiaris Consortio, not all difficult or irregular situations are by their nature contrary to the dignity of the family or of marriage. While there is no question that the provided passage can and is referencing something like the commonality and acceptance of divorce and remarriage in contemporary culture, it is much harder to determine if the notion of teenage married couples, the families of migrant workers, single parenthood, or other situations outlined in Familiaris Consortio ##77-85 are also being addressed in this statement given the diverse representations of these situation across cultures, their correspondence with Catholic Teaching, and their threat level to the dignity of marriage and the family. #17 of the Letter to Families makes similar claims for protection against moral permissiveness, but again, the specifics of the situation are left to those that “damage the authentic

requirements of peace and communion among people.”155 Therefore, the overall message from this document as it relates to irregular family forms is that these forms should not be regarded as normative because they are a threat to marriage and the family. The problem with this statement is that it does not address specific irregular forms which certainly are not all equivalent with regards to their conformity to Catholic Teaching or their threat level to marriage and/or the family.

Another manner in which the Letter to Families discusses the family (and also the domestic church) is in calling the family to be a community of relationships that is a “civilization of love”.156 The idea of a civilization of love is “linked to the ‘domestic church’ in early Christianity, but has particular significance for the present time.”157 Drawing this idea out one step further, the way of the Church is the way of love is the way of the family. Just as God’s love is central to the Church and the family is central to the Church, the family is central to the civilization of love. The love that is being spoken about seems to be twofold. First, the ideas presented in #13 of the Letter to Families speak directly to the conjugal love that is shared between a married couple and the threats to that love’s being shown properly. To that end, John Paul II uses this occasion to again restate some of the claims of Veritatis Splendor,158 specifically those statements against

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155 The full passage reads, “No human society can run the risk of permissiveness in fundamental issues regarding the nature of marriage and the family! Such moral permissiveness cannot fail to damage the authentic requirements of peace and communion among people. It is thus quite understandable why the Church vigorously defends the identity of the family and encourages responsible individuals and institutions, especially political leaders and international organizations, not to yield to the temptation of a superficial and false modernity.” [John Paul II, Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II. 1994 <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html>, #17.] The passage echoes the earlier claim that marriage undergirds the family which is the bedrock of society.

156 Ibid. #13 and following.

157 Ibid. #13.

the use of the moral method of utilitarianism which can lead to the treatment of people as things as opposed to as persons. This condemnation stems from the following statements against contraception, abortion, etc. The second idea of love that is presented is more *agapic* in nature. *Agapic* love is God’s love for us as shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and, therefore, is an authentically Christian love. It is a love that is forgiving, redeeming, and demanding.\textsuperscript{159} This type of love can certainly be called true love. “Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and gives it to others.”\textsuperscript{160} The family, the civilization of love, the domestic church, is called to show this type of love not only to other members of that family, but also show it to the world. Embodying this type of love as an individual and as a family is contrary to selfishness. For a community of persons to become a communion of persons in a manner befitting a domestic church, the members as individuals and the family as a whole must be practitioners of this demanding form of love. Yet, this type of life is a goal and is not a utopia. Even if the domestic church is able to achieve this lofty goal, it still exists in a world that is not necessarily equal to the task of Christian love. The family must live in love, be love, and show love to the world in order to protect their own vocation and dignity and in order to protect the dignity of all families.

Perhaps the most specific way that the *Letter to Families* discusses how love should take place within the family is through education. Love is shown both in the person who is doing the educating and in the one being educated. “The educator is a person who ‘begets’ in a spiritual sense. From this point of view, raising children can be

\textsuperscript{159} James P. Hanigan, *As I Have Loved You* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 149-152.
considered a genuine apostolate.”161 The spiritual dimension of begetting is also discussed in the *Letter to Families* #9 which reads:

We wish to emphasize that *God himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting “on earth”*. Indeed, God alone is the source of that “image and likeness” which is proper to the human being, as it was received in Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation.162

Parenthood (and as an exercise of parenthood, education) are different and separate from other means of co-creation. Through education, both the educator and the educated become sharers in God’s truth and love. There is no more loving thing a parent can do for a child, or a child for a parent, than to show the other God’s love. The process of education allows this in a significant and novel way because the process of the education allows for co-creation with God in which persons and the family are shaped to be what God has intended them to be.

The educational process within the family cannot exist in its proper form if it is disassociated from the Church. “The family is called to carry out its task of education *in the Church*, thus sharing in her life and mission.”163 In this sense, education becomes occasionally equivalent with evangelization. “Certainly one area in which the family has an irreplaceable role is that of religious education, which enables the family to grow as a ‘domestic church.’”164 Religious education here is understood to be the teaching of the members of the family by other members of the family how the unit can come to function as a civilization of love. Once the domestic church has built itself from within, it begins

163 *Ibid.* #16. This statement of course reflects the idea that the Church is the path to *correct* education. It is implied that teaching values or practices that are not in line with Church Teaching is not a loving action or certainly not a genuine apostolate.
164 *Ibid.* #16 which echoes many previous teachings rooted in *LG* #11.
to become a beacon of Christian light to other families and to society at large. The smaller civilization of love influences the larger society in a way that will help move it towards God’s loving embrace.

Although what has been said does move in a linear fashion and grafts itself well to previous Church Teaching, there remains in the Letter to Families a tension between marriage and baptism as it relates to the foundation of the domestic church. While it is certain that this document is certainly centered on marriage and married family life, there remain some unclear statements as they relate to baptism and its relationship to the founding of a domestic church. The following series of passages all appear in #19 of the Letter to Families:

The Church professes that Marriage, as the Sacrament of the covenant between husband and wife, is a "great mystery", because it expresses the spousal love of Christ for his Church. Saint Paul writes: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Eph 5:25-26). The Apostle is speaking here about Baptism, which he discusses at length in the Letter to the Romans, where he presents it as a sharing in the death of Christ leading to a sharing in his life (cf. Rom 6:3-4). In this Sacrament the believer is born as a new man, for Baptism has the power to communicate new life, the very life of God. The mystery of the God-man is in some way recapitulated in the event of Baptism. As Saint Irenaeus would later say, along with many other Fathers of the Church of both East and West: "Christ Jesus, our Lord, the Son of God, became the son of man so that man could become a son of God".

This Bride, of whom the Letter to the Ephesians speaks, is present in each of the baptized and is like one who presents herself before her Bridegroom. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her..., that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27).

The family itself is the great mystery of God. As the "domestic church", it is the bride of Christ. The universal Church, and every particular Church in her, is most immediately revealed as the bride of Christ in the "domestic church" and in its experience of love: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, the

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165 "Baptism" or “baptized” appear approximately fifteen times in the text while “marriage” or “married” appear some seventy-five times.
love of a community of persons and of generations. Could we even imagine human love without the Bridegroom and the love with which he first loved to the end? Only if husbands and wives share in that love and in that "great mystery" can they love "to the end". Unless they share in it, they do not know "to the end" what love truly is and how radical are its demands. And this is undoubtedly very dangerous for them.

It appears that two separate arguments are being made in the given passages. The first argument has been stated many times and goes back to Fiordelli’s reference of the “great mystery” in Ephesians 5 as a model for spousal love and why the family should be considered a domestic church. John Paul II uses this conjecture as a starting point to argue against modern rationalism and to reaffirm that it is Christ (as the Bridegroom) who is at the center of marriage and the family. This point will be taken as a given here as it does not relate to the sacramental grounding of the domestic church; rather, it is a Biblical basis for the teaching. To that end, the passage is instructive as to how marital and familial love should be modeled upon the great mystery that is Christ’s love for the Church. Yet, the passage continues on with its discussion of the domestic church as the bride of Christ. It is not the spouses as individuals that are “wedded” to the Church to form a domestic church; it is the family as a communal unit. Given the language used in the document, and the specific notation that Paul is talking about baptism when he states “the washing of water with the word,” it appears that the means to the wedding between the spouses (and for that matter the family) and the Church is a function of baptism. If this is correct, the couple becomes married to each other through marriage, but becomes married to the Church (as a unit or as a family) through baptism. The idea of the domestic church being wedded to the Church itself in this manner is in line with the

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discussion of family conversion found in the *Catechism.* Nonetheless, on most occasions, Church Teachings center the domestic church within the teachings on marriage.

In the *Letter to Families,* John Paul II goes to great lengths to attempt to provide a program for securing the family’s rightful place at the center of discussion concerning society. Families keep societies, and the Church vital. The family is our common path in life and our common path to salvation. The amount of time spent discussing love as an ideal and as a program for communal, familial, and societal civilization is well founded and adds a new depth to the discussion of the domestic church especially in the exposition of the intrinsic link between love and education. While the letter certainly points out that there are many threats to the dignity of the family, John Paul II is equally as emphatic in attempting to show that Christ and His Church have and are good news for the family.

**The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ *Follow the Way of Love***

Written to coincide with the 1994 declaration of the Year of the Family by the United Nations and John Paul II’s *Letter to Families,* the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released their message to families entitled *Follow the Way of Love.* Although relatively brief in length, the document is striking in its inclusion of non-nuclear family forms, its proposals for family action, and its compassionate understanding of the current state of the family in the United States. The title of the work, as well as its contents, seems to work in concert with the *Letter to Families* in that it seeks to humbly address families by returning to one of the most basic Christian values,

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love. The language used and theology employed are fairly general so that the message presented might be more accessible to families. In fact, while some of the guidance given to families carries a particularly Catholic bent, the overarching themes of the work as well as the majority of the goals set by the bishops can be valuable for all Christian families in an effort to raise their family to a place of holiness. While some of the ideas presented in *Follow the Way of Love* do not seem to be groundbreaking, others certainly seem divergent from other magisterial statements on the domestic church.

At the outset of the message, the bishops make great effort to establish that their vocation as celibate clerics does set them apart from families but they are also members of families. The bishops all grew up in families that mirror the families of all Christians. Some lived in single-parent families while others lived in traditional nuclear families. Although they are celibate now, they know the “both the joys and hardships of family life.” This message is one of solidarity. The family is the most basic community in human life and the bishops state that it is their connection to families as well as their religious vocation to leadership that make it their responsibility of “opening up God’s truth about human existence and of sharing [with you] the saving resources the Lord has entrusted to the Church.”

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168 Gerald Foley’s *Family-Centered Church* proposes that *Follow the Way of Love* should be distributed to parishioners so that they can discuss its contents in discussion groups. [Gerald Foley, *Family Centered Church: A New Parish Model* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 32.] The idea reinforces the fact that *Follow the Way of Love* is written directly to families. Therefore, the articulation speaks to families as they are as well as how they can and should be.

169 This guidance includes the building up of religious vocation, the affirmation of life in the face of abortion and other issues, etc.

170 “The message is addressed primarily to Christian families but is intended also for all who can use it toward strengthening their families.” [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message to Families* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994).]


vocation, the vocation of love, a love that is forever intertwined with life in the Church. “The point of the teaching is simple, yet profound. As Christian families, you not only belong to the Church, but your daily life is a true expression of the Church.”

The love that all families are called to is rooted in that family’s relationship with God. The communion that happens in a family is rooted in baptism. “Baptism brings all Christians into union with God. Your family life is sacred because family relationships confirm and deepen this union and allow the Lord to work through you.” The bishops are flatly stating that the reason that the family can be sacred (a domestic church) is because family relationships allow families as a group and through its members to deepen their baptismal union with God. The family can be a church because they can express the Church through the daily living out of their baptismal vocation. As Adrian Thatcher states

Following the argument, then, baptism is the formal means whereby ordinary family life is thought to be sanctified. Baptismal grace is not simply given through the sacrament: it continues to be given through mutual ministries of the domestic church. It has a divine origin, yet grace is one. Given formally in baptism and informally in the domestic church, it forms the characters of that church’s members, and forms them mutually.

*Follow the Way of Love* defines church as “those whom the Lord gathers, who strive to follow his way of love, and through whose lives his saving presence is made known” or more simply the church is where Jesus is, “where two or three are gathered in his name.”

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173 This call goes hand-in-hand with John Paul II’s proclaiming of the family as a civilization of love in his *Letter to Families*.
175 *Ibid*.
The family carries out its shared mission with the Church in its daily life. It is not simply in extraordinary actions that the family deepens its union with God. Rather it is in the ordinary and common that Christ can fill the family’s life. The bishops list the following means as expressions of that shared mission: believing in God, loving, fostering intimacy, evangelizing, educating, praying together, serving one another, forgiving and seeking reconciliation, celebrating life, welcoming the stranger, acting justly, affirming life, and raising up vocations. The list is quite comprehensive and extensive. Yet, the call is not for perfection in the mission. The call is for a constant reformation and a striving toward a greater depth in the family of living out this shared mission. As the bishops themselves state, “No domestic church does all this perfectly. But neither does any parish or diocesan church. All members of the Church struggle daily to become more faithful disciples of Christ.”

Another interesting facet of the listing of ways the family can live out their mission as a domestic church is that marriage or any derivative term is not used in the explanations of the call. Perhaps this omission is caused by the fact that the bishops are attempting to speak to all families, not simply nuclear families. Florence Caffrey Bourg points out that “they [the bishops] can speak candidly about the fact that some families (perhaps many that John Paul II categorizes as being in ‘difficult or irregular situations’) may not understand or believe that they can be a domestic church.” The bishops make certain to try and tell families that there is no family form that is incapable

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178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 The closest that the document comes to mentioning marriage in this portion of the text is in the section describing fostering intimacy by stating that it happens “beginning with the physical and spiritual union of the spouses” which certainly implies a married couple. However, that is not the totality of the explanation which points more to each family member’s ability to share of themselves with their family.
181 Florence Caffrey Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 82.
of being a domestic church provided that family allows grace to permeate its perimeter.

“A family is holy not because it is perfect but because God’s grace is at work in it, helping to set out anew everyday on the way of love.” To further this idea, the bishops specifically comment on those families headed by a single-parent, blended families, interreligious families, childless families, and those families who have lost a child. Follow the Way of Love makes the point that all things are possible with the aid of grace. Even broken families can and are of use to God and the Church. All families can live in a manner that moves them ever closer to the goals the bishops set out in this document: living faithfully, giving life, growing in mutuality, and taking time.

The topic of living faithfully is at first directed to married couples and their call to marital fidelity. However, time is also spent discussing ideas of family fidelity such as caring for ill family members, single parents who raise children without the aid of a spouse, and dealing with the loss of a job. Giving life is of course tied with the idea of raising children but it is focused more on the idea of procreation (working with God in the education of children and in the bettering of the world) than on reproduction (bearing a child). Growing in mutuality also lends itself to a discussion of marriage and that is certainly maintained in the document. Families are called to intimately share with each other in a manner that allows all members of the family to flourish. Mutuality is not

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183 The notion of the domestic church not having a singular family form is not exclusive to the US bishops in the writing of national bishops’ conferences. The US bishops are certainly speaking to the concerns of their parishioners, but the reality of changing family forms is not exclusive to the US. The Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference also bases their understanding what a family is on love. The ACBC states, “We regard Australian families as those intimate communities within societies whose members are committed to each other in love – whether through marriage, through blood, or by adoption...There are many different types of families living in Australia today. When people speak of traditional families, sole-parent families, blended families and so on, they recognize that all these different communities have ‘life and love’ in common.” [Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, Families Our Hidden Treasure (Melbourne: Aurora Books, 1994).]
power or control; it is shared responsibility. Taking time speaks to the true nature of love. “To thrive, love requires attention, communication, and time—to share a story or confide a need, to play a game, to tell a joke, to watch and cheer on—time to be present to another’s failure or success, confusion, despair or moment of decision.”\textsuperscript{184} In order to love, one must take the time to be present for the family in an authentic way.

*Follow the Way of Love* is remarkable in the amount of ground it covers given the brevity of the message. What fundamentally differentiates the bishops’ message from other Church proclamations concerning the domestic church is that it is abundantly accepting of practically all family forms so long as those that compose the family remain faithful to God. By defining the family as “those whom the Lord gathers, who strive to follow his way of love, and through whose lives his saving presence is made known,”\textsuperscript{185} and including non-nuclear family forms, *Follow the Way of Love* seems to be an alternative view when compared with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which defines a family as “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children.”\textsuperscript{186} This conflict is deepened as the US bishops firmly root the domestic church and the family in baptism as opposed to the more common magisterial formulation that founds a domestic church in Christian marriage. While other Church teachings begin and end with the ideal, the US bishops speak to all families as they are. Florence Caffrey Bourg notes, “*Follow the Way of Love* sees less-than-ideal family situations as opportunities for faith, peacemaking, and recognition of the universality of God’s love. The bishops remind us that holiness does not lie in perfection, and that even broken

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
families can be used for God’s many purposes." The lingering question then is if imperfect families can be places of God’s holiness, or to put it another way, domestic churches.

Conclusion

As evidenced in these pronouncements, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church began using the theme of the family as a domestic church in the proceedings of Vatican II and that discussion has continued to this day. The theology of domestic church did not immediately become normative, but with *Familiaris Consortio* and the documents and exhortations that followed, the domestic church has become the central metaphor in Catholic Theology for acknowledging the family’s place within the Church. The family is to be a domestic church, the little church, the smallest, yet authentic, form of church. The domestic church is to be a place of education and evangelization. The mission of education and evangelization that is shared between the Church and the domestic church is to find its focus on the family’s children. Yet, as with the Hierarchical Church, the domestic church is to be a beacon of faith to their community and the world. Through prayerful steadfast faithfulness to the Church and a lived participation in a graced reality, the family, as a domestic church, becomes a sacramental community that is considered the most common path to salvation.

Yet, there are many issues that are left unresolved by these magisterial statements. Many, if not most, of the pronouncements in these documents address only an idealized family. These documents presuppose that the family is a nuclear family: a married (first

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only and sacramental marriage) couple and their children. While the nuclear family model certainly fits any definition of domestic church, it is not the lived reality of far too many families. “Irregular” and “difficult” family forms are often neglected or barely mentioned. When they are mentioned, it is simply to express empathy or to state that the irregular form under discussion is not compatible with being a domestic church. The question remains: Is “a man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children” the only form of family that is actually a family and therefore a possible domestic church? If it is, many families are incapable of being domestic churches simply based on their form. Also, the question of what exactly is the basis for a family being a domestic church is left without a conclusive answer. If the discussion on form is the trump card in the discussion, then the issue would seem to be settled and it is sacramental marriage, followed by the raising of children that serves as the basis of the domestic church. However, if as has been mentioned throughout this presentation and in the document’s own words it is living out the baptismal priesthood of all Christians that is to be the foundation of the domestic church, then the idea that only a nuclear family can be a domestic church would seem to be incorrect. Is the domestic church’s living out of its shared mission with the Church, the education and evangelization of the young, being a beacon of faith, and other duties something that a family can accomplish if it is not a nuclear family? Can a family be a place of holiness and a path to salvation without being a nuclear family?

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188 With the notable exception of *Follow the Way of Love*.  
These questions and several others, as well as an overall interpretation of what a domestic church is and what it should and should not be doing will be addressed by various theologians in the following chapter and continually throughout this work.
Chapter 2: Current Theological Dialogue on the Domestic Church

Introduction

The reintroduction of the domestic church into the theological lexicon at Vatican II made a rich new hermeneutic available to theologians. Simply put, the documents of Vatican II and subsequent offerings from the Magisterium provided an outline within which theologians, pastoral ministers, and all practicing Catholics could operate. The transition from an understanding of the family as subject to the Church to an understanding in which the family is the Church was momentous. Given the relative novelty of the transition and the scarcity of specifics in the Magisterial pronouncements, those who chose to (and continue to) comment on the domestic church were left with many directions and a long distance to travel. As Bernard Boelen commented, "The shift from the preconciliar understanding of the Christian family in terms of ‘functions’ and ‘subjects’ to the renewed understanding in terms of the ‘domestic church’ is so profound, so overwhelming and far-reaching, that its full realization will be long in coming."\(^{190}\) Given the profound, overwhelming, and far-reaching nature of the shift, all commentators have to agree on common starting points. The primary starting point is that the promulgations of the Church on the domestic church are the fundamental building blocks upon which to build a deeper theology. Furthermore, there is evidence that nearly all authors dealing with the domestic church share the common starting points stated within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family as a framework for their “Theological and Pastoral Colloquium: The Christian Family, a Domestic Church”. Those two starting points are as follows:

(1) The existence of the term, domestic church, in modern Church teaching and, thus, the need to give it serious attention in theology and pastoral ministry.

(2) The recognition that teaching about the family is received and applied by people living in specific circumstances which act as a filter for the teaching; moreover, that the experience of family living is itself a valid source for the theologizing which contributes to the development of that teaching.\textsuperscript{191}

However, following these common starting points a divergence of thought can begin to be seen.

There are two basic difficulties in gathering a theological consensus regarding various aspects of the domestic church: lack of commentary and conflict among commentators. Unfortunately, many theologians who make the effort to mention the domestic church do so ever so briefly as a means of discussing the family or often times as a tangential topic to marriage. Thomas Martin summarizes the problem: “Passages about the domestic church do not usually draw out the meaning of the phrase with any careful terminology. The language and the feeling embodied in the language are strong. The problems and ambiguities are not really faced.”\textsuperscript{192} It would be incorrect to state that there has been no discussion of the domestic church as a theological reality. However, that discussion has been somewhat muted. When the topic is undertaken, theologians have chosen to approach the issue by either building on the promulgations of the Magisterium or by attempting to fill in some of the blanks left by those same pronouncements.\textsuperscript{193} While the Church has said much about the domestic church, there

\textsuperscript{193} Of course, another source of contention (or progress depending on perspective) is if theologians are attempting to not simply add on to existing Church teaching, but rather to change those teachings. For instance, Donald Miller is quite content with the Magisterium’s definition of a family (“The Church’s
remains much more to be added. Michael Fahey is one author who sees the development of using the hermeneutic of domestic church as a positive step, but only the first step in a process.

Despite the theological correctness of Catholicism’s reappropriation of the family as ‘domestic church’, the teaching is formulated in a doctrinal vacuum that fails to address serious issues that need to be articulated in dialogue with sociologists, psychologists and demographers, to name only a few. As the Catholic Church approaches the new millennium, its teachers will need to listen attentively and to discern painstakingly the signs of the times.¹⁹⁴

The work that has been done concerning the theology of domestic church seeks to read the signs of the times that Fahey mentions. Yet, not all read the signs in the same manner. Florence Caffrey Bourg plainly states, “It would be an overstatement to say that the authors who invoke the idea of domestic church are of one mind as to the significance of this term in its practical applications.”¹⁹⁵ Some see current cultural shifts as a series of issues that need to be countered within, through, and on behalf of both the domestic and Roman Church. Others view the shifting sociological and demographic realities as an opportunity to use what the Magisterium has put forth and expand upon those ideas for even greater inclusivity among all Catholic families.

The conflict of opinion comes down to a central question: is domestic church a theological expression of the lived reality of membership and participation in the Church of ideal Catholic families founded in static absolutes or is domestic church a means of expressing the lived reality of membership and participation in the Church that all

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Catholic families strive for? The more traditional view usually focuses on the “ideal” family that is characterized by its form (nuclear), basis (Christian Marriage), and lock step living out of its shared mission with the Church. Those who hold these views either ignore non-nuclear, non-traditional, or otherwise flawed families entirely or mention them as cautionary tales. They worry that by granting any merit to the non-ideal family there is a danger in rendering a theology of domestic church meaningless. Joseph Atkinson illustrates this perspective in the following passage:

There is a real danger that the concept of domestic church may become an empty theological tag, used without due regard for its constitutive theological nature. This, in the end, can seriously confuse or even wound the authentic nature of the family as ecclesia domestica. Indeed, this is a danger for any theological concept. This may be done out of misplaced compassion as people seek to be inclusive. ‘Define family any way you are comfortable with and you are Church.’ But is this legitimate? Some find the ecclesial and Christological dimension of family too limiting, and prefer to see family principally as a sociological unit which can affect its own self-definition. For some, the domestic church (as christologically or ecclesiologically defined) might appear too restrictive or possibly judgmental.

On the other hand, there are those theologians who seek a more pragmatic approach to the issue of reconciling the reality of families as they now are and the domestic church as a model of family. Due to the variance in family relationships and forms, speaking of the family in idealized terms is simply a “projection of an ideal rather than an empirical

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196 Rosemary Radford Ruether dramatically states the conflict in the following way: “At this moment all the Christian Churches, Catholic and Protestant, are in a deep internal schism. They are split between fundamentalists on the one hand, who seek to shore up an absolute worldview of fixed certainties that support patriarchal hierarchy, militarism, and free-market capitalism, and progressives on the other, who have accepted diversity of cultures and religious perspectives and seek egalitarian justice.” [Rosemary Radford Ruether, Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 223.] While she is right to cite the ideas of fundamentalism and possible patriarchal hierarchy, it is a bit much to state that those who believe domestic church a place for ideal families rely on militarism or capitalism for their ideas.

This “new” approach is summarized by Lisa Sowle Cahill when she states that those theologians who are trying to reconcile the ideal with the actual by shaping an ethos about the family that “is informed by a strong dose of practicality and common sense; and that can combat the divorce culture without withholding support from nontraditional families.” Florence Caffrey Bourg seeks to tie the two approaches together through a directive to those who seek to deal with the domestic church as a theological term. “Thus, a theologian’s or pastoral minister’s task in exploring or working with domestic churches is not to concentrate solely on ideals, nor to give up on them as unrealistic, but to attend to the dynamic and often tense relationship between the two which is at the heart of the families’ growth as humans and as Christians.”

Perhaps another means of adding some depth to the disagreement as to the proper usage of the term domestic church is to establish what type of term it is. Bourg discusses the difference between domestic church as a judicial term and as a symbolic term. “Judicial language is used to mark boundaries and to establish disciplinary clarity and fairness. Symbolic language is more fluid, it functions primarily to stimulate our religious imaginations, though not without implications for institutional structure.” Different authors approach this issue in different manners. While most authors do not address the topic specifically by stating if they believe domestic church to be a judicial or symbolic term, the answers and theological deductions that they reach certainly point to a particular understanding of the term. Of course, many authors do not seek to categorize

199 Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Marriage: Developments in Catholic Theology and Ethics," *Theological Studies*, Notes on Moral Theology, 64, no. 1 (March 2003), 80.
the domestic church as an either / or with regards to these types of language. It may be entirely appropriate to state that a theology of domestic church sometimes needs to deal with the symbolic while at other times it must be more objective. For example, “How is the family a saving community?” may require a more symbolic answer while, “Can all family forms be found acceptable to be called domestic churches?” may require a more objective judicial answer. Bourg ultimately reaches the conclusion that the symbolic nature of the term should be primary while its judicial component should be counted as secondary or derivative. Other authors certainly seem to start with the judicial criteria of being and becoming a domestic church and fill in the gaps with symbolic language where necessary. In some cases, it is not the type (symbolic or judicial) of answers that are in conflict, it is the specific answers. However, the linguistic understanding of the term “domestic church” can and sometimes does lead theologians and other authors to distinctly different conclusions.

Due to the fact that different theologians have different focuses and different starting points, various and often conflicting conclusions concerning the domestic church have come into play. There is agreement that what is central to the family as a domestic church is its lived Christianity. As Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz note in their book *Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church*, “A family and a marriage are

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202 The Magisterium itself and Pope John Paul II certainly fit into this category.
203 Alessio and Munoz for example spend the bulk of their book dealing primarily with the couple’s objective living out of a proper marriage as well as particular activities and tasks that are necessary in the rearing of children in order for the family to be considered a domestic church. [Luis and Hector Munoz Alessio, *Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church*, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982).]
204 Perhaps the difference between a focus on the ideal family versus a focus that seeks to be more practicable applicable for a myriad of families is the result of commentators starting point. If the starting point is the works of the Magisterium, particularly *Familiaris Consortio* or other works by John Paul II, one will seek to deal primarily with the ideal (or even idealized) family. If one begins with the family as it is, a statistically variant sociologically complex reality, perhaps one seeks a more “open” approach to forming and fostering domestic churches.
Christian, when they acknowledge in theory and practice, the Lordship of Jesus Christ; when they profess in words and deeds that Jesus is ‘sole Lord.’ This is the profession of the church, the profession which the ‘little Church,’ which every Christian family, must profess.”205 Yet, this idea is only the first step. What is left to be resolved is if all Christian families are domestic churches. In order to determine the theological consensus regarding domestic church, the following questions will be analyzed:

1. Are all families called to be domestic churches?
2. What are the mission and/or functions of a domestic church that set it apart from other families?
3. What is the Sacramental basis for a domestic church; Baptism or Marriage?
4. Are all family forms capable of being a domestic church?

The following pages will seek to compile answers to these questions by attempting to categorize the perspectives of various commentators, ministers, and theologians who have specifically grappled with a theology of domestic church. What is found is that there is often argument as to the answer to any of the above questions.206

**Are all Families Called to be Domestic Churches?**

The simple answer to the question, “Are all families called to be domestic churches?” is “Yes.” However, why that is the case and what that means are issues that need to be discussed in much greater detail so that the affirmative answer to the question retains its meaning. One mission shared by the domestic church and the Hierarchical Church is that both are called to make Christ present in the world. In essence, both are

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206 Of course, another problem when dealing with the current scholarship on the domestic church is that many of those who have commented of the domestic church have only considered specific aspects. This divergence of focus is the primary reason why this chapter progresses from topic to topic and not from author to author.
called to be a sacramental entity unto itself and into the world and “the concept of
domestic church raises the natural experience of family to a participation in the
sacramentality of Church.” Considering the previous statement as a truism might lead
to two further questions: “What does it mean to call a domestic church (a family) a
sacramental entity?” And, “How does a family, as a domestic church, live out this
sacramental reality?”

Each domestic church is called in a particular manner; yet, all are called to be a
sacramental reality. Using the foundation set forth in *Familiaris Consortio*, Maureen
Gallagher is one author who illustrates how it is that the domestic church can be
considered sacramental by first attending to the issue of grace and then affixing a
particular grace to the family. The simplest definition of grace is God’s gift of self to the
world. To this definition, Gallagher adds the notion of communal grace. Grace is only
individual so far as individuals are part of a community. Humans exist in relationships
with others. She states, “Grace is interrelational insofar as individuals are in solidarity
with the human race.” The family can be considered sacramental because it can be a
communal experience of God’s gift of Self. The three basic concepts of sacramentality in
Gallagher’s work are: (1) God’s self communication with the world; (2) the recognition
and acceptance of this in ordinary events of life which is the task of faith; (3) the
celebration of this grace within the community. In essence, a domestic church is
sacramental in a like manner to the Hierarchical Church; both accept grace and attempt to

209 Ibid. 7.
live out that grace in their daily life. The family, as a domestic church, is capable of being iconic and prophetic as a sacramental reality in like manner to the Church itself. It can be a herald for the Church while drawing others closer to the Church. However, while it is common to think of the “normal” lives of the Church to be something quite out of the ordinary to the average domestic church, many families consider their lives too “normal” to acknowledge the experience of grace in their daily activities. It is often through the love of another within the family that the individual experiences God’s love. Gerald Foley is one author who points out that the family’s communal experience of grace is often unnamed, but is certainly real.

Although they may not be able to describe what it means to be a sacrament, most families have moments when they realize they are in the presence of a Mystery greater than themselves. These may be such moments as discovering a first pregnancy, childbirth, an intimate sexual experience, or reconciliation after a painful misunderstanding. Perhaps the most difficult truth to believe over the course of our lifetime is that we are important enough to be loved by God. Nothing makes this more credible than our discovery of being important to and loved by another person…Too often God’s plan is ineffective because families either do not understand this call or have no idea how to live their vocation…Although we tend to think of marriage and family life as something very ordinary, it is not ordinary to God, who calls families to be a powerful sign as a community of love.210

Or, as Sarah-Vaughan Brakman comments, the family is sacramental because “The family is rooted in God, instituted by God, is a community of persons relating and living with others in an attitude of agape love.”211 This definition of family could also suffice for a definition of church if the words were interchanged.

While not disagreeing with the previous position, other authors have gone a step further in stating that the family can be an expressed mediation of the Holy Trinity. Both Mark Cardinal Oulet\textsuperscript{212} and Denis Edwards\textsuperscript{213} attach the sacramentality of the domestic church to its likeness with Trinitarian relationships specifically in the realm of a theological understanding of *perichoresis*. The simplest and operative definition of *perichoresis* is the mutual indwelling of the Divine Persons within each other. In essence, both authors relate the sacramentality of the domestic church to its interior relationships and outward thrust which are modeled on Trinitarian *perichoresis*. “The Trinity is understood as a dynamic communion of Persons-in-love, a love which, in the free action of creation, explodes outward to embrace the universe and all its creatures.”\textsuperscript{214} The family, also understood as persons-in-love, undertakes the creative action of procreation as well engaging the world in a loving embrace. Or, to summarize as Oulet does, “The communion of persons based on the ‘sincere gift of self’ creates more than a ‘resemblance’ to the communion of the Trinity; it sacramentalizes in some sense the gift of the divine Persons to the world, and even exchange ‘between’ the divine Persons.”\textsuperscript{215}

However, the family is not a domestic church unless it is part of the larger Church. Just as there is a basic assumption that all are called to be members of the Church, all families are called to be members of that Church in the way that best exhibits their particular vocation. Or more concisely, all are called to the Church and all families are called in a particular way, as a domestic church. Gerald Foley takes up this theme by

\textsuperscript{212} Mark Cardinal Oulet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).
\textsuperscript{213} Denis Edwards, "The Open Table: Theological Reflections on the Family," *Australian Catholic Record* 22, no. 3 (July 1995), 327-39.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid. 332.
stating, “For a Christian family, being church is both a vocation and an identity.”

All who are baptized are called to participate in the continued life of the Church. When the baptized find themselves members of a family, they are to participate in the Church in a manner consistent with their familial identity. Just as an individual is to live out their baptism in the community, the family is to live out their collective baptism by being Church for themselves, but also in their community. Or, as Donald Miller notes, “Just as natural and Christian marriage make present the covenantal relationships between God and creation / Jesus and the Church, so the family makes present the Church and gives specific cultural and historical expression.”

In order for the domestic church to be a “specific cultural and historical expression” of the Church in the community, the family must accomplish two tasks: participate in the life of the Church and live their day-to-day lives as members of a domestic church. In doing so, the family ties the Sacraments of the Church to their own sacramental existence. “To call the family a domestic church is to express how the family, by reason of the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of initiation, is raised up to be ‘in the Lord’ and how God’s presence is experienced in the natural dynamics of family life, e.g., unconditional love, forgiveness, healing, communication, nourishing, growth, care, etc.”

One example of how both of these charges can be fulfilled in a manner that shows both the sacramental nature of the family and the relationship of the sacramental family

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218 Committee on Marriage and Family National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Theological and Pastoral Colloquium: The Christian Family, a Domestic Church (Summary Report of Colloquium Held at Notre Dame, IN, June 15 16, 1992)* (1992), 8. While this statement is being used in this context to show the connection between being a part of the Church through the Sacraments and the domestic church becoming a sacramental entity unto itself, the phrase “by reason of the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of initiation” and others like it will be analyzed fully in the portion of this chapter titles “What is the Sacramental basis for the domestic church; Baptism or Marriage?”
with the Church itself is the relationship between the Eucharist and the family meal. The historical precedent for this comparison is the sharing of the Eucharist in early house churches. In these instances, the particular literal family joined with other families and individuals to become a spiritual family who would share a meal that was comparable to the eventual established Eucharist. Today, from the Roman Catholic perspective, one of the most basic understandings of participation in the Church is attending Mass and partaking in the Eucharist. It is in the celebration of the Mass that particular families join other families and individuals to celebrate their faith in the same manner as the earlier house churches. As Ernest Falardeau notes, “The Eucharist makes the Church and the family is the domestic Church; and so the Eucharist makes the domestic Church, the family. The Eucharist makes the family.”\(^{219}\) Therefore, in order for a family to be a domestic church – in order to be a sacramental expression of Church – the family must regularly partake in the Eucharist.

However, there is another parallel to be drawn from the early house churches to our understanding as to why it is that a domestic church is sacramental; namely, the family meal, shared together, is still an important expression of unity of purpose and of love. Perhaps Julie Hanlon Rubio’s summation of the Catholic understanding of a sacrament, why it relates to the family meal, and what is to be gained in the connection helps to clarify this idea:

A Catholic understanding of sacrament would presume something more than the shared time together made possible by strong moral commitments. Sacraments in the Catholic tradition are about unity and action. Sacraments concern what the Church is in itself and that the Church does for society in order to become itself. Thus working out a Catholic sacramental understanding of the family meal

provides a good opportunity to show how the Catholic tradition can function as an important resource for those who seek to understand the family as a community which, like the Church, has duties both to itself and to society.\footnote{220}

The connection is not to say that the family meal is equivalent to the Eucharist. It is to say that the family meal is can be sacramental in like manner to holy water and the rosary.\footnote{221} The sacramentality is drawn from the importance of the family meal in regards to the daily life of the family as a church. The shared meal is most common high point of shared activity within the family. Neglecting participation in the meal or improper participation (for example silently eating in a common room while blankly staring at the television) will have an adverse effect on the overall strength of the family and its ability to function as a domestic church. This weakening is analogous to the faltering in faith and Christian practice that one who habitually does not attend mass experiences. The family meal is the place where the domestic church comes together to reinforce its mission and shares its experiences as members of this specific church community.

Through this activity, the family as members and as a collective is better able to live out the mission(s) that they share with the Church in the world. The family meal should not only be focused on the family itself, but also on how the family can effect greater change for the good in the world. “If the family does not gather as a community of love in the home, it cannot then be a community of love for the world.”\footnote{222} Thus, the ordinary, common, if not neglected practice of the family meal becomes a manifestation of the family’s vocation to be church.

\footnote{220} Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Does Family Conflict With Community?" \textit{Theological Studies} 58, no. 4 (December 1997): 615.  
\footnote{221} \textit{Ibid.} 616.  
\footnote{222} \textit{Ibid.} 617.
Insights such as the relationship between the family meal and the Eucharist are becoming more common to families and theologians alike. It is in their everyday expressions of simply being a Christian family brings the members of that domestic church into contact with God. As Bourg states, “Thoughtful Christians are realizing and voicing the fact that ordinary family life need not be a distraction from God – in fact, it can be the setting where God’s presence is made real and concrete.”

In other portions of her writings, Bourg harkens back to Karl Rahner’s notions of the wholly pervasive nature of grace in order to give greater voice to the idea that it is through common (not specifically religious) actions that the family can serve as a conduit for Christ’s love among itself and to the world. All families are called to be domestic churches as all are called to perform basic tasks of family that are a possible experience of grace. Simply being a Christian family makes a family a domestic church; a domestic church is sacramental by its very nature; all are called to be saved in Christ, and the domestic church is the specific vocational path of the family to achieve that end. Yet, the domestic church is not self-sufficient. In order for those common family activities to be placed in the proper Christian context, the family must remain attached to the Hierarchical Roman Church.

Leading a sacramental life as a family inevitably can be traced back to participation in both the sacramental life of the Church as well as the formal Sacraments. Looking again to Rahner, Bourg posits that the Church is the basic sacrament. “The Church (as the basic sacrament of salvation for the world) and the individual sacraments are needed because they manifest the presence, love, and mercy of our mysterious God,

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224 Ibid. Chapter 12.
revealed in Jesus Christ.” The family can only be a sacramental reality if it comes to know Christ. The Church is the foundational point of entry into a life in Christ. Perhaps Bourg’s most succinct summary of her thoughts on the matter is as follows:

However, individual domestic churches are not self-sufficient in cultivating a sacramental perspective. Their origin and continued strength depend on a source outside themselves. Each relies on the resource of (God working through) the larger Church community – including other household communities, past and present – to nurture sacramental perspective at all stages of development: hearing, discipline, and awareness. Following Rahner, we may say God’s presence in the liturgy of the world is a truth that must be brought into explicit and convincing expression through the larger Church as sacrament. When the Good News is shared by believers, newcomers are introduced to the possibility of sacramental perspective.

This sentiment is echoed by Lisa Sowle Cahill. “Catholicism holds that the presence of
God in the family is mediated through the sacramental system of the institutional
church.” Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz reach the same conclusion but also take into account all the Sacraments of the Church.

Then, how can a family call itself “Christian” if it does not value this life of grace; if it neglects its Sunday participation at Holy Mass; if its members do not receive Communion or almost never do so; if the sacrament of conciliatory confession is left for urgent cases, if they do not call for a priest when there is someone ill, because “they do not want to frighten him;” if they make no effort to see the priests as ministers of Christ? How can a marriage be called Christian if its vocation and baptismal grace are forgotten, if it neglects its Confirmation and that of its children and if it never endeavors to live the sacramental grace of marriage?

To conclude this point, the domestic church can be a sacramental reality in the whole of its life because of its participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

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225 Ibid. 99.
226 Ibid. 107.
227 Lisa Sowle Cahill, Family: A Christian Social Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 132. (Italics are as per original.) It should also be noted that this statement is a portion of a quotation that is contrasting a Catholic understanding of the family’s relationship with God with a Protestant understanding of the same. The Catholic perspective is that the relationship is through the Church while the Protestant view is that the relationship is rooted in the parents’ personal relationship with God.
228 Luis and Hector Munoz Alessio, Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 26-7.
To briefly rearticulate the discussion: Is the domestic church a salvific reality?

Yes. Why is the domestic church salvific? The domestic church is both a specific path to salvation as a part of the Church and also an expressed mediation of the Trinity in a similar manner to the Catholic Church also being an expressed mediation of the Trinity. Domestic churches manifest Christ’s presence “not only when engaged in explicitly religious activities or displaying their best human qualities, but equally when engaged in mundane, secular affairs, and even when they are mired in suffering, immaturity, and sinfulness.”

Domestic churches are capable of this expression because of their continued participation in the life of the Church. It is not simply that domestic churches are occasionally an expression of Church or occasionally express the Trinity; domestic churches are exactly these things in both their specifically religious and common affairs. Just as a priest is always a priest, whether he is distributing the Eucharist or playing basketball, a domestic church is always such. All people are called to live out their relationship with God through their vocation. When that vocation is to be a part of a family, that relationship is expressed as a domestic church. All who are called to be a member of a family are called to be a part of a domestic church.

**What are the mission and/or functions of a domestic church that set it apart from other families?**

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II outlined four basic tasks that all domestic churches should undertake: “1) forming a community of persons; 2) serving life; 3) participating in the development of society; 4) sharing in the life and mission of

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the Church.”  There is no doubt that those ministers and theologians who have commented on the theology of domestic church since the publication of *Familiaris Consortio* have concurred with these expected responsibilities. In that regard, what is discussed in this section is not to be seen as a program for the family that is in conflict with the Magisterial teaching. What is offered by theologians is a deepening of the expectations. The approach that will be taken here is to discuss different ideas brought up in the literature that cuts across several if not all of the tasks outlined in *Familiaris Consortio*. The progression of ideas discussed here will go as follows: the domestic church is called to share in the Church’s mission which is primarily done through evangelization inside the family (education) and from the family to the world (participate in and better the larger community). Of course, many of the specifics that will be discussed here can also fit into more than one of the stated categories. In fact, it can certainly be argued that educating, evangelizing, and being a positive part of the larger human community can all be seen as a function of sharing a mission with the Hierarchical Church or that, in certain ways, evangelization and education are essentially the same task (especially in the case of religious education). For instance, an expected and somewhat easily understood task of a parent as an individual or a domestic church as a collective is to have his/her/their child baptized into the Church.  It is easy to argue that the act of bringing one’s child into the Church can fit under all four of the tasks

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230 *FC* #32. A discussion of *Familiaris Consortio* and the domestic church’s shared mission with the Roman Church can be found in the previous chapter of this work.

231 Having one’s child Baptized into the Church certainly can be foundational to a family becoming a domestic church. It is certainly discussed in *Familiaris Consortio* as well of other documents of the Magisterium. It is also discussed in depth by Gilbert Ostdiek [Gilbert Ostdiek, "More Than a Family Affair: Reflections on Baptizing Children and Mutuality," in *Mutuality Matters: Family, Faith, and Just Love*, ed. Edward Foley Herbert Anderson, Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 201-10.] and will be discussed later in this section of the chapter. The example is made here simply to make a point.
outlined by John Paul II or any of the proposed labels listed above. In short, the particular classifications applied to specific ideas and tasks outlined here does not preclude that this is the only broad task being accomplished through the specific action.

The most basic statement of the shared mission between the Church and a domestic church is that both are to build up the Kingdom of God here on earth. Florence Caffrey Bourg characterizes this mission as sharing in divine life which she describes as “encounter/communion with God, partaking in supernatural virtue, or establishing life worthy of humans created in God’s image.”

It is through the Church that Christians encounter God and learn these worthy means of building the Kingdom. Yet, as a domestic church is itself a functional form of the Church, it is also the setting for sharing in divine life and building the Kingdom. The domestic church shares the larger church’s mission because it is that same Church. A basic means of building the Kingdom here on earth is to build up the earthly Church. Strengthening domestic churches strengthens the Church as an ecclesial body. As John Paul II said and reality itself has conveyed, the future of the Church can be found in the families that compose it. Ernest Falardeau comments on this symbiotic relationship in the following way, “There can be no Church without the family. And the family has virtually all it needs to be the Church. Or to put it another way, the Church needs to nourish families if it is to build itself up.”

The family needs the Church to be a guiding light in its mission and the Church needs the family to help accomplish its mission of building the Kingdom of God.

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Before any individual or family can begin to attempt to share in the Church’s mission, one must understand the concept of “church”. The most common place that each member of the Church first came to understand the concept of church is within the confines of their family. The family sets the micro context for the macro experience. In fact, over 80% of practicing Catholics are children of one or more Catholic parents.\textsuperscript{234} For four out of five Catholics, learning how to be a member of the Church is part of the process of learning how to be a member of their family. This is true not just for children, but also for adults. Learning how to be a Christian parent who is a member of a domestic church is also a process; children learn from the adults in their family while the adults learn from other adults as well as their (or others’) children. Mitch and Kathy Finley summarize the point in the following way, “It is within the family that the foundational experiences of Christian life happen best, for both children and adults. For most people, it is within the fabric of family life that faith becomes real.”\textsuperscript{235} In this sense, it is the domestic church’s mission to make “church” a lived reality for its own members in the same manner that the Hierarchical Church is accountable to its members. To further look at this aspect of domestic churches two ideas will be addressed: parents as the first pastors to their children and making the home more of a “church” by instituting rituals, regular prayer, and other activities.

As the “pastors” of the domestic church, the parents are responsible for the religious health of the family. While certainly not taking the place of the ordained clergy, the parents are certainly placed in the leadership position for their family. Leadership in

\textsuperscript{234} Tom W. Smith, \textit{Counting Flocks and Lost Sheep: Trends in Religious Preference Since World War II}, GSS Social Change Report no. 26 (Chicago: NORC, 1991), Table 29. The exact number reported is 82.3%.

the home certainly results in the parents’ responsibility for the theological education of their children through both their words and deeds, but it also has a more basic means of manifestation. The parents are the leaders of the familial unit by reason of their experience as well as of their symbolic position. Alessio and Muñoz comment that “they [parents], mainly, are those who symbolize and participate in the fecundity of the Church. Papa and mama are ‘witnesses and cooperators of the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church.’” Participation in the Church is primarily the burden of the parents. The simple act of becoming a parent generates the obligation to be a pastor “of the foundational church that is their family.”

Parents, as the leaders of their domestic church have the primary obligation of guiding new members in the Church’s ways. While this specific mission that is also shared with the Church certainly equates to education and evangelization, it can also be seen in the parent(s)’ choice to have their child baptized. In the child’s baptism, the family becomes a domestic church that is a participant in the life of the Church. The parents are acting for both their children and the Church by having their children formally brought into membership. Just as the Church most obviously builds itself through the addition of new members, the domestic church is the central means of accomplishing this task. Gilbert Ostdiek comments on the parental role in this process as follows:

They personally present their child for baptism, sign its forehead to claim it for Christ, renounce sin and profess faith, and commit themselves to rear their child in the gospel values of one who follows the way of Christ. Because the child will be entrusted to their daily care through its formative years into early adulthood,

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they can in effect become not only the child’s human family, but also the ‘Church on the ground’ for the child.\textsuperscript{239}

For their children, and often for others, the domestic church is the gateways for individuals to become a member of the Church itself.

Another way that the Christian family can express its being a domestic church is to make the home more “church-like”. Religion cannot simply be participation in the Eucharist (or only attending Mass) coupled with theological and ethical instruction. Rather the home must be a place that reflects that those who inhabit the home are also a church in their own right. Religious symbols such as statues, pictures, crucifixes, etc. should be common in the house. Prayer should be a part of everyday activities such as saying grace before meals or group prayers before bed. Seasonal rituals that couple with “in church” rituals (such as the lighting of an Advent wreath or making a particular individual or family sacrifice during Lent) can be observed in the home. If the family has a festival that marries its heritage or culture as well as its religion (such as Mexican Americans celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe) it should be recognized for what it is. A child’s first confession, first communion, or later, their confirmation should be celebrated in the home as well as in the Church.\textsuperscript{240} These types of activities help to teach the children of the family what it means to be a member of both the domestic and Roman Church. These activities will also help to remind parents that they are always church, even when they are physically apart from the church building and its other members. By making the household a religious place, the family can deepen its understanding of itself


as a domestic church. The home and family activities are the most basic and normal place and actions in a person’s life; the more that that particular “normal” mirrors the Church, the easier it will be for a family to live as a domestic church.

While the parent(s) are commissioned to be the leader of the domestic church and the home should be like a church, the family does still need the Hierarchical Church. It is impossible to work towards a common goal and be a member of a society that one does not engage with on a regular basis. The familial unit, just as individual Christians, needs to participate in the Eucharist in order to remain attached to the Church itself. The parental leadership reaches its apex in the leading of the family to that participation. Although the home is to be church-like, it does not replace the Church or the leadership of the parish priest. Or as Alessio and Munoz note, “The Christian family needs the priest because it needs the Eucharist.” Yet, the Eucharist alone is not the only reason the domestic church must participate in the larger Church in order to keep focused on its mission. It is in the Mass and through participation in the Body of Christ that the Christian family itself is educated, evangelized to, and shown how to be a part of the world. Denis Edwards points this fact out by stating, “The family participates in the mission of the Church, and is called to become a ‘saving community’. It is called to be an evangelizing community, which listens to the Word of God, within which all members evangelize each other, and which becomes evangelizer of other families and of the neighborhood of which it forms a part.” The domestic church does not operate as a unit apart from the Church. Although often physically separated from the Church’s

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242 Denis Edwards, "The Open Table: Theological Reflections on the Family," *Australian Catholic Record* 22, no. 3 (July 1995): 331.
structure, it always operates within the Church. Without direct participation, efforts made to share in the Church’s mission will be for naught.

By participating in the life and mission of the Church, the family becomes an evangelizing body unto itself. In Gerald Foley’s words, “The church exists to evangelize.” 243 The domestic church is no different. In *Familiaris Consortio* John Paul II stated, “The future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home.” 244 That sentiment has been echoed by several authors and may be best summed up by Foley. “None of the church’s efforts to set up evangelization programs will match the importance and effectiveness of ordinary Christian families when they do their best to live the Christian life…By serving one another and their dedication to serving the needs of others, the family evangelizes.” 245 Simply by being a Christian family, the domestic church engages in evangelizing – both within itself and to the larger community. It is within the family that children learn what it means to be a Christian and a member of the Kingdom of God. By interacting with others and being part of the community, families can show what it means to be a church.

Evangelization is ultimately an expression of love. That love flows not only from parent to child, but also from child to parent. 246 Further, this love then flows from the family out into the world. The Christian love shown within the family will strengthen the family as a whole as well as teach the children of the family about their relationship with God. Love shared among the family’s members will have no choice but to radiate

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244 *FC* #52.  
outwards and affect the larger community. By living out their Christian mission to evangelize, the domestic church helps to bring about the Kingdom through faithful example and loving action. As Sidney Callahan states, “Love is the goal of the family mission and love is the way.”

Evangelization with relation to the domestic church has two basic premises. “Internal” evangelization is primarily the religious education of children by their parents. Parents teach their children how to be Christian and what exactly that means in terms of beliefs and more importantly, in terms of actions and outlook. “External” evangelization is the domestic church’s relationship with non-church communities (neighborhood, nation, world, etc.). Obviously, these two ideas have crossover aspects, but for the sake of clarity, they will be addressed somewhat separately.

The manner in which most authors deal with internal domestic church evangelization is to address the ways and means that parent(s) religiously educate their children. From the first mention of the domestic church in Lumen Gentium #11, it is clear that giving life to children in a Christian family also means educating them. As the “primary heralds” of the faith to their children, parents are the original experience of religion for their children. The parent – child relationship is certainly one of if not the closest bonds an individual is capable of forming. As Margaret Ryan Boatz notes, “Faith is shaped and experienced most deeply in our closest relationships.”

The parents must have learned of God’s love through their own relationships with their parents, with their friends, and with their Church. It is their responsibility to pass this knowledge on to their children. Or as Alessio and Munoz put it, “In life, everything is teaching and learning.

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The same happens in the Christian family where the Lord is the Teacher. Who are the most noticed for continuing to preach the teaching of Christ? The parents, who must live and then teach an experience of the Church.”

However, there is a certain amount of threat to the parental basis of education. Common society as well as the institutional educational system seems to approach education as something that is to be farmed out to larger institutions than the family.

Yet, the idea that the family is to be the primary educator of children is not the least bit novel. Thomas Groome points to the household code of Ephesians to illustrate the point. “And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Groome continues in his exposition of the primacy of family education, “That parents are the primary educators of their children is a wisdom of the ages, reflected throughout all ancient cultures…The primary mode of parental education is through apprenticeship and the ethos of the home, by the enculturation and socialization that takes place through the medium of family life.” Or as Alessio and Munoz ask, if the parents are not the primary educators of their children, who is?

Given the fact that familial relationships are the strongest that most people

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249 Luis and Hector Munoz Alessio, Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 31.
250 For a greater discussion of these threats to the family’s primacy in education see Joyce Little, “The Family and the First School of Life and Love: Its Competitors,” in Faith and Challenges to the Family: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Workshop for Bishops, ed. Russell E. Smith (Boston: The Pope John Center, 1994), 126-45. Little asserts that the state educational system, modern psychology, and the government are the primary competitors to the family with regards to the education of children.
252 Above is a paraphrase. The full quotation is as follows: “They [parents] must be the first ones convinced of the need to spread the Christian message and indeed they exercise a vital apostolate in the specific office of the children’s education. It is true that the father and mother carry out their apostolate in their professions, in their living together, in their neighborhood, in their parish, and in other apostolic institutions. But their primary apostolic labor, a task they cannot abandon, consists in caring for the family and, especially of offering the world and the Church holy children. If they do not do this, who will? The
form, it is nearly unavoidable that children will learn from their parents. Therefore the
domestic church, a religious family, will pass on their faith to their children. Because this
will happen, parents must be participants in the Church and live out their Christian
virtues. While there may be competition of information that a child will take in, the
family, as the closest and original source, have a religious duty to pass their faith on to
their children. It is a parental duty to educate their children through their words, and
possibly even more so, through their deeds.

The actions of the parent will most likely have a greater impact of the faith life of
their children than their words will. Simply speaking of the importance of attending
Mass while never actually doing so will at best send a mixed message. To take the
analogy a step further, a child will begin to understand the importance of the season of
Lent if the parents not only tell their child what Lent is and what it means, but they also
ritualize the season in their home through Lenten sacrifices or other activities in which
they and the entire family participate. Boatz contends, “Sensitive to the faith of their
parents, children respond to modeling and experience rather than to abstract teaching, and
they will eagerly participate in the domestic church to the degree they see the parents’

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253 The Passing on of education also would certainly include introducing the child into the Church. Specifically, it can also been seen as a first step of education to have the child Baptized as discussed earlier in the chapter.

254 Of course, culturally we have seen rather odd manifestations of the nexus of familial importance, cultural importance, and religious importance. Culturally the Christian celebration of Christmas seems to “outrank” that of Easter. Certainly, this reality is not due to the religious importance of Christmas over Easter. Rather, the economic impact of Christmas as a gift based holiday as well as the idea that families tend to spend far more time and effort in their preparation for and celebration of Christmas than Easter has led a society to value one over the other even if that ranking is not accurate with the religious education that most Christians undoubtedly received.
faith expanding and molding their lives.”\textsuperscript{255} Just as discussed previously in this chapter, using decorations, art, rituals, and other activities related to the Church and faith within the home will have a significant impact on the religious education of children. Mitch and Kathy Finley also suggest taking children on trips to Catholic or more generally Christian places and events to further deepen the normalcy of Christ in a child’s daily life. They mention Trappist monasteries, parishes of differing ethnic make-up, shrines and other places and events to further illustrate the commonness of and diversity within Christianity.\textsuperscript{256} The more “normal” the experience and expression of religion become for a child, the more likely that child will be to retain a deep connection to that religion for the entirety of their life.

One of the central means of teaching through actions is in modeling positive relationships for children to internalize. The basis of these relationships should be cooperation and mutuality. Children will first learn how to model their relationship with God on how they see their parent(s) relate to the Lord. This basis is why Boatz\textsuperscript{257} and Alessio and Munoz\textsuperscript{258} stress the importance of communal family prayer in addition to simply “teaching” a child how to pray. How parents reference God in the speech (as well as the petitions they make in formal prayer and off hand) will have a great effect on how their children view God. In a more extended passage, Boatz also relates that the model of God that a child generates will be based on their relationship with their parent(s):

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The self-image and God images of a child have roots in actual relationships with those closest to them (usually parents) to connect to the questions, “Who is God?” and “Who am I?” Poor familial relationships during this formative time are likely
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\textsuperscript{255} Margaret Ryan Boatz, “The Domestic Church Today,” \textit{Liturgy} 7, no. 3 (1988), 54.
\textsuperscript{257} Margaret Ryan Boatz, “The Domestic Church Today,” \textit{Liturgy} 7, no. 3 (1988), 56-7.
\textsuperscript{258} Luis and Hector Munoz Alessio, \textit{Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church}, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 87.
to lead to confusion and distortion in these images. Thus parents should focus conscious attention on the relational patterns they embody in the home. Openness and love are essential to a relational style capable of forming healthy self- and God images. Mutuality within an intimate setting can nurture those characteristics.\(^{259}\)

In short, a child will begin to form his or her ideas about God and human relationships based on those relationships to which they relate in the deepest way, namely their own relationship with parental figures and the relationships they see their parents take part in. It is not just words, but also relationships, that teach a child who God is.

Another important aspect of relationships that children learn early and apply to their religious understanding of the world is cooperation. Parents working with their children (as opposed to simply instructing their children) can lead to a more fulfilling and influential passing on of information as well as virtuous behaviors. Daniel DiDomizio and Jacqueline Haessly highlight the importance of cooperation when discussing how the experience of family should lead to a mutual and collaborative religious growth.

“Cooperation is an essential aspect of family living that is nurtured in a home where children learn to play together, not always against, each other. Cooperation is seen as a value when children and adults work together to complete common tasks for the good of all.”\(^{260}\) Cooperation within the family teaches that the normal state of human relationships should be collaborative rather than contentious.

Perhaps Thomas Groome best synthesizes these points into a coherent whole that illustrates how the domestic church educates. Groome summarizes the functions of a Christian community as witness, worship, word, and welfare and elaborates the educational basis for each aspect. To bear witness is to always be a Christian. To that


end, parents (and families in general) must educate themselves and their children that there is no separation between “Church life” and “other life.” In order to accomplish this, the family’s priorities, relationships, surroundings, practices, etc. must reflect their Christian identity. In order to be a worshipping community, the family should have some sort of “liturgy” in the home in the form of rituals, symbols, etc. that reinforce and teach faith and theological principles. The family as worshipping community demands the family participate in Mass (and teach children the importance of doing so) as well as integrating the Word into the family’s life. Incorporating the Word can be done through the use of basic phrases (for example, Groome points out “God willing” or “with God’s help) or something more direct such as a family Bible study or “scripture time.” Family welfare requires care for the totality of the family; spiritual, physical, and emotional. This care for the welfare of the family and its members should radiate outwards. By caring for each other’s welfare, the family learns to care for all people in a just and compassionate manner.  

Through his system, Groome points out that mutual and cooperative education is the basis for the entire Christian familial program.

It is the role of the domestic church to teach children their role within the family, within the Church, and within the world so that those children may both begin to participate in the Church and the world as well as to flourish as individuals and as Christians. Children learn what it means to be Christian and how to relate to others through their familial education. While the educational aspect of the domestic church is centered on the rearing of children, adults/parents certainly gain an education through this same process. They will continue their education through their relationships with the

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Church, with each other, and their relationships with their children. The education children receive in the domestic church empowers them to go forth into the world. However, it is not a sole child become adult that goes forth into the world to fulfill the domestic church’s mission. Rather it is the domestic church as a whole that goes about the process of evangelizing and participating in the betterment of the wider community.

Echoing the Magisterium, Alessio and Munoz point out that the domestic church cannot be solely concerned with its own internal affairs because it is the “the place of meeting between the Church and the world.” While the Church itself is of course present in the world, it is the domestic church that is capable of transferring the Church’s message into action and passing that message on to others outside of the Church community. The family’s role in society is not only procreation and education, but also a political and social mission of participation in human communities. Of course, baptized Christians all should live out this same mission as individuals. All are called to be a part of the worldly community and to better it in ways that are commensurate with each person’s vocation and gifts. The domestic church is called as a family, a specific communal reality, to evangelize to the world through its example and action. Mitch and Kathy Finley state that it is a basic principle that “Whatever the family decides to do to serve others, it is imperative that it be some form of service that the whole family can be involved in.” Children will participate in the manner of which they are capable; a

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263 Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz, Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 94.
participation that will grow in both ability and depth of understanding as the children age. Parents ministering to their children help to build the domestic church; families ministering to the larger community help to build the Kingdom of God. Or, to quote Bernard Boelen, “In a Christian family which is consciously renewing, all the members build their ‘Church of the home’ by ministering to one another. They build their ‘parish’ by ministering to the families of the neighborhood. And they build the universal Church by ministering to the sacramental gathering of the people of God.”

In evangelizing, the domestic church is called to do more than simply love each other. Serious concern must be placed in the welfare of others. While the family’s good remains of central importance, the common good becomes the context for understanding the family’s personal good. One problematic aspect of attempting to discuss a domestic church’s contribution to society or the common good is that culture leans toward measuring a family’s contribution in terms of work or economics. The economic output of the family is counterbalanced by the love that is shared within the family. A duality develops where the family is seen as an enclave of love for its members while it is individuals (the parents) that engage with the larger society as defined by consumption and income. Julie Hanlon Rubio sees that the remedy to this duality is to understand the family as a community of disciples who engage humankind as a unit:

Thus the family should not be seen primarily as a haven of love but as a community of disciples. Its members, part of this community of disciples, have a mission to one another and to the world. Each family has its task to work out in its own terms what its specific mission will be, but the work of the adult family members will be crucial in defining that mission.

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267 Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Does Family Conflict With Community?" *Theological Studies* 58, no. 4 (December 1997), 602.
Whatever the particulars of the family’s chosen manner of living out this mission, the basis of its success will be found in the living out of their Christianity in and through relationships with other individuals, groups, and society at large. These relationships must possess some level of intimacy so that they can be transformative. Just as the child receives the values of their parent(s) with such strength is the intimacy of the relationship, the more of the world the family is the greater impact that their example and their relationships will have on the society. The Finleys comment that, “The Christian family strives to live according to the spirit of the gospel in the everyday world. By doing this, it proclaims that the meaning of life is to be found in a human intimacy which is experienced as inseparable from intimacy with God.”\textsuperscript{269} The embodiment of the discipleship mission of domestic churches is found in actual and concrete relationships with others both near and far. These interactions enable the domestic church to help transform society and other institutions through their evangelization.\textsuperscript{270}

The call of the domestic church to this type of discipleship is made somewhat more understandable through the notion that the Christian family is counter-cultural.\textsuperscript{271} The reason this statement can be made is two-fold. First, as pointed out by Rubio above, the Christian context establishes that the family’s value to society is not found in its economic consumption or profits generated, but rather is found in its transformative relationships that improve the common good. Second, the domestic church, unlike

society and by its very nature, is anti-individualism. Patrick Brennan summarizes the point in the following way:

As society focuses on the individual, so also do many of our ministerial efforts. A family perspective consistently sees beyond the individual to a person’s network of social systems: society as a whole, institutions, groups, and the family. The family and other social networks become, in a family perspective, the lens through which we plan and evaluate programs and ministries.272

The family evangelizes through its nature as the basic cell of society. While the cultural understanding is that the individual is of highest value, the counter-cultural domestic church establishes that society is built of families and not of individuals. Two authors provide specifics as to how they believe the domestic church can live out this discipleship.

In Family-Centered Church: A New Parish Model, Gerald Foley sets out three principles through which the domestic church can live out its mission of evangelization: stewardship, acceptance, and outreach. Stewardship is defined as a particular attitude towards the treatment of resources. The most easily grasped understanding is stewardship of the environment and of natural resources. However, Foley contends that proper stewardship of financial resources is also part of the mission of the domestic church. Living simply is a way to combat consumerism and when combined with using personal resources for the betterment of those with economic or physical needs can help to overcome the sense of self that many seek to find in possessions. Acceptance is understood as working against prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. First, acceptance is something that parents must teach to their children through their words. More importantly, parents must teach their children through their example. The parental

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272 Patrick Brennan, “The Domestic Church and a Family Perspective,” in Reimagining the Parish: Base Communities, Adulthood, and Family Consciousness (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 117.
example should flourish into a familial example that can be seen by others. Outreach requires the greatest amount of interaction with those outside of the family. Underlying an attitude of outreach is the idea that society is not competition to the family, but rather, the family is part of society that can and should help shape that same society. A Christian family is not called to be insular or fearful; a Christian family is called to engage. The goal of outreach should be justice for all of the society. Through stewardship, acceptance, and outreach the domestic church is capable of providing legitimate social witness of the Kingdom of God.  

James and Kathleen McGinnis start their approach to the domestic church as an evangelizing force in society by first discussing the challenges present in society that need to be overcome by the family: materialism, individualism, racism, sexism, and violence or militarism. It is not enough for the family to work against, and even defeat these obstacles in their own sphere. The domestic church must turn outward to help others and society as a whole to overcome these problems. This action is both an extension of the family’s call to be a place of love and its call to discipleship. The authors state that for a domestic church to embrace their mission, “families need to have their imaginations expanded, their inspiration deepened, and their sense of isolation countered with ever-widening structures of support.” Imagination here is synonymous with creativity. Families must be creative in their evangelization and discipleship because most, if not all, of the societal ills they are facing down have been ingrained in culture for many years and are reinforced in many ways on a near daily basis. One

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275 Ibid. 129.
family may not be able to fix a specific problem on a large scale, but they certainly can have a positive effect that will begin to influence societal change. Many specific activities are offered as ways to combat particular challenges (materialism, racism, etc.). Several of the offerings do not seem overly imaginative (for example, recycling as a means of dealing with materialism in the form of waste which echoes Foley’s call to stewardship) while others (choosing to live in a diverse community and be an active member therein) seem to be much more novel. The central point is that for a domestic church to have an effect on their outside community and/or the world, that family must actually put thought into their direct actions to have the greatest impact. Inspiration deals more with where to look for inspiration than any other factor. The sources of inspiration listed in the essay include: “deepening relationships with God/Jesus, with people who are hurting, with advocates for change, and with a community of faith.”\textsuperscript{276} Two of these sources are distinctly “religious” (personal and familial relationship with the Lord – within the Church/community of faith) while the others (those suffering from injustice – those seeking justice) can, but are not necessarily based in the family’s faith. Indeed, while the domestic church’s evangelical mission is rooted in the mission it shares with the Institutional Church, the domestic church’s ability to succeed in that mission most likely requires engagement with, or in this case inspiration from, the outside community. The final part of this remedy is that the domestic church should participate in and turn to support systems with a goal of empowering themselves and other families. Personal relationships with other families allow all involved to be strengthened. While the parish is certainly a primary “larger” support structure, it is not the only network of families that

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid. 131.
can empower the domestic church in its evangelical mission.\textsuperscript{277} Families working together allows for maximum impact as well as humanizing and personalizing issues as well as solutions.\textsuperscript{278}

In summation, the domestic church shares in the mission of the Church to be a saving community that evangelizes both within its own sphere and to those outside of the family and outside of the Church community. This mission is accomplished in and through the ordinary day-to-day activities of the Christian family such as “believing, loving, educating, praying, forgiving, celebrating, and justly acting beyond ‘the church of the home.’”\textsuperscript{279} However, it must always be remembered that the domestic church’s mission can only be a normalized expression of its being as a family if it remains regular participants in the Church proper. Florence Caffrey Bourg sums this point up in the following way:

First, members will accept (with varying degrees of maturity) a sacramental vision that perceives God’s presence in all things and interprets the family’s life as an instrument of sacred communication with God and the world. Second, they will seek to maintain social, spiritual, and intellectual bonds with the larger Church community instigated by Jesus, to give the best possible assurance of integrity in their sacramental perspective and witness. Third they will celebrate the liturgical sacraments with this community. They will do so to fulfill a human need to express their implicit daily relationship with God as well as their Christian responsibility to take advantage of symbolic means of communication passed on to them by Jesus and his Church.\textsuperscript{280}

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\textsuperscript{277} The McGinnis article specifically sites the Christian Family Movement and the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network as larger support structures. It is certain that increased social networking and other internet based communications have exploded the number of large (and small) support structures available to families that will allow for bonding, strengthening, and organizing. If anything, these new opportunities only strengthen the arguments made in the McGinnis article.
\textsuperscript{279} Adrian Thatcher, \textit{Theology and Families} (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 238.
\textsuperscript{280} Florence Caffrey Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 121.
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The domestic church can and will communicate God because it is normal for it to do so. It is normal because of the domestic church’s self-understanding and full participation in the life of Christ through the Church. The participation then turns both inwards on the family itself and outwards to the world. Lisa Sowle Cahill describes the domestic church’s mission in three steps: (1) Christian family relationships are structured on Christian ideals of reciprocity and spirituality; (2) Christian families seek to serve others in the society by transforming the society; and (3) Christian families struggle together despite their many differences.  

Perhaps the simplest and most direct summation of the vocation of the domestic church belongs to Denis Edwards. “The vocation of the Christian family is to be a community of prayer, a community ‘in dialogue with God’ and a community in the service of humankind.”

The mission of the domestic church is to be of God, of Christ’s church, and of the world.

**What is the Sacramental basis for a domestic church: Baptism or Marriage?**

As evidenced in the previous chapter of this work, the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church have given a seemingly definitive answer to this question while at the same time leaving many openings and making many statements that render that answer less than unquestionable. Specific references to the domestic church are normally made within the context of a wider discussion on marriage. *Familiaris Consortio* is seemingly only addressed to married couples, or those lay persons who may become married. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the family as “A man and a woman united in

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281 Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 84. One of the differences listed by Cahill is family form which is addressed later in this chapter under the subheading “Are all Family Forms Capable of being Domestic Churches?”

282 Denis Edwards, "The Open Table: Theological Reflections on the Family," *Australian Catholic Record* 22, no. 3 (July 1995), 331.
marriage, together with their children.” 283 This definition certainly grounds the Christian family (the domestic church) in marriage while at the same time raising the issue as to if a married couple who have not or are unable to produce children can be a family. Yet, at another point in the Catechism the family is said to exercise its priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way. 284 Is this living of a baptismal grace amplified by marriage or wholly apart from marriage? On a local level, and on the other end of the spectrum, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Follow the Way of Love the Bishops state, “baptism brings all Christians into union with God. Your family life is sacred because family relationships confirm and deepen this union and allow the Lord to work through you.” 285 Or, to restate this, the family is sacred (a domestic church) because of relationships confirmed and deepened through the family’s relationship with God that is founded in baptism. The basic reasoning to conclude that the domestic church is founded in marriage is either (or some combination of): (1) there is no family without a preceding marriage, (2) permanent sacramental marriage grants the permanence of the domestic church, and/or, (3) marriage is a communal elevation of the couple’s baptismal graces that is the essential founding of a domestic church. The two basic reasons to conclude that the domestic church is truly founded in baptism are (1) the mission of the domestic church is actually a continuance of the mission granted to all Christians in their baptism that is realized and amplified through the family (that does not need to be elevated or changed by marriage) or (2) practically speaking, it is more inclusive and less idealistic to

284 Ibid. #1657.
state that baptism is the root of the domestic church. This section of the chapter will explore these answers and the reasoning that undergirds them.

In 1992, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family sponsored a colloquium to discuss the nature, meaning, and impact of calling the family a domestic church. After the discussion, the following conclusion was reached. “In Lumen Gentium and in other documents the term [domestic church] is consistently linked with Christian marriage. The family (domestic church) is regarded as proceeding from, or being rooted in, marriage. Marriage is the origin of the family, and, therefore, of the domestic church. This is the position taken in official church teaching.” Simply put, without marriage, there is no family. This position is built on the Church’s teaching as well as on the theological basis that marriage is the means of Christ entering the life of the couple, and subsequently the family, as a communal reality in a manner separate from the relationship each individual member of the family has with Christ through his or her baptism. From the moment of marriage, Christ is a part of the couple’s relationship. It is this same manner of thinking that has led Donald Miller to define the family as “that secular community of interacting persons, rooted in human nature and in the marital covenant (natural or sacramental) which affords it love, stability, and endurance” after his study of the family in Magisterial documents from Vatican II.

286 Committee on Marriage and Family National Conference of Catholic Bishops, A Theological and Pastoral Colloquium: The Christian Family, a Domestic Church (Summary Report of Colloquium Held at Notre Dame, IN, June 15 16, 1992) (1992), 10. This certainly was not the only conclusion that was reached. In fact there is mention of the fact that not all participants felt that this statement was correct theologically; although, it is factually correct to state that the statement is in agreement with official teaching. The argumentative ideas presented in the colloquium are discussed later in this section.

287 Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz, Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 14.

288 Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christifideles Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 125. Even after surveying a sampling of “current theological evaluations and critiques of that teaching,” Miller provides his descriptive definition.
through *Christifideles Laici*. This first perspective can be summarized as the domestic church is rooted solely (or at the very least primarily) in marriage because of a theology of marriage stating that Christ becomes a full member of the couple and their family through their marriage in a previously unavailable manner.

A second reasoning for marriage being considered the sacramental foundation of the domestic church is founded in the permanence of Christian marriage. A family can be a domestic church because its marital foundation is as everlasting as the Church is. A non-permanent basis for the foundation of the family would not be acceptable for that same family to be able to model, let alone be, a church. Stratford Caldecott is one author who takes this theme and adds an additional layer to his framework of grounding the domestic church in marriage. Caldecott sees the Holy Family as the grounding of the shared mission of both the Church and the domestic church “to give Christ to the universe.” The fact that God chose the family as the entrance point for His Son into the world is not to be overlooked when establishing marriage as the bedrock of the domestic church. Caldecott sees marriage as a permanent reality that needs to be present rather than an ideal that is to be strived for. He writes, “The sacrament of marriage involves the creation of a new ontological reality that persists even through the most acrimonious separation, until it is dissolved into the reality of union with Christ through

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289 Alessio and Munoz discuss the idea of permanence as the foundation to the domestic church in the first chapter of their work while paying special attention to how the notion of divorce affects their understanding. [Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz, *Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church*, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 3-10.]

death." Without the permanent “ontological shift” that the couple/family undergoes in the reality of marriage, the family is not truly capable of modeling the Holy Family and therefore not able to carry out their mission to bring Christ to the world.

Perhaps the most common theological reasoning for understanding marriage as the sacramental basis for the domestic church is an acceptance that baptism is the beginning of a life in Christ that is then elevated by marriage in a way that allows for the possibility of a couple/family being a domestic church. This approach does not see marriage as the sole means of establishing the family as a domestic church, but rather as marriage being the primary sacramental basis for the domestic church with baptism being a secondary cause. However much those holding this position value or emphasize baptism, marriage is seen as necessary for the establishment of a legitimate domestic church. For instance, Joseph Atkinson reads the writings of John Paul II as grounding both the ecclesiological and Christological meaning of the domestic church in marriage while also noting the late pontiff’s acknowledgement that marriage specifies and elevates baptismal graces. “One can easily draw the parallel between the family and the Church, inasmuch as both have a community-like structure and purpose. But with the injection of this Christological dimension, one is truly entering into the mysterion. The late pontiff grounds this in the sacrament of matrimony and later refines this further by stating that marriage ‘makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism.’” The Colloquium also comments in a similar manner that uses an “and” formulation that references marriage as the pinnacle while other sacraments are secondary. “To call the family a domestic

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291 Ibid.
The church is to express how the family, by reason of the sacrament of matrimony and the sacraments of initiation, is raised up to be ‘in the Lord.’”

Adding to these examples is Mark Cardinal Oullet who most directly enunciates this perspective with regards to the relationship between marriage and baptism within the domestic church. Simply put, Christian baptism is the individual’s initiation into a relationship with Christ and into His Church. Marriage, in this scheme, is the couple/family’s initiation into a communal (non-personal) relationship with Christ and His Church. The full argument as presented by Oullet is as follows:

Baptism signifies and creates a person’s relationship of ecclesial membership in Christ. It ratifies, by the sacrament of faith, the personal bond of subjects with Christ, Head of the Church of which these same subjects are members…What the sacrament of marriage adds, therefore, is participation as a couple, so much so ‘that the primary immediate effect of marriage (res et sacramentum) is not supernatural grace per se, but the Christian marriage bond, a communion which is typically Christian, representing as it does the mystery of Christ’s incarnation and the mystery of his covenant.’ Therefore, the love of Christian spouses and the richness of their family relationships become a sacred sign, a vehicle and sanctuary of a greater Love, the love of the Trinitarian, incarnate God, who enters into humble and indissoluble bond with their community of life and love.”

The understanding of a domestic church founded in marriage in some way must also understand marriage in a somewhat novel manner. Marriage is commonly referred to as a sacrament of vocation meaning that it establishes how a Christian has chosen to live their life in relationship to the community, i.e. Church. The understanding of marriage presented by Oullet and others also introduces marriage as a sacrament of initiation in as much as it initiates a couple/family into the Church in a distinct way that baptism does not.

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One final notation from the Colloquium; there is a note in the published summary that there certainly questions raised as to if the domestic church could indeed be founded in baptism. Yet, the fallback position was as is related above. Namely, marriage “specifies and gives focus” to a Christian’s baptismal vocation. This official statement highlights that there was not a unanimous voice among the theologians, ministers, and various lay individuals that participated and that there are certainly other theological opinions that have been voiced.\textsuperscript{295} Some of those approaches follow now.

In part, the reason that there are such varied views as to the sacramental basis of the domestic church is that some authors seem to speak to both a baptismal and a marital basis in the same work. One example of this phenomenon is Mitch and Kathy Finley’s \textit{Christian Families in the Real World}. Chapter 4 of the book is titled “Marriage: Foundation for the Domestic Church,” which speaks for itself while chapter 7 is titled “Spirituality and the Single Parent” and certainly considers a single (unmarried, or possibly divorced) parent and their child or children a domestic church.\textsuperscript{296} However, while the Finleys do certainly stress that marriage \textit{can} be foundational, they also state that marriage is a manner of living out a Christian’s baptism. In addition, there are various statements that plainly base the domestic church in baptism. One interesting statement that they make relates to the fact that the original church that an infant is

\textsuperscript{295} Committee on Marriage and Family National Conference of Catholic Bishops, \textit{A Theological and Pastoral Colloquium: The Christian Family, a Domestic Church (Summary Report of Colloquium Held at Notre Dame, IN, June 15 16, 1992)} (1992), 11. Ultimately, the Colloquium states that there is a remaining tension in the question while returning to the point that the historical precedent is that the domestic church is a result of deductive theology of Christian marriage while many today reason inductively and therefore reach differing conclusions. The result being that the Colloquium panel never reached a clear consensus on the question so it allows for the argument to continue.

\textsuperscript{296} Mitch and Kathy Finley, \textit{Christian Families in the Real World} (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1984). The notion of family form and its relation to the domestic church is discussed later in this chapter of the dissertation. For now it suffices to say that an unmarried parent and his or her children being considered a domestic church cannot be founded in Christian marriage as one has not taken place.
baptized into is their family. “The first form of church into which an infant is baptized is the church of the family. As so many pastoral theologians remind us today, the baptism of a baby makes little sense apart from daily opportunities for the growing child to experience the Christian life in his or her family relationships.”

This statement is important as it refers to the baptized being a member of the “church of the family” without mention of that family’s being headed by a married couple or not. Certainly, the Code of Cannon Law does not prohibit the baptism of a child of unmarried parentage. In fact, there are specific instructions with regards to paperwork if the baptized is a child of an unwed mother.

Summarily, Mitch and Kathy Finley are stating that baptism brings members into a domestic church. Another passage rather succinctly puts forward which sacrament the Finleys believe the domestic church to be based in, “The domestic church is a community of baptized Christians.”

The first specific reasoning as to why it is baptism that is the root of the domestic church is to say that the domestic church is defined by its mission that is shared with the universal Church; a mission that is rooted in the baptismal call of all Christians to share in the priesthood of Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states, “By

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297 Ibid. 14.
298 This passage reads in full, “If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.” [“The Proof and Registration of Conferral of Baptism,” The Code of Cannon Law, ed. Canon Law Society of America, New English Translation. 1983, #877 sub. 2. 8/1/09 <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/__P2Z.HTM>. ] For the purposes of this section of the dissertation, it is sufficient to point out that Mitch and Kathy Finley state that Baptism brings a child into a domestic church – and this process can take place without previous marriage of the parents (as evidenced by the above quotation) it is of additional note that they are in fact stating that there are family forms that can be a domestic church that are not founded on marriage. This idea will be discussed in the next section of the dissertation.
baptism, all share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission.”

Thomas Groome makes the argument that all education, even the education of children within the context of the domestic church is a function of the baptismal call to share in that same priesthood of Christ. Adrian Thatcher takes the above arguments in connection with those presented by the US Bishops in *Follow the Way of Love* and reaches the conclusion that baptism is the “formal means” of sanctification for the family. The baptismal grace that is given in baptism empowers the individual to serve the priesthood of Christ. That grace continues to unfold in the life of the domestic church through its ministries. “It has a divine origin, yet grace is one. Given formally in baptism and informally in the domestic church, it forms the characters of that church’s members, and forms them mutually.” Unlike those who argue that baptism forms the individual while marriage forms the couple/family, Thatcher and others state that marriage’s formal formation of the family is a furtherance of baptismal grace and call to mission, not a new or different calling. Bernard Boelen takes this argument one step further. He states, rather plainly, that the domestic church is able to share in and be church because of baptism; nothing more, nothing less. “The Christian family fully shares in the Church’s universal call to ministry, sacramentality, holiness, etc., not on the basis of any mandate from the hierarchy, but simply because of its baptismal entry into the community of the people of God. These spiritual powers are not ‘functions’ of the Christian family, but rather are the charismata of its very being.”

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presently stated is that the domestic church is church because of the family’s individual and communal baptism which calls it to share in the Church’s mission to evangelize as well as to fully be a communal member of the priesthood of Christ.

Beyond the theological argument that it is the baptismal mission that is the basis for the domestic church’s mission to share in the priesthood of Christ, there is the practical argument that it is “simpler” to understand baptism as the entrance point of a domestic church into the Roman Church as it is the entrance point of each individual into that same Church. One of the most basic functions of the domestic church is to educate (their) children. Florence Caffrey Bourg comments, “It would seem much simpler and more theologically consistent to link all Christian education with the apostolic mission of evangelization, rooted in baptism.” Education is an apostolic mission rooted in baptism, not an occasionally “marital” mission. In addition, it is baptism that initiates each Christian into the Church at both its largest (Universal) and smallest (domestic) levels of being Church. Furthermore, it is baptism that is common to all Christians. Interchurch marriages become far less “complicated” as domestic churches if the domestic church is understood to be rooted in common Christian baptism rather than marriage which has differing theological meanings in various strains of Christianity. To again quote Bourg, “It is difficult to understand why baptism is not cited as the sacrament by virtue of which Christian families become a saving community, since it is the sacrament, not marriage, that all Christians share and which is most directly indicative of new life in Christ.”

305 *Ibid.* 73. For a further analysis as common Baptism being a starting point for discussing the relationship between the domestic church and interchurch marriages see Thomas Kneips-Port le Roi, "Conjugal and
All enter a family through their birth and all enter the Church through their baptism. These two concepts are made concentric through the domestic church. Gilbert Ostdeik (while quoting Herbert Anderson) pulls these two communities together as follows. “Baptism is initiation into a community that calls every individual to seek for justice within the family and beyond the family in widening areas of concern. ‘The family and the Church in turn are two contexts in which we may discover the faithfulness of God and so nurture our gifts for the world that we can also give them away.’ Baptizing children enlarges the nurturing circle at the beginning of life to include the community of believers.”

Baptism brings us into the family and the family into the Church. By asserting that the domestic church is founded in baptism, all are called to the same communal mission to evangelize. Or, to state this in the negative, by establishing the domestic church is founded in marriage, all those who are not products of Christian marriage in some way, shape, or form are not called to live out their baptismal mission in the same manner that other families are called. Bourg provides an extended list of “problems” that would be solved by accepting that the domestic church is founded in baptism:

It [a theological understanding of the primacy of baptism in establishing the domestic church] affirms baptism as the root of every Christian vocation to holiness. It can appeal to any Christian denomination, and especially to interchurch families whose members participate in more than one Christian tradition. Reflection on domestic church as founded upon shared baptism can be extended to incorporate families wherein one spouse is already Christian and the other spouse or children are exploring Christianity or formally preparing for baptism, a process that can take several years. This approach can speak to


Christian couples whose ‘irregular’ marriages are regarded canonically as ‘invalid’ but whose shared, valid baptism is not called into question by Catholicism. This approach better accommodates bonds of family members (such as siblings) not related by marriage. It creates a door for welcoming ordained and other unmarried adults – who are not sealed off from family life – into reflections on domestic church. It acknowledges that just as the role of ‘child’ is our first entrance into family at a human level, the one permanent and universal role among humans, baptism, which makes us a ‘child of God,’ is the first, permanent, and universal experience shared by Christians. For all these reasons, baptism as the sacramental foundation of domestic churches deserves more attention in the theological and magisterial literature.  

Practically speaking, theologically understanding the domestic church as being founded primarily in baptism and modified or elevated in marriage as opposed to being founded in marriage (which then, in some systems, elevates baptism to a “new” calling) opens up possibilities that would otherwise be eliminated.

The difficulty some authors have with rooting the domestic church in marriage rather than baptism is that it reduces “the family” to a subsection of a theology of marriage. Donald Miller notes that some authors concern themselves too much with marriage and proper sexual ethic to the detriment of other familial considerations such as the family as a domestic church. Yet, there is no doubt that the teachings that have comes down from the Magisterium, with the notable exception of Follow the Way of Love, point to marriage as the root sacramental cause for the family’s ability to be a church unto itself. The basic argument seems to be that some theologians do not accept as viable family forms (capable of being a domestic church) that are not founded in Christian marriage while the opposing side argues that the mission of the domestic church actually comes from a baptismal mission. This point means that the mission was

308 Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christfideles Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), xiii.
there before marriage and continues in and through a family regardless of if that family was formed in marriage. Perhaps the real issue at hand in this question is the exclusion of some groupings of people that one side believes to be a legitimate family capable of being a domestic church while the other side does not accept these forms as viable. If marriage is the starting point, there are far fewer family forms that can fulfill the requirements of being a domestic church. If baptism is the root, the practical application of the theology of domestic church is far more open.

Unlike the previous two questions that have been analyzed, there is actual difference in the answer as opposed to simply different reasoning for a similar or identical answer. How one answers the question of the root sacrament of the domestic church will have a significant effect on how one answer the following question, “Are all family forms capable of being a domestic church?”

**Are all family forms capable of being a domestic church?**

The first point that needs to be made when attempting to present a logical discussion of what family forms are acceptable to be called a domestic church is to acknowledge that there is no author that denies the commonly understood “nuclear” family is an acceptable family structure for the domestic church. The operative definition for the nuclear family is a married mother and father and their child or children. Anthony Gittins lists five basic characteristics of all nuclear families: “it requires at least three members; marriage is the necessary precursor; it will evolve as the status of the

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309 Any additional definitional characteristics that are inferred in the Church’s writings and laws are not related to the family’s composition, but rather to the function or responsibilities of the individual members. There is certainly much to be inferred in works such as *Familiaris Consortio* and the *Letter to Families* that the official Church preference veers closer to a “traditional” family with implied gender roles and work expectations than a “nuclear” model which is not as concerned with who does what in the family, but is strictly labeling form. The notion of gender roles within the family and their necessity or lack thereof in the domestic church are addressed in a portion of this section of this chapter dealing with hierarchy in the domestic church.
spouses change from bridegroom to husband to father, and from bride to wife to mother; its evolution continues as more children are added to the basic family unit; and the fundamental building block of the family is the spouses."310 It is this form that is most commonly referenced and discussed in the Magisterium’s theological exposition of the Christian family and in turn the domestic church.311 There does not appear to be a theologian, minister, or lay person on record as stating that the nuclear family is incapable of being a domestic church based solely on its form. Therefore, there is no real question as to the acceptability of the nuclear family as a domestic church; the question is if it is the only acceptable form.

A perfectly functioning Christian nuclear family is certainly the ideal in the Church’s writings as well as that of most theologians. There seems to be little argument that the sociological outcomes of children born into and raised in a nuclear family produce the “best” outcomes. Yet, the nuclear family is not even the only acceptable model according to the Church. Clark and David Cochran present the point that, “For Catholic Christians, the monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the model and goal…Yet, the church has recognized a wide variety of expressions of this model – nuclear and extended families, multiple child-rearing practices, and a variety of combinations of home work and family.”312 This statement typifies the position of those that hold that the

311 There is one caveat to this statement that must be noted. Although it is assumes in the term “nuclear family” there is a slight shift from expectation to imperative with regards to the fact that this is the first marriage for the couple in question. Any instance where one or more of the spouses has been previously married and that marriage ended in divorce will be noted by the author. While this distinction is not as important definitionally, it is of paramount importance in Roman Catholic theology. The difference within Church teaching is the difference between the ideal and an unacceptable form.
312 Clark E. Cochran and David Carroll Cochran, Catholics, Politics, and Public Policy: Beyond Left and Right (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 72.
Magisterium is accepting of diverse family forms. However, the only addition to the nuclear family that is truly made in the passage is that of the extended family (meaning the children’s aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.). Of course, there is some basic expectation that the extended family’s composition is of other nuclear families or of single individuals and remains centered on a particular nuclear family. Child rearing practices and sharing of work has little if anything to do with family form. The NCCB Pastoral Colloquium actually goes a step further when analyzing the extended family form as it relates to the domestic church. “The spousal unit is a domestic church, to be sure, but the domestic church – if it is truly to be ‘foundational’ for the whole Church – must be much more. The extended family or multigenerational family seems to be a more adequate expression of domestic church.”

There is a simple truism presented in this statement; once a child is born to parents, they always remain their child. Even when the child grows and starts a family of their own, their parents remain a part of that new family. There is not a “new” family; there is an “extended” family. Certainly grandparents play a role in the religious education of their grandchildren just as they continue to aid and educate their own children and siblings remain so even when one of them marries and begins a family. Fittingly, an extended understanding of family seems to be an agreed upon acceptable family form for the domestic church – provided that it is ultimately centered on the nuclear model.

Today, the most basic understandings of what are “normal” and acceptable family forms are in a state of flux. Simply put, the family “is in a process of redefinition and is

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open to new interpretations.”

The demographic and sociological shifts in family form will be addressed in the following chapter of this work. The task at hand here is to analyze the perspective of theologians as to how this shift has expanded (or not) the number and shape of acceptable family forms that can be a domestic church. The Magisterium’s promulgations focus almost solely on the nuclear family and only seldom extend the family’s boundaries to include the extended family as described above. Most mentions of other family forms label them as either outright condemned or at the least imperfect or “irregular.” However, the average person (including the average Catholic) readily identifies non-nuclear family forms as an authentic family. The question at hand seems to be if acceptance of these non-nuclear or irregular forms is a threat to a theology of marriage. In essence, if one asked the previous question addressed in this chapter (What is the Sacramental basis for a domestic church; Baptism or Marriage?) by stating that Sacramental marriage is the entry point or prerequisite to a family ability to be a domestic church, then any family form that was not founded in or at based on a Sacramental marriage is obviously a family form not capable of being a church. Yet, as evidenced in that analysis, there is not agreement if marriage is the basis of the domestic church. The NCCB Colloquium contextualizes the question at hand in the following manner:

On the one hand, this position [grounding the domestic church in marriage] emphasizes the importance and dignity of marriage. On the other hand, it exposes the apparent weakness in our theologizing. There are ‘families’ in our society that are not rooted in marriage. For example, a woman may have a child, never marry the Child’s father, and then raise and care for her child (sometimes with the help of other family members) in a loving and stable manner. Then, too, there are

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315 See FC ## 77-85 for the presentation and discussion of “difficult” and “irregular” circumstances and see Chapter 1 of this work for an analysis of these passages.
many families who are no longer united by marriage, e.g., a divorced parent raising children alone. Single-parent families in our society are customarily regarded as families. But are they domestic churches in the same way as families which are rooted in marriage?\footnote{316} The essential question is to establish if the myriad of family compositions and forms that fall outside of the nuclear and extended-nuclear families are capable of being a domestic church, a salvific community that shares in the life and mission of the Hierarchical Church. Or, to use the language of Anthony Gittins, is there such a thing as a “goodenough family” with regards to composition and form and that family’s ability to be a domestic church. “‘Goodenough family’ is used to identify an existential reality that may fall short of a cherished ideal, yet be more or less capable of sustaining its members and contributing to the broader society.”\footnote{317} Going forward, the goodenough family will be understood as “essentially as” or “equally as” capable of that cherished ideal’s (the nuclear family’s) ability to be a domestic church. Before turning to specific criteria for, forms of, and necessary internal mechanics of goodenough families, it first has to be considered what exactly is to be lost if there is no acceptance of non-nuclear families.

The risk of only accepting one family form as capable of being a domestic church is that the policy not only excludes other family forms, it may drive them away from the Church rather than supporting them. Florence Caffrey Bourg notes, “There is a risk of excluding persons who rightly ought to be included in discussion of family and, by extension, the risk of excluding them in political, cultural, and religious institutions.

\footnote{316}{Committee on Marriage and Family National Conference of Catholic Bishops, \textit{A Theological and Pastoral Colloquium: The Christian Family, a Domestic Church (Summary Report of Colloquium Held at Notre Dame, IN, June 15 16, 1992)} (1992), 10.}

addressed to families.” Excluding these forms not only pushes those families away from the Church, but also away from all the good that the Church does as well as socially marginalizing those same families. Even the NCCB Colloquium noted that acceptance only of the ideal often strikes those excluded families (as well as others who want the Church to be accepting of all) as overly judgmental if not prosecutorial. Gerald Foley points out that many single parent families, families headed by one or two divorced and remarried parents, and other non-traditional family forms expect judgment from the Church rather than the compassion of Jesus and avoid or remove themselves from the Church altogether. Lisa Sowle Cahill believes that the same theological viewpoint that bases the domestic church on nuclear form is undermined by the condemnatory attitudes expressed towards nonconforming families. Focusing on ideal form rather than Christian moral ideals actually weakens the Church and the common good. The simplest manner of stating this point is that authors expressing this view believe that the Church’s relationship with families should be to support them, not to condemn them. Further, active vocalization condemning non-nuclear family forms is an unavoidable result of theologically excluding those same family forms from proper acknowledgement of their ability to be a domestic church.

Norbert Mette outlines the problems created by the Magisterium defining the domestic church solely through the nuclear family: 1) By only acknowledging one legitimate family form, the Church is proposing that the nuclear family is and always has

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been the proper expression of family. Yet, “family” has been expressed in many differing forms throughout history. 322 “Fundamentally, the model based on natural law asserts nothing less than a specific form of the family, of the kind that has developed in the course of modernity, above all in Europe and North America”323 is acceptable. 2) Accepting only the nuclear family form denies the dynamic nature of the family and reduces it to a static reality. 3) This teaching regards the nuclear family as pre-ordained by God (which can be proof texted using various scriptural passages such as the 4th Commandment) leaving little room for adaptation. 4) Roots the family exclusively in marriage leaving the family as a secondary hanger-on to a theology of marriage therefore denying a theologically rich understanding of the family. 324 It is not simply that Mette and other authors feel that a solely nuclear family understanding of domestic church is an inaccurate expression of the reality of families today, it is that only accepting nuclear families as domestic churches is historically problematic and, in a sense, anti-family.

If nuclear form is not going to be the determining factor in a family’s ability to be a domestic church, other criteria are going to be needed as a base line for consideration. One argument that can be dealt with rather quickly is the position that the nuclear family is the only form of family that can be considered a domestic church because it is the only form that can model the hierarchy of the Church. Lisa Sowle Cahill’s “Notes on Moral Theology” which focus on marriage does note that there are some authors who still hold that there are gender roles and an intrinsic hierarchy within marriage and that these are

322 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) for an in depth discussion of how the family’s transformation has evolved over time with the aid of socioeconomic as well as religious factors.
324 Ibid. 77-8.
presumably necessary for the family to be a domestic church. Some of these statements or ideas are simply attempting to label a particular gender with a universal personality trait such as William E. May’s contention that women “are, on the whole, more oriented toward helping or caring for personal needs, whereas men, on the whole, are more inclined to formulate and pursue long-range goals.” Others, such as Joseph Atkinson present a more clearly defined idea of a hierarchy within the domestic church. He views the father as the bishop of the family and, therefore, is “responsible for his little domestic flock.” In the case of disagreement in views between the father and mother, “it is always the prerogative of the man to make the final decision.” While these views are still posited by some and accepted by others, they are not the generally understood and accepted position. However, a history of patriarchy is not easily erased. Adrian Thatcher notes that, “While hierarchy is not a necessary feature of the contemporary use of the expression ‘domestic church,’ it remains a latent one.”

Nevertheless, the generally accepted position is that there is not a hierarchy within the domestic church. In fact, the governance of the domestic church is to be based on mutuality and respect as opposed to authority and gender roles. As Thomas Groome points out, “Good governance in the family, as in the church, did not intend for a male patriarch to lord it over the household, but called the family to function with love and mutuality as a particular instance of the Body of Christ.”

325 William E. May, Marriage: The Rock on Which the Family is Built (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 53.
327 Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Marriage: Developments in Catholic Theology and Ethics,” Theological Studies, Notes on Moral Theology, 64, no. 1 (March 2003), 87. Referring to the work of William May cited above.
of labor in any family form, but that division should not be based on the gender or position of power of any particular member of the family.

Florence Caffrey Bourg summarizes, “The overwhelming consensus of magisterial and lay authors is that hierarchical gender stereotypes are to be considered obsolete: within a contemporary domestic church, husbands and wives ought to consider each other equals.”

Because hierarchy is not implicit or necessary in a domestic church, it is not a legitimate means of denying the authenticity of those family forms which cannot live up to a hierarchical model of family.

Another consideration is to seek to understand what it is that makes a family authentically Christian. Michael Lawler and Gail Risch contend that a family is Christian because it lives that way. “Being Christian means concretely living a Christian life. Living that life makes a family Christian, no matter what its structure might be.”

Lifestyle and action are placed above if not outright excluding family form as a decisive factor establishing the family as a domestic church. The Christian family is a domestic church because it lives as a church and it experiences the world as Christians. “A family is first of all an experience, not a place.”

Daniel DiDomizio and Jacqueline Haessley state that a family is a domestic church because of the manner in which the Christian family lives and experiences itself as family as well as how that family lives and interacts with others. The family’s mission is to create an atmosphere where its members can flourish. In order to accomplish this task, the family must live out their Christian

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vocation in a spirit of intimacy, cooperation, and hospitality.\textsuperscript{333} Living as Christians, not proper form, makes the family a domestic church. Margaret Boatz summarizes the point thusly, “The family is truly a ‘domestic church.’ Regardless of its form or membership, it provides a setting for the realization of prayer and celebration, service and care within our lives.”\textsuperscript{334}

Underpinning any argument made in favor of accepting non-nuclear family forms as possible domestic churches is somewhat dependent on a certain understanding of grace. Thomas Rausch points out that the logic that Christian marriage is the beginning point for a family (or at least the couple) to be considered a domestic church is based on the sense of certainty that God is present in that marriage due to its Sacramental nature. God’s presence allows that family to be a church unto itself that shares in the mission of the Church. In a family that is not founded on a Christian marriage, that same level of objective certainty of God’s presence in the family is not available.\textsuperscript{335} However, if one accepts a more Rahnerian understanding of grace, it can be accepted that the grace of a sacrament can be present outside of the Church’s defined canonical statutes.\textsuperscript{336} God and grace are not bound to ritual; rather, God is present where God chooses. Specifically to Rausch’s point, nontraditional unions can still be effective vessels of grace. “It would be difficult to deny that a nontraditional union, in which the partners love each other and their children with a life-giving and self-sacrificing love, may indeed be an effective sign of the grace of the sacrament, even if the Church cannot officially recognize it as

\textsuperscript{333} Ibid. 374-6.
\textsuperscript{334} Margaret Ryan Boatz, "The Domestic Church Today," Liturgy 7, no. 3 (1988), 53.
\textsuperscript{335} Thomas Rausch, Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2006), 56.
Carrying this logic forward, it could be asserted that the same grace that is present in a nuclear family, that Rausch argues can be present in a family headed by a nontraditional union, can also be present in a family headed by a single parent. Gerald Foley notes that American families are already far more diverse than the Church wishes to acknowledge and these families need to know that grace is available to all in whatever family form they find themselves. “Our definition of the American family must be much broader than the nuclear family, embracing the diversity of American families and recognizing that God’s own life can be touched in single-parent families, elderly couples, and all other units that make up the American family.”

If one accepts that familial grace is not bound to marriage and allows for lifestyle to be the determining factor in establishing a family as a domestic church can lead to accepting any grouping of individuals that label themselves family to be considered a domestic church. This openness may be a welcome change to some, but it would eliminate any notion of the importance of kinship and marriage from the definition of family. To counter this negation of long held theological assertions, Lisa Sowle Cahill defines the family as “basically an organized network of socioeconomic and reproductive interdependence and support grounded in biological kinship and marriage.” However, she does not define the family as necessarily being rooted in marriage. Marriage and/or kinship are the formal means of structure for the family. Historically and cross-culturally, there have been times when kinship was considered primary, while at other times, marriage was considered primary. While kinship runs older and deeper across cultures and through history, marriage is the ultimate means of choice in establishing a

family. Both are important and either can be the founding principle of a family. In order for this family to lead a Christian lifestyle (to be a domestic church), Cahill recommends the following five propositions: 1) the family should be grounded in relationships that promote family well-being. These relationships should be based on mutuality, dignity, and respect in a manner that is appropriate to the age and station of each member of the family. 2) The roles of each member of the family should promote social well-being in accord with participating in and elevating the common good. 3) The kinship family is integrated into Christian community as ‘new family in Christ’ that reaches out to those in need. 4) The family observes a preferential option for the poor that seeks justice in the world. 5) The family’s moral commitments are to be placed in context of their relationship with God both in church life and secular lifestyle.³⁴⁰ Certainly non-nuclear family forms can be accommodated by Cahill’s definition of the family. Those same family forms would be capable of living out her five point program for leading a Christian life as a family.

Mitch and Kathy Finley make the effort to explain how families that are headed by a single parent can be a domestic church. First, they list newlywed couples, single parent families, older couples whose children have grown and presumably started their own families, and childless couples as “authentic forms of familial and ecclesial life.”³⁴¹ The single-parent family is said to be a legitimate and authentic “small cell of

³⁴¹ Mitch and Kathy Finley, Christian Families in the Real World (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1984), 13. The position that childless couples are indeed an authentic familial form is somewhat challenged by Donald Miller. Miller agrees that if the married couple is physically unable to produce children, they are not to blame and there is no difficulty in resolving their childlessness with their marital duties as defined by the Church. However, if that same couple simply has decided to permanently refrain from procreation even through the use of licit forms of birth control, that couple may not be considered to be living up to their marital commitment and, therefore, not be authentic form of family – and possibly not capable of being a domestic church. [Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II
Christian life" because the familial unit is still capable of sharing in the mission of the Church and leading a Christian lifestyle. “As church, the single-parent family can cultivate prayer and family rituals, can know forgiveness and reconciliation, can cultivate a life of service, participate in a parish community, and proclaim the gospel effectively…The main prerequisite is the decision to live the life of a single-parent family according to the spirit of the gospel." The single-parent family form is not, in and of itself, a lifestyle that runs counter to Church teaching. Therefore, the parent and his or her child or children are capable of both being an authentic family as well as living as an authentically Christian family. The authors feel that the local parish and the Church as a whole should be a source of support for single-parent families so that they might be a better domestic church as well as be able to be a more significant participant in the life of the Church.

However, single-parent families are just the tip of the iceberg when looking at the myriad of family forms found today. Different authors seem to be accepting of different “lists” of family forms. There seems to be a scale from only accepting nuclear based families (the commonly accepted understanding of the Magisterium’s position) to accepting almost any form even quasi-identifiable as a family. Here is a sampling of two of these extremely open understandings of the family. First, Thomas Groome:

By ‘family’ I intend any and every community of domestic life. In other words, we need to shift our imaginations beyond the nuclear family of a mom, dad, and two kids, to include extended and blended families, single-, double-, and triple-

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Through Christifideles Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 193-4. In essence, Miller is using the same “lifestyle” logic to label a family form as unacceptable that other theologians use in order to have a more open understanding of what family forms are acceptable to be called domestic churches.


parent families, straight, gay, and bent families. Family is any bonded network of
domestic life and nurture.\textsuperscript{344}

And second, Rosemary Radford Ruether:

We need to support a variety of family and household patterns. These include
single householder; the gay or lesbian couple, including partners raising children
by adoption, former marriages, or artificial insemination; the single parent, male
or female; the two-earner heterosexual couple; the three- or four-generation
family; families blended through divorce and remarriage; and cohabiting
partnership of two, three, or more people that may or may not include a sexual
pair. This diversity is already the reality of American life.\textsuperscript{345}

Lists such as these seem to accept any form of family that can be conceived as being
equally valid, even those family forms involving or headed by individuals or couples
leading a lifestyle that runs counter to established moral teachings of the Church.\textsuperscript{346} Yet,
as discussed earlier, God’s participation in the life of the family is felt and realized by
non-nuclear families as well as nuclear families. Perhaps the question is actually two-
fold. First, is this grouping of people, this particular form, an actual family? Second, and
of import for this work, is that family capable of being a domestic church? Obviously,
various authors have provided various answers to these questions. In part, the difficulty
in finding the correct answer is that no particular family form provides a uniform
experience for all families who take that form. As T.D. Harblin comments, “Single
parent, matricentric, multigenerational, socially-isolated, casually-bonded, experimental,

\textsuperscript{345} Rosemary Radford Ruether, \textit{Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 212.
\textsuperscript{346} It would appear that accepting those family forms as capable of being domestic churches, literally being Church, would mean that those moral teachings are incorrect. However, that argument leads down a path that deals with specific moral teachings of the Church and not specifically with which family forms are capable of being a domestic church and are, therefore, outside of the scope of this work. However, logic dictates that if one is to accept the lists such as those above, there would need to be increased theological development as to why, and even how, any family can be a representation of a Church whose moral teachings they are contradicting in their daily lives.
and so on, are adjectives which are currently used to describe the family experience of increasing numbers of adults and children. For some, these family forms provide stability, continuity, and religiously meaningful lives. For others, the same family forms produce transience and alienation.\textsuperscript{347}

Perhaps the root of the problem is that there are those theologians and writers that will not accept any constraints on a family’s form for it to be considered to be a possible domestic church. Aside from the fact that some family forms are by their very definition morally wrong as per Church teaching, there seems to be a need to have some manner of concretely defining what family forms can and cannot be considered a domestic church. As Joseph Atkinson points out, domestic church, much like the term family, is not a self-defined theological tag that can be applied to any sociological form one deems possible. His extended comment is as follows:

The problem here, however, is that a non-objective approach edges closely to denying that the family in Christ, precisely as domestic church, has any specific constitutive dimensions, and that it is uniquely defined by the created and salvific order…There must be some boundaries. It is clear that differences can be a good thing. However, when the diversity is of such a nature that it attacks the constitutive structure of the entity, it cannot be said to participate properly in that reality. As long as any specific diversity is not contrary to the fundamental structure of the family in Christ, there is no problem. When it is, it becomes destructive of this reality.\textsuperscript{348}

A significant concern in the discussion as to what forms are acceptable is that there appears to be almost no middle ground. On one side is the argument that it is marriage that roots the domestic church. Once one has reached this conclusion, it becomes extremely difficult to allow for any family form that is not rooted in marriage. Hence, the


nuclear family, or at most an extended understanding of the nuclear model, becomes not
only normative and ideal, but compulsory for a family to be considered a domestic
church. On the other side are those who do seem to wish to allow the “theological tag” of
domestic church to be applied to any family form one can dream up. This argument
seems to be rooted in the idea that any form that can fulfill the function of sharing in the
mission of the Roman Church can be a sacramental path to salvation – even if that family
form or its members also lead a lifestyle that is otherwise unacceptable.

There has to be some middle ground that seeks to account for the large number of
families that have been previously labeled “irregular” or “defective” but are attempting to
lead an authentically Christian lifestyle. The search for the needed middle ground will be
the focus of chapter 4 of this work.

Conclusion

The proceedings and resulting documents of Vatican II, John Paul II’s writings,
the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and other Magisterial sources provided the
building blocks for a theology of domestic church. Numerous theologians have taken
those works and added to that theology in order to deepen and explain what has already
been stated. However, they also point out its weaknesses and unanswered questions.
While in some instances there is general consensus on several points, the reasoning and
formulation of those same points is not always agreed to. When dealing with other
questions within a fully articulated theology of the domestic church, there is rank
disagreement regarding conclusions as well as underlying reasoning.

There is agreement that the domestic church is a legitimate path to salvation. It is
in fact the path that the majority of Christians start on and most continue on until their
death. As the Church is the central path to salvation, there must be an enmeshing of the
family and the Church. As Ernest Falardeau comments, “Everyone belongs to some family. We came into the world as members of a family. There is a bond between each individual and the family (even a one-parent family). And there is a bond between each family and the Church.” The bond between the domestic church and the Hierarchical Church is that they are both mediations of the Trinity who share a duty to better the common good and build the Kingdom of God. Just as all Christians are called to this mission, all Christians who are part of a family are called to this same mission as a family as a domestic church.

There is also general agreement that the mission of the domestic church is rooted in the Church’s mission to be Christ in the world, for each other and for outsiders. The family is said to realize this goal in their daily lives, as they participate in the Church, and in their interactions with others. The domestic church is called to evangelize. This evangelization often takes the form of education, especially of children. Education is carried out by verbal teaching, but also and most importantly, by Christian example. The mission is both inward facing in that the family evangelizes to itself, but is also outward facing in that the domestic church is the Church in the world.

When considering if it is Christian baptism or marriage that is the sacramental root of the domestic church, there is fundamental disagreement among theologians. While the Magisterium often discusses the domestic church as a subheading of an analysis of marriage there are passages and specific documents that either confuse or flat out contradict an understanding of the domestic church finding its cause in marriage.

350 This is certainly the case in the Catechism, is evident in portions of the documents of Vatican II, and is implied in Familiaris Consortio.
The root cause of the disagreement is that by asserting that marriage is the root of the domestic church, family forms that are not rooted in marriage are by definition unable to be considered domestic churches. In addition, those who hold that baptism is the root of the domestic church also see it as the root of the domestic church’s mission to evangelize. In this system, the domestic church becomes a particular manifestation and manner of carrying out that baptismal mission rather than an entirely different reality that is begun in marriage. The other side of the debate relies on previous Church teaching to establish that marriage is indeed a transitional point in which two individuals are brought into a new and communal relationship with Christ and His Church. Without marriage, there is no authentic Christian family and, therefore, no domestic church. Of course, the resultant understanding of which sacrament is the basis for the domestic church has an enormous effect on if one accepts the legitimacy of non-nuclear based family forms.

The discussion of form is as contentious as that of the sacramental basis of the domestic church and also breaks down along the same lines: traditionalists who understand Church teaching to have determined the nuclear form, rooted in Christian marriage, to be entirely normative and progressives who begin with the diversity of family forms in the world who can and do lead authentically Christian lifestyles that attempt to accomplish the goals stated for a domestic church. There appears to be little discussion of accepting multiple, but not an unlimited number, of family forms as capable of being a domestic church. The result is that the position taken either only accepts nuclear based family models with the understanding that the nuclear norm is a static reality or accepts any model regardless of the underlying moral choices involved therein.
that will always accept whatever sociological dynamic that evolves. Neither answer
seems to be worthy of a sustained and growing theology of domestic church.

Having analyzed the answers that theologians have generated, the next task will
be to attempt to illustrate the sociological and demographic reality of the family.
Following that will be an attempt to formulate a theology of domestic church that is
faithful to the diversity of the family as it is as well as attempting to remain faithful to
revelation and Church teaching.
Chapter 3: Demographics, Sociology, Religion, and the Family

Introduction

The family is not only a central concern of the Catholic Church and theologians. Its social and cultural significance has also been established by demographers and sociologists. The culture wars of the 1990s (which many would argue have never fully receded) discussed “family values” as the central prism for qualifying and expressing a perceived downward slide of societal norms. What was not in question then (and before the flare up of the culture war) remains as a generally accepted maxim today, namely that the strength of a society is based in the strength of the families that compose it.\(^{352}\) The reasoning for the family’s importance varies among authors in their specifics but essentially boils down to the fact that one’s family of origin and later familial status has a significant impact on what type of person one is and becomes and what sort of societal impact that same person is capable of. As Don Edgar surmises:

Personal human resources, human capital, develop in and through family resources, the emotional and marketable skills a child learns within this primary group, the networks within which the family is embedded, and the family’s access to financial and other social resources within its own community and national context. Moreover, the decisions to marry, remain single, have children, leave the parental home, or take a particular job, are never totally disembedded, they are developed in a social context with the significant others and in the light of social as well as individual resources.\(^{353}\)

We, as individuals, as a society, and within the Catholic Church, are made who we are in and through many societies; generally speaking, none of these societies has a more commonly expected and actually occurring effect than our family. As such, it would be

\(^{352}\) While there seems to be a general agreement that societies thrive in situations that best support their members and an individual’s first, often primary, and also often most influential support is his or her family there is not agreement as to if all family forms are equally capable of providing that support and guidance. Additionally remaining is the question of what forms constitute a legitimate “family.” This chapter, and indeed this entire work, is an effort to explore these ideas.

remiss were this work not to explore the statistical realities of families today (demographics), take a brief glimpse into the effects and expectations of those statistics (sociology), and also explore the relationship that religion, specifically Catholicism when possible, has with those numbers, effects and expectations.

There is little doubt that our expectations of what a family is has shifted.\textsuperscript{354} Research has begun to show that “only one-third of Americans define a family in the most traditional sense as a ‘mother, father, and children,’ or ‘a husband, wife, and children.’”\textsuperscript{355} Given the accepted legitimacy of non-nuclear family forms, the very definition of “family” currently resides in a gray area between idealized past and possibly relative future. The initial aim of this chapter will be to analyze if the numbers back up the assertion that the American family has dramatically changed in its normative composition. There are three basic components to this assessment: birth rates, marital status, and the situation of children.

Birth rates tend to fluctuate with the economic fortunes of a nation. For instance, according to the Associated Press, using data obtained from the Center for Disease Control, “Births in this country topped 4.3 million in 2007, more than any other year in the nation’s history, surpassing the peak during the post-World War II baby boom 50 years earlier. Many of those babies were conceived in 2006, when the economy was relatively good.”\textsuperscript{356} However, when taking a longer view of birth rates, we begin to see

\textsuperscript{354}This statement is certainly not to make the argument that for many people what a family should be has not changed. Part of the reasoning behind the composition of this chapter is to show that there is often dissonance between expectations and actualities of families. Not just in the actual composition of families, but also in the social impact of those post-nuclear family forms.
that families are more commonly smaller than they were in previous generations, or are even shrinking even within the context of the current generation. The Department of Health and Human Services reports that, “during the period 1990-2005, pregnancy rates for married women fell eight percent while the rate for unmarried women declined eleven percent.”^357 This statement is impactful in two ways. First, it evidences the fact that family size is shrinking and that many individuals and couples are choosing to abstain temporarily (or in some cases permanently) from reproducing which some theorists view as a threat to the family. Penny Edgell displays this position in the introduction to Religion and Family in a Changing Society; “Delayed marriage and childbearing mean that more American households comprise single adults and childless couples, and remaining childless throughout life has become much more common, fueling concern among some of the decline of the family.”^358 The second important facet of the HHS report is that while overall birthrates are declining, unmarried women’s birthrates are receding at even greater rates. Hence, while the same statistic can show a perceived “weakening” of the family through a recession of births, it can also evidence a perceived “strengthening” of the family in that proportionately more births are occurring within the context of marriage. However, it must be noted that birth rates as raw data do not explain the shifts in family formation, dissolution, or definition. There must be some causality that undergirds the decline in births that feeds into tangential demographic and sociological shifts.


The simplest explanation of the decline is that not only are married couples having fewer children than in past times, the percentage of married couple headed households has also declined significantly since 1970. In 1970, seventy-one percent of all households were composed of a married couple with or without children. Today, those households only make up fifty-one percent of all households. The growth in other household forms has been equally distributed between other family forms, single people living alone, and non-family households all rising approximately seven percentage points.359 The underlying causes of this shift in household composition will be explored later in the chapter, but some obvious explanations are the average age at marriage for both men and women has risen consistently over time,360 an increase in divorce rates,361 and an increase over that same time frame in out of wedlock births.

Another issue that has complicated both the definition as well as a sociological understanding of the family is with whom children reside after their birth. While the most common residence remains that a child will live in a household with his or her own parents, and those parents will be married, there are now several other forms that are far


360 From 23.2 years for men and 20.8 years for women in 1970 to 27.7 years for men and 26 years for women in 2007. Data taken from Infoplease. Median Age at First Marriage, 1890–2007. 2009. 19/3/10 http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0005061.html which is simply a reproduction of information taken from the US Census Bureau.

361 Divorce statistics can be deceiving in that the percentage of marriages that end in divorce have been fairly steady over the last ten to twenty years while the divorce rate which is calculated as the total number of divorces per 1000 residents is actually in decline. These statistics end up in these results because the marriage rate, calculated as marriages per 1000 residents has also declined. In terms of the above analysis, in the time from 1970 until today, the divorce rate and percentage of marriages that end in divorce have both risen. Hence, an overall (overtime) increase in the number and rate of divorces has led to a greater number of single adults living alone and single-parent households composed of a divorced adult and his or her child or children.
more common than in the past. The US Census Bureau provides the following statistics as to whom children live with (percentages provided are for 2008):362

- Two parents 69.9%
  - Married Parents 66.7%
  - Unmarried parents 3.2%
- Biological mother and father 62.7%
  - Married biological mother and father 59.9%
- Biological mother and stepfather 4.3%
- Biological father and stepmother 1.3%
- Single-parent 26.3% (mother 22.8% - father 3.5%)
- Grandparents only 2%

One-third of all children are not living with a married mother and father. In addition to the above percentages, there has been an increase in non-parental membership in the households of children. Children are still most commonly and primarily being raised by their own parents who are most commonly married. However, the rate of children being raised by step-parents in addition to their biological parents and the rate of children living in multi-generational households are increasing. Hence, the simple formula of marriage plus children equal a family is no longer the only formula that is commonly accepted to yield a legitimate family. With regards to comparing Catholic families to the “average” US family, percentages of marriage, divorce, cohabitation, etc. are all similar to national averages. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University generated the following analysis:

Fifty-three percent of adult Catholics (age 18 and older) are currently married. Twenty-five percent have never been married. Thirteen percent are divorced or separated (12 percent divorced and one percent separated). Five percent are widowed and four percent are currently unmarried and living with a partner.

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These proportions are generally similar to those for the U.S. population as a whole.\textsuperscript{363}

In short, Catholics, at approximately the same rate as the population at large, are experiencing fluctuations in both the families they meet in their community as well as in their own experiences of family. As Penny Edgell points out, “Most Americans spend some portion of their adult lives outside of the nuclear family, forming and re-forming family like connections periodically over the course of their lives, causing many to rethink long-held assumptions about the necessity of marriage and parenting for adults’ happiness, security, and well-being.”\textsuperscript{364} But this new norm of familial pluralism has not been deemed acceptable by all moral and social philosophies. Again quoting Edgell, “Many Americans see the family as the bellwether of our society and find the rapid and numerous changes in family life over the last few decades to be troubling.”\textsuperscript{365}

This chapter will explore the statistical and demographic shifts in family populations followed some sociological analysis of emerging family forms and their legitimacy and societal impact and concluding with an analysis of interplay between sociologies of family and religion. So as to attempt to focus on issues reflective of the greater goals of this work, each of the following sections will deal primarily with shifts in household and family forms that will be relevant for further discussion. Hence, the nuclear family, marriage, single parenthood, and multi-generation families will be the focus on the analysis. Issues that will not be a focus of this work such as ethnicity,
economic class, and the like will be mentioned only as necessary to bolster necessary arguments.

**Demographic Trends**

Given that for the majority of recent history, both sociologically and within the Church, family has been discussed as a function of marriage, the current marital status of the adult population is where an analysis of demographic shifts will begin. The first point of reference must be to provide a snapshot of the marital status of adults in the United States today. The following is the status of individuals fifteen years of age or older in 2008.

*Current Marital Status of Individuals 15+ Years of Age*[^366]

- Married spouse present 50.5%
- Married spouse absent 1.4%
- Widowed 6%
- Divorced 9.8%
- Separated 2.2%
- Never married 30%

What can be quickly gleaned from these numbers is that the most common status of an American adult is that they are currently married. However, it must be noted that the above does not reflect what proportion of the currently married are individuals who are in a second, third, or beyond marriages, only current status.[^367] Census Bureau statistics also show that men are more likely than women to be married, are less likely to remain


[^367]: Additionally, these marital statistics do not account for what proportion of those married couples are same sex couples. While the proportion is relatively small, the overall phenomena will for the most part go unmentioned in this work. The simple reason for this decision is two-fold. First, not all states recognize same sex unions so these statistics are still relative in proportion to their legitimacy. Secondly, the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize the legitimacy of same sex coupling, let alone any instance of dogmatic acceptance of the possibility of same sex “marriage”.
divorced, and are more likely to have never been married. These conclusions are reflected in the following information that is also found in US Census Bureau records which shows the changes over time in both total number increase (in thousands) and overall percentage decrease in marital status of both men and women from 1960-2007.

Total over 15 married, unmarried, never married 1960-2007 (in thousands and as percentage)369

Men
2007
Total 114480 – Married 64656 (56%) – Unmarried 49824 (44%) – Never 37496 (33%)
2000
Total 103114 – Married 59684 (58%) – Unmarried 43429 (42%) – Never 32253 (31%)
1990
Total 91955 – Married 55833 (61%) – Unmarried 36121 (39%) – Never 27505 (30%)
1980
Total 81974 – Married 51813 (63%) – Unmarried 30134 (37%) – Never 24227 (30%)
1970
Total 70559 – Married 47109 (67%) – Unmarried 23450 (33%) – Never 19832 (28%)
1960
Total 60273 – Married 41781 (69%) – Unmarried 18492 (31%) – Never 15274 (25%)

Women
2007
Total 121368 – Married 65202 (54%) – Unmarried 56167 (46%) – Never 32794 (27%)
2000
Total 110660 – Married 60527 (55%) – Unmarried 50133 (45%) – Never 27763 (25%)
1990
Total 99838 – Married 56797 (57%) – Unmarried 43040 (43%) – Never 22718 (23%)
1980
Total 89914 – Married 52965 (59%) – Unmarried 36950 (41%) – Never 20226 (23%)
1970
Total 77766 – Married 48148 (62%) – Unmarried 29618 (38%) – Never 17167 (22%)
1960
Total 64607 – Married 42583 (66%) – Unmarried 22024 (34%) – Never 12252 (19%)

The total number of individuals who are married continues to rise, but not nearly at the same rate of growth as that of the general population. Another interesting factor

369 Ibid. Percentage calculations done for this work.
illustrated by these statistics is that the rate of the population that has never been married is also increasing. While this can partially be explained by the previously mentioned fact that both men and women are marrying for the first time at a later age, another factor is the growing societal disconnect between marriage and children, a theme that will be explored later in this chapter. Furthermore, these marriage rates are not perfectly reflective of the numbers of remarriages – individuals marrying again after a previous divorce – although this cycle certainly impacts the marriage rate to never married ratio. Paul Glick summarizes, “The United States was found to have (and still has) one of the highest marriage rates among the developed countries, partly because it also had (and still has) one of the highest divorce rates; remarriages after divorce contribute to the overall marriage rate.”

Hence, the marriage rate is not comprehensively representative of the number of first marriages and is disproportional to the number of adults who remain single and have never been married. This decline in the marriage rate and percentage of married adults has also led to a dramatic decrease in the percentage of households headed by a married couple. While in 1960, nearly three quarters (74%) of households were headed by a married couple, today, only half (51%) of all households are headed by a married couple.

While the decrease in marriages and relative increase in both people remaining unmarried and heading their own households as single adults has obviously had an effect on the housing status of children under 18, it remains true that roughly two-thirds (67%)

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of family groups with children were headed by married couples. Perhaps most conclusively, once all of these ratios and data have been cross referenced, Rose Krieder and Diana Elliot report that, “The most notable trend is the decline of married-couple households with their own children – from forty percent of all households in 1970 to twenty-three percent in 2007. In contrast, the proportion of households that were made up of married couples without children dropped only slightly over the same time period – from thirty percent in 1970 to twenty-eight percent in 2007.”

While the number of married couples in general and married couples who are living with and raising their own children specifically are in proportional decline, the rate of individuals raising their child or children as a single-parent are steady, if not rising, over all sample time periods. Two truly telling sets of percentages are those of all households composed of single parent families, which rose from eleven percent in 1950 to sixteen percent in 2000, and the percentage of family households (defined as two or more related persons living together) composed of single parent families, eight percent in 1950 to twenty-three percent in 2000. By 2007, the percentage of US households maintained by a single parent with a child under the age of 18 had reached twenty-five percent. In fact, only roughly half of all children are living in a traditional nuclear family which the US Census Bureau defines as a married couple living with their own

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373 Ibid., 4.
biological children and no one else.  The largest segment of the other half of children are being raised by single parents of some type with the two main “causes” of single parenthood being out of wedlock births and divorce. While the divorce rate has stabilized to a certain extent, the rate of out of wedlock births is still in flux and often misunderstood.

In relation to previous years, 2007 saw an all time peak to out of wedlock births in which the rate reached forty percent. However, while our initial social impulse may be to blame teenage pregnancy for this inundation, that would be a misplaced focus. According to the Associated Press, “Health officials cautioned that the rise in teen births is not the chief cause of the increase in births to unwed mothers. Unmarried births were up for women of all ages, and were up an astonishing sixty percent for women in their early 20s – the group that has the largest number of babies.” In fact, more than three out of four out of wedlock births are to women of at least twenty years of age.

Furthermore, a National Vital Statistics Report states that “The teenage pregnancy rate dropped forty percent from 1990 to 2005, reaching an historic low of 70.6 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years. Rates fell much more for younger than older teenagers.” Given the instances of inclination of out of wedlock birthrate combined with a declination of teenage birthrate, one can conclude that the “problem” is not a lack of


restraint, morality, or planning among teenagers. The issue may be that there is an underlying devaluation of marriage if not simply a statistically measurable disconnection of marriage and parenthood.\footnote{To extend this thought: there are authors who rightly pronounces that “out of wedlock” births do not have a one-to-one relationship with “single” parenthood. These statistics often become conflated because demographers and social scientists often equate the two or to use a snapshot of a given situation as a static reality. In fact, many out of wedlock births are to cohabiting couples in which case the births are certainly out of wedlock while still not leaving either parent as sole caregiver. However, cohabitation is far more transitory than wedlock and methods of reporting dissolution of cohabitational parenthood are less prevalent (and certainly not a matter of public record) than methods of observing divorce that render the caregiver a single parent or individuals who have a child and raise that child alone from their birth. For an example of this analysis please see Seltzer, Judith A. "Families Formed Outside of Marriage." \textit{Journal of Marriage and the Family} 62 (November 2000): 1247-68.}

While our understanding of what types of women are having children out of wedlock should be changing, our understanding of statistically who is more likely to be a single parent is also changing. While there is certainly still a misdistribution across races, income, and education levels as to rates of single parenthood, it is becoming a more common phenomena across all demographic factors. Additionally, the number and rate of single fathers is also growing. While from 1970 to 2006 the percentage of families maintained by women has doubled, that same time frame has shown more than a tripling in the percentage of families maintained by a single father (from two to seven percent).


In comparison to European nations, the United State’s ratio of births out of wedlock appears to be an approximately median rate. According to a compilation of data by Kathleen Kiernan, the rates of births outside of marriage have risen across the board for European and North American nations. In 1999, the rates ranged from a sixty percent plus rate found in Iceland to a well under ten percent rate found in Greece. The US rate of roughly one-third in the sample year places it mid-range among countries of}
comparable economic and social patterns. While this does not explain the growing US trend, it does help to put that trend into context among other nations that share many cultural, economic, and religious values.

Another growing trend in both family and household arrangements is that of the multi-generational unit. According to the 2000 Census, four percent of all households were multi-generational. That number does not reflect the even larger percentage of households that incorporate both a child under 18 and at least one grandparent, but it does represent the fact that at least one in every twenty-five homes in this country contains at least two generations of adults. A 2005 survey commissioned by Religion and Ethics Newsweekly found that it is as common for a child to be living with a grandparent as it is for them to be living with a step-parent and it is twice as likely that a child is living with a grandparent than that the child was brought into the family through adoption. That same analysis reflects that children living in a “non-traditional” household are twice as likely to have a grandparent present in the home. The following shows the growth in the number of children (reflected numerically and by percentage) who lived in their grandparent(s)’ home between 1970 and 2008.

**Children under 18 living in the home of their grandparent(s) 1970-2008 (in thousands)**

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383 Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly Frequency Questionnaire," ed. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. October 2005, 13/12/09 http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week908/ReligionAndFamily_Questionnaire.pdf, 3. The exact results discussed above are as follows: (If children are present in the home) Is this child yours by birth, yours by adoption, a step-child, a grandchild, or unrelated to you? [Numbers reflect percentage 1) total, 2) traditional, 3) non-traditional] Yours by birth (88, 92, 79), Yours by adoption (3, 4, 3), A step-child (6, 7, 4), A grandchild (6, 4, 11), Unrelated (2, 1, 4), Other family member (2, 1, 5), Other (2, 0, 8).

384 All data from 2007 and previous compiled from U.S. Census Bureau, "CH-7 Grandchildren Under Age 18 Living in the Home of Their Grandparents: 1970 to Present,". January 2009, 8/1/10
2008
Total children 74104 – With grandparent(s) 4350 (5.9%) – only with grandparent(s) 1510 (2.0%)
2007
Total children 73746 – With grandparent(s) 4013 (5.4%) – only with grandparent(s) 1484 (2.0%)
2000
Total children 72012 – With grandparent(s) 3842 (5.3%) – only with grandparent(s) 1359 (1.9%)
1990
Total children 64137 – With grandparent(s) 3155 (4.9%) – only with grandparent(s) 935 (1.5%)
1980
Total children 63369 – With grandparent(s) 2306 (3.6%) – only with grandparent(s) 988 (1.6%)
1970
Total children 69276 – With grandparent(s) 2214 (3.2%) – only with grandparent(s) 957 (1.4%)

Reflecting this data, children are twice as likely today to live in their grandparents’ home as they were forty years ago. Additionally, while the total percentage remains a relatively low two percent, children are also more likely to be living only with their grandparent(s). The simplest explanation as to the difference in rates, as well as the overall increase is that parent(s) and their children are more likely to return to the grandparents’ home or to have never have left than it is for parents to simply turn over custody of their children to their grandparent(s). Echoing previously mentioned data the causes of these increases can be broadly attributed to increased numbers of parents returning to the home of their parents after divorce and an increase in the birth rate to non-married individuals who either have not yet left their parent’s home or return there for aid in raising their child.

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Another reason for the growth of multi-generational households is the increased life expectancy of all people. As grandparents live longer than in previous generations, it is more likely that they will reside with their own children for some portion of their lives. While there remains a significant difference in the life expectancy between males and females, both sexes have experienced an increase in average age of mortality throughout history and including recent decades. The overall average for life expectancy in 1960 was 69.9 years and by 2006 that age had reached 77.7 years.\(^3\) J. Beth Mabry, Roseanne Giarrusso, and Vern L. Bengston present the following information regarding the overlap of lifespan between grandparents and their grandchildren. Grandparents are becoming more and more likely to not only be living when their grandchildren are born, but are now more likely to live until their grandchildren are into adulthood. Across several developed nations, among grandparents over the age of sixty-five slightly more than half has grandchildren over the age of eighteen. Therefore, it is now more common for children to reach adulthood with both their parents and grandparents living than in previous generations. In 1900 less than half of American adolescents had at least two grandparents living. By 1976, that same subset was more than ninety percent of adolescents.\(^4\) While the sociological impact of these developments will be discussed later in the chapter, we must note here that the total number of children under the age of 18 who are currently residing with at least one grandparent is 6,588,000 (out of

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74,104,000 total children). This number represents nine percent of the total child population. In short, if one in eleven children will spend at least some of their childhood living with a grandparent, sociologists and theologians who deal with a theology of domestic church would be remiss to not address this growing trend.

Even after presenting statistical trends, no clear or decisive definition of family emerges. The Census Bureau defines a family as “group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family.” Therefore, the definition is both relational and residential. “However, while the Census Bureau’s definition reveals the legal, biological, and spatial arrangements that constitute a family, it does not capture the myriad meanings attached to the term family.”

The most simplistic definitions of family tend to rely on the tent-poles of marriage and children. But, as evidenced, the centrality of marriage is becoming less impactful defining line for families. Household, family, and marriage used to be inexplicably interlinked. That linkage is separating. According to various analyses, “In the year 2000, nearly half of all Americans lived in a home where the head of the household was unmarried; in the 1950s, seventy-eight percent lived with a married head of household.” In essence, what is expected is not the same as it once was. Yet, a

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“normal” or “average” family remains statistically similar to at least the previous generation or two. Don Edgar summarizes this observation in the following way:

Even looking at the statistics on family forms, one has to wonder at the persistence of marriage and the family as core units of society. Certainly there is more normative acceptance (in most Western societies, though even there in a fragmented and contested way) of new types - single-parent, stepparent, single-sex, separated, divorced, even the ‘un-family’ of friendship groups (which hardly meet the criteria of long-term relationships between people related by blood, adoption, or marriage and linking the generations preceding and succeeding)...There are increasing numbers of couple-only families, maintaining intergenerational links with their forebears and relatives but without procreating for the future...But the statistics still show that the nuclear couple with children is the dominant form. Coupling can be casual and multiple, but the majority of human beings prefer to forge a longer-lasting relationship with one other who is exclusively committed them.391

What is yet to be explored, both in this chapter as well as in sociological circles in general, is the relationship between family definition, family form, and family function. What has been shown thus far is the current composition of the family and its relation to the family of forty to fifty years ago. The question becomes if there was a time where the family lived up to an ideal that is not being met today. To put it another way, is there a definition of family that individual units and cultures have to live up to or are families self-defining in that they are defined by the means of their existence? Edgell speaks to this point in the following way; “Familistic ideologies are historically specific and vary over time and place. They do not promote the idea that any kind of family is equally valid, but rather tend to idealize certain forms and functions of the family, defining them as legitimate, valuable, and morally correct, even essential for the health of the

Although temporality has a significant impact on defining the idealized family, the real time fluctuations in the family lead to the reality that a particular family may be meeting the ideal one day, be a “non-traditional” family at another time, and then return to the idealized nuclear form. Specifically, “Even though about 70 percent of children at each age lived with married parents, any given child may not have always lived with married parents and may later live in a mother-only family or another arrangement.”

As a conclusion to discussion of defining the family through statistics, below is the results generated through a survey questionnaire generated by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for the television program Religion and Ethics Newsweekly. The question was phrased the following way: “When I say the word "family" people may think of different things. Some may think of a mother, father, and children, whereas others may think of being with a long-term partner or just a parent alone with a child. How about for you? How do you define a ‘family’?” The results are split into three categories: “total,” “traditional,” which represents responses by members of families that fit the nuclear form and “non-traditional,” which represents responses by members of non-nuclear or otherwise abnormal family forms. The top result was a mentioning of the nuclear family including children. But, even that category of answer was less than fifty percent of respondents. The full results are below.

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How do you define a family?³⁹⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>NonTrad</th>
<th>Trad.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NUCLEAR FAMILY (MENTIONS CHILDREN)</strong>............................................</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td>Mother, father and children .................................................................</td>
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<td>Children .........................................................................................</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband, wife and children ..................................................................</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One parent and child ...........................................................................</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married couple with kids .....................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NUCLEAR FAMILY (DOES NOT MENTION CHILDREN)</strong>..................................</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/Parents ....................................................................................</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate family ..................................................................................</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and woman .....................................................................................</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related by marriage or blood ................................................................</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband and wife ..................................................................................</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother, sister, siblings .....................................................................</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCLUDES EXTENDED FAMILY AND RELATIVES</strong>......................................</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEOPLE CONNECTED THROUGH EMOTION, NOT RELATED</strong>...............................</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>People who care for each other ..........................................................</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Close group of people/ Anyone close to you .........................................</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>People working towards common goals and needs ....................................</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>People you put trust in ........................................................................</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Loving relationships .............................................................................</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loving people/ Loved ones/ Anyone who loves you ..................................</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being with each other/being together ...............................................</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whoever lives with you/ Anyone you live with/ ....................................</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Caring/Loving/Nurturing environment ..................................................</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living together ....................................................................................</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A home .................................................................................................</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring .................................................................................................</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love ......................................................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togetherness .......................................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>

³⁹⁵Ibid.
Georg Simmel points out that the family is important in sociology for three reasons: 1) it is the socialization of a few people replicated across cultures and times centered on important and observable interests, 2) diversity of family forms over times and cultures allow for relevant comparisons, and 3) diverse interests such as religion and social aspects, erotic and economic needs, power and unity, are all united under the umbrella of the family.³⁹⁶ This section of the presentation will focus primarily on the

second of Simmel’s three foci. Socialization and interests, especially religious socialization and interests, are of central import to this dissertation, but they will be dealt with separately in the following section of the text. Currently at issue is the argument as to if sociologists who deal in and analyze family matters do so with the understanding that there is an accepted and viable form of family with other forms being mere perversions of the norm. The “modern nuclear family” has been the basis for sociological family theory, but it has outlived its usefulness. The idea that there is a culturally and temporally normative form of family upon which all industrial or post-industrial societies will be based has proven to be factually incorrect. This approach has led to treating non-nuclear family forms as deviations as opposed to alternatives. As Jo Van Every points out, sociologists have recently fallen prey to simply using their pre-existing theories of family as opposed to accounting for the numeric and proportional diversity among family forms. The so called modern family (which is often reduced to the nuclear family) is not truly modern and often does not reflect the reality of families today. To this end, there will be scant attention paid to arguing for the legitimacy and positive influence of the modern nuclear family. A domestic church (or family in general) that is rooted in a first marriage and centered on the procreation and raising of children is clearly an accepted form and does not need to be defended in the following analysis. Therefore, attention will primarily be paid to families that defy the previously held norm while retaining their viability (as well as issues influential to that end).

The change of focus from a nuclear norm (with its inferior deviations) to an understanding of families as diverse and distinct reflects the demographic changes detailed in the first portion of this chapter. As “normal” changes statistically in terms of family form, formation, and sustainability there has been a search for an explanation of causation. Don Browning et. al. present four explanations that they have seen others make: shifts in cultural and sexual values, changing economic patterns, psychological causes, and patriarchy. Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim blends all of these arguments together in a manner of presenting her thesis that society is moving towards an understanding of family that is “post-familial.” Essentially, she posits that family is no longer a necessary social structure, but rather is a choice. Her full explanation follows:

Whereas, in preindustrial society, the family was mainly a community of need held together by an obligation of solidarity, the logic of individually designed lives has come increasingly to the fore in the contemporary world. The family is becoming more of an elective relationship, an association of individuals who each brings to it their own interests, experiences and plans, and who are each subjected to different controls, risks and constraints. It is therefore necessary to devote much more effort than in the past to the holding together of these different biographies. Whereas people could once fall back on rules and rituals, the prospect now is of a staging of everyday life, an acrobatics of balancing and coordinating. This does not mean that the traditional family is simply disappearing. But it is losing the monopoly it had for so long. Its quantitative significance is declining as new lifestyles appear and spread. These in all their intermediary and secondary forms represent the future of families, or what I call the contours of the ‘post-familial family’.  

The post-familial understanding of the family bases the definition of family on relationships over and above form. This idea is not nearly as novel as one might expect. As far back as 1926, Ernest Burgess posited that the family is a process of relationships

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not merely a structure or household. However, the process of relationships that one can rightly call a family will inevitably begin to normalize itself around several expected forms. The question then becomes if residence, kinship, marriage, or parentage still matter in defining families or if the definition reduces solely to understanding choices of relationships. Judith Seltzer would like to see marriage be removed from the definition of family. She defines families through co-residence and childbearing because she views marriage as a legal (as opposed to say a sociological or strictly familial) term. While marriage literally gives license for family formation, it is not the only means to achieve this goal. In a sense, Seltzer’s thesis is that there does not need to be external permission allowing family formation. Rather, all that needs to be present is the agreement among members that they are indeed forming a family.

Stephen Post uses a more traditional definition of family which relies heavily on parenthood. His characterization of the family is as “a biological community within nature that is defined by sexual differentiation, procreation, and kinship descent; it is the social unit in which children are born, protected, supported both economically and emotionally and socialized.” Hence, the understanding of family is more common in its understanding of kinship but it is still centered on a particular relationship: parent and child. Georg Simmel combines a version of Post’s definition with Seltzer’s dismissive comments on marriage. He states that the necessary building block that must be present for there to be an entity that we comfortably define as a family, is not a marriage at all.

The central building block is the mother-child relationship that is essentially the same

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across cultures and times while the relationship between spouses “is capable of infinite modifications.”\textsuperscript{404} Post’s as well as the other definitions mentioned here certainly seem more accommodating to myriad family forms although all would still rule some forms as legitimate while others would remain illegitimate. However, what is also common among these definitions is that they are all centered on relationships and those relationships can take place within the context of various forms. Sinikka Elliott and Debora Umberson comment that “Using the two-parent structure as a benchmark against which all other family arrangements are compared also masks the importance of the quality of the relationships.”\textsuperscript{405}

As individuals and families have more and varied acceptable means of providing the services and functions previously and normally expected of a family, forms and demographics have shifted. In a sense, the cause of the change is possibility and choice. The effects and viability of these choices will be discussed below. One significant caveat, this portion of the text will not deal in any considerable means with issues that clearly illustrate a family as a domestic church (marriage, first marriages, etc.) or with those family forms and issues that clearly go against Roman Catholic Moral Teachings (same sex coupling, divorce and remarriage, etc.). The focus here will be on single-

\textsuperscript{404} Georg Simmel, “On the Sociology of the Family,” \textit{Theory, Culture & Society} 15, no. 3-4 (1998), 288. Further, Simmel posits that the shift in most cultures toward marriage was based primarily on economic interests and basic protection. The question that arises from his analysis is if the relationship in question can be reduced to a “parent-child” relationship or if Simmel honestly believed there to be a distinct nature to the mother-child relationship that is not present in the father-child relationship. If this were to be considered an exclusionary definition, Simmel would be stating that single-parent families headed by women were indeed families while those headed by men were not families at all.

parent, step-parent/blended families,\textsuperscript{406} and multi-generational families as forms. Form inequality and the relationship of the family with its local community as issues that will also be addressed.

The trend toward single-parenthood is a growing one to say the least. As mentioned above, one in four children under the age of eighteen now lives with a single (or at the very least, unmarried) parent. Several matters complicate an attempt to do an analysis of this issue is that sociologists and demographers do not normally distinguish between parents who reproduce outside of the bonds of marriage, never marry, and raise the child together and parents who are currently raising their child or children on their own after the dissolution of a marriage or cohabitation relationship. Furthermore, if the parents of a given child do not marry after that child’s birth, it is highly likely that the family in question will be considered by sociologists and demographers to be a “single-parent family”. While attempting to separate out which forms are truly single-parent families and which should be considered some other form, it is important to keep these differentiations in mind through the course of this and any other analysis of the issue.\textsuperscript{407}

The recent growth in the number of single parents – especially single mothers – is not being caused by increased rates of divorce\textsuperscript{408} or by a larger number of teenage

\textsuperscript{406} Step-parent and blended families certainly often are the product of one or more of the spouses being previously divorced. However, this need not be the case. Analysis conducted by sociologists often does not distinguish between a marital and non-marital production of children before the marriage that solidifies the blended or step-parent family. For this analysis, the data and theories used will be those accessible to the author without regards to the sociologist’s focus. However, in the entirety of this dissertation, when the argument will be presented that step and blended parent families should be considered acceptable forms of family that are capable of being domestic churches, the reality of neither parent being previously divorced (without an annulment – a reality clearly immoral according to Church Law) is significant in the validity of the family and its ability to be a domestic church.

\textsuperscript{407} In the following chapter, I will make the case that these different forms of “single-parent families” are quite different in their possible viability as domestic churches. As this chapter of the work is focused on sociology, the issue is best saved for that time.

\textsuperscript{408} Divorce rates have remained relatively stable (and even decreased in per capita rates) recently. See: \url{http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/vitstat.pdf} for statistical comparison from 1950-2000.
pregnancies.\textsuperscript{409} In fact, Marcy Gringlas and Marsha Weinraub’s article “The More Things Change…Single Parenthood Revisited” points out the fact that the growth in single-parenthood is rooted in an escalation in the number of women who are seeking to have and raise a child on their own. They state, “Demographic changes indicate that single-parent families have moved from a category consisting overwhelmingly of divorced, widowed, and separated women to one that includes a large and growing number of nonadolescent, nonmarried, ‘solo’ mothers.”\textsuperscript{410} This increase in women willfully having and raising children on their own is still disproportionately visible among minorities but is seeing its current highest rate of growth among whites.

Gringlas and Weinraub also point out that childhood outcomes are not primarily effected by the number of parents present in the household. There is a higher amount of stress shouldered by a single-parent than there is per-parent in a two parent family, but this stress does not statistically change the expected outcome for children.\textsuperscript{411} Mark Fine, Brenda A. Donnelly, and Patricia Voydanoff’s work supports this thesis. They state that single-parents are more commonly depressed than either intact or stepparent families; additionally, single-parent females are more likely to be depressed than single-parent males. However, this statistical reality does not translate to an inherent pathology of single-parent families.\textsuperscript{412} Simply stated, without significant help from other family or non-family resources, it is more stressful to raise a child as a single-parent. One major


\textsuperscript{411} \textit{Ibid.}, 29.

factor in this assessment is the fact that single-parents are often economically stressed or impoverished. Single-parent families spend more (by percentage) on basic items – food, housing, and services - and less on items of “choice” (health care, entertainment, etc.) than do married couples. 413 Hence, it is outside support that can be viewed as the determining factor between successful and unsuccessful child outcomes among single and two-parent families. 414

Although there is certainly some evidence that single-parent families are as successful in producing children who flourish as two-parent families are, anecdotal evidence, social stigma, economic concerns, and the stresses placed on single-parents themselves still leave society with a problem that it feels must be corrected. One means of alleviating these problems is to build greater social support for single-parents.

Defining which social policy supports can or would be best able to combat these familial ills is better left for politicians and policy experts. 415 One answer to the “problem” of single-parenthood is analyzed by Deborah Roempke Graefe and Daniel T. Lichter who seek to assess the outcomes of women who have children outside of wedlock and later marry. The first fact that they point out is that “Out-of-wedlock childbearing fundamentally alters a woman’s cohabitation and marital life-course trajectory, and the quality of the matching process itself (i.e., the kinds of men that women marry).” 416


415 For example of the complexities of this type of approach: Does providing welfare to single-parents actually support those who need it or rather create an economic incentive for an individual to become a single-parent? Arguments such as this one have been publicly discussed for years with no apparent objectively correct answer in sight.

Women who do not marry the father of their child or children are less likely to get married overall. In cases where the mother does get married, premarital childbearing leads to statistically less stable marriages in general. “Marriage is no long-term solution to poverty and welfare dependence if low-income single mothers are unable to stay married and marry well.”\footnote{Ibid., 617.} Unwed mothers are not likely to be better off (economically or parentally) simply by marrying because those marriages are more likely to fail and the spouses that are primarily available to these women are in their same economic class and possess their same level of social capital (bearing in mind that Graefe and Lichter’s work shows that the children of single women weaken that woman’s capital). Hence, the marriages of single mothers will be of the most personal and social benefit if it is preceded by improved economic or social conditions.\footnote{Ibid.} The correction to single-parenthood cannot be reduced simply to marriage, it is only effective if the single-parent in question marries “above their station” or improves their own level of social capital before marriage.\footnote{Ibid.} The other means of correcting the problems associated with single-parenthood appear to either be finding ways to prevent single-parenthood from occurring or establishing social supports for those families that are morally viable.

The above comments on single-parenthood are not to say that step-parenting or blended families are inherently poor places for children. Even if this perceived weakness were a reality, at least one third of all children will spend time in stepfamily before

\footnote{The argument as presented here refers to those single-parents who are having trouble or show an inability to raise their child or children in a successful manner. Certainly, an economically stable and/or well educated single-parent will present sufficient social capital that marrying someone of their own social station would likely actually be a positive for the family as a whole even if the help were not needed in the first place.}
adulthood\textsuperscript{420} so there must be an attempt to find out how to best situate step-parent and blended families within the context of viable family forms. Adolescent well-being is improved in the case of step-parenting (provided that there is no marital conflict between the step-parent and birth parent); especially if the adolescent is also close to their biological parent who is a part of that relationship. Shared activities and longevity of relationship also have positive effect in stepparent – stepchild relationships. However, these relationships must be looked at in connection or sociological results generated for adolescent well-being are in doubt.\textsuperscript{421} Graefe and Lichter point out that there is likely to be some form of marital issue in step-parent or blended family situation due to the weakness of social capital the single-parent brings into the marriage. Nevertheless, in instances where there is not underlying marital discord, a step-parent/step-child relationship can be beneficial to the child and the family unit as a whole.

Mark Fine and Brenda Donnelly have argued that overall stepparent satisfaction is not statistically different than their counterparts in intact families.\textsuperscript{422} It may seem like common sense, but given divorce and remarriage rates, the most successful families are built upon good relationships between both spouses and the children that they are raising. It is as possible to have negative relationships between married spouses raising their own children as it is for there to be a positive relationship between a step-parent and child. Conceivably, in the case of step and blended families, what are most important are the particular relationships among family members. As Fine and Donnelly succinctly put it,

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
“Perhaps previous work has overestimated the difficulties inherent in raising stepchildren while, at the same time, underestimating the stressors associated with rearing biological children.” Of course, step and blended families add additional complications that may give rise to less than ideal relationships within the family. If those complications are overcome, there is little to no difference in the familial satisfaction shown by parents raising their own children and step or blended families.

One brief point which must be made in relation to step and blended families and their comparative relationship to cohabiting couples in which one of the cohabiters is not the parent of a child who shares that residence is that marriage does make a difference. Judith Seltzer states that, “Compared with stepfathers, male cohabitating partners devote less time to organized youth activities at school, religious, or other community organizations.” While cohabitation is more likely to end in dissolution than a formal marriage is to end in divorce, it can easily be deduced that cohabiting “step-parents” are going to be less likely to be effective parental figures given that their commitment to the family is neither formal nor legal. Therefore, while step-parenting and blending families is indeed more complicated (and sometimes less successful in is outcomes) than simply sustaining a marriage, it is still preferable to raising a child in a non-marital cohabiting relationship.

423 Ibid., 401.
While you will find few if any persons who will assert that a child’s grandparents are not a part of that same child’s family, sociologists (as well as theologians) have had difficulty in accepting that extended and multi-generational households are on the rise and attention must be paid to the role of grandparents and other members of extended families in the lives of their children, grandchildren, etc. As illustrated in the previous section of this chapter, one in eleven children currently reside in their grandparent(s)’ home or have a grandparent residing in their parent(s)’ home.\footnote{U.S. Census Bureau, "C4 Children with Grandparents by Presence of Parents, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for Selected Characteristics 2008," Jan. 2009, 9/1/10 www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2008/tabC4-blkmax.xls.} According to Mabry, Giarrusso, and Bengtson, grandparents are far more impactful to studies of and realities for families today than in past years in part simply because of extended life expectancies. Of the cohort of children born in 1900, only twenty-four percent had all four grandparents alive at the time of their birth. Today, that number has reached almost seventy percent.\footnote{J. Beth Mabry, Roseanne Giarrusso, and Vern L. Bengtson, "Generations, the Life Course, and Family Change," in The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Family, ed. Judith Treas Jacqueline Scott, and Martin Richards (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 87-108. The authors cite Vern L. Bengtson, "Beyond the Nuclear Family: The Increasing Importance of Multigenerational Bonds," \textit{Journal of Marriage and Family} 63, no. 1 (February 2001): 1-16 in the passage. The following analysis of multigenerational families relies heavily on the work of Vern Bengtson and references several of his works.}  Furthermore, the context for childbearing is far less concrete than in generations past. The expectation of marriage to precede and sustain the birth and raising of a child is no longer a given. Non-marital childbearing has made parenting roles less defined. In part, this shift has led to a wider and more direct interaction of generations in parenting.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.} The role of the grandparent has also expanded to actions and activities that
were previously reserved almost exclusively for biological parents. In addition to the increased availability of grandparents and other multi-generational family members purely by their ability to stay alive, technological advances have also increased the possibility of direct action in “parenting” that were not possible for previous generations. This development of technology has allowed for strengthening multi-generational families which will become increasingly more important. Relatively cheap commercial airline flights, email, webcams, and myriad forms of social media allow members of a family who may or may not reside in the same household continue to have regular, intimate, and important interactions. Possibility of interaction and its influence on relationships should continue to grow over time. As Bengston surmises, “The increasing availability of extended intergenerational kin (grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles, and aunts) has become a resource for children as they grow up and move into young adulthood.”

Increases in longevity coupled with decreases in fertility have led to a point that we would be better to think of families as metaphorical beanpoles rather than the old model of a pyramid. It no longer seems correct to assume that once a single adult or a couple’s child marries that they will no longer be “parents”. The beanpole metaphor

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430 Of course, this situation is not particular to grandparents, but it is most prevalent among them. In some instances, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and others can be found carrying out the duties previously expected of birth or step-parents. For the purposes of this analysis, it is simplest and most relevant to conceptualize the issue around “multi-generational” rather than “extended” families as multi-generational families are more common and more easily defined/visible. While the numbers and statistics associated with multi-generational families are different from those surrounding extended families, the majority of the conclusions hold up. Further, multi-generational families in which the grandparents themselves have had more than a single child definitionally come to include some semblance of an extended family.


433 Ibid.
implies that families remain connected for their life’s duration. There is a “root” family, but they do not separate when new families are established. They continue to sustain that family and its additional members. While grandparents are showing an increased effect in the raising and flourishing of their grandchildren, they are also remaining tied directly to their own children. Mabry, Giarrusso, and Bengston state that “the parent-child tie appears to be increasingly important with the growing number of years of life the two generations share – currently, upwards of five decades. Parents and their adult children typically feel a great deal of affection for each other.”

The relationship maintained between grandparents and grandchildren and is often effected by and dependent on the parent – grandparent relationship. Consequently, multi-generational family structure is more than simply layering another relationship that fosters development onto our existing understanding of childhood, it is an understanding that “family” cannot be defined as simply as a parent(s) and child relationship.

Those who see the family as a declining social structure also see trends in multi-generational families that back their thesis. Primarily, they see the fact that children are more likely to move away from their parents in adulthood as a sign of family decline. The authors report:

With regard to the multigenerational family, decline proponents rely on several trends to portray a shift away from kinship as an important social institution for the aged. One focus is the residential independence of elderly parents from their adult children as a sign that the family has lost its earlier function of serving the needs older, dependent members. According to the family decline thesis, the trend from intergenerational co-residence and the tendency of children to live at far distances from their parents signal decline in the function of the family as a source of support and security for elders. But research shows that most elderly

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individuals remain in regular contact with their children, whether or not they live nearby.\textsuperscript{435} Not only are the authors correct in concluding that geographic distance does not have a serious effect on inter-generational contact, but there is also the growing trend of grandparents residing in the same household as their grandchildren. Furthermore, the decline theory as proposed in the above negates the function of grandparents being the stabilizing force in a single or solo parent’s life either immediately after the birth of their child or following the dissolution of the relationship that generated the child.\textsuperscript{436} Multi-generational families are often deepened and sustained through the need of the adult children as much as they are through the want and need of the grandparent/”older” generation or the grandchild/”younger” generation.

To summarize, relationships across generations are becoming more important while also increasing in diversity of structure and function. These relationships will continue to increase in importance because of extended life spans, the increase of grandparents commonly filling the need for basic family functions, and strength of intergenerational solidarity. Bengston concludes that “multi-generational bonds will not only enhance but in some cases replace nuclear family functions, which have been so much the focus of sociologists during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.”\textsuperscript{437} While replacement of the nuclear family is not at issue here, the prevalence and importance of multi-generational families are certainly going to be a central issue in family theory and practice going forward.

\textsuperscript{437} Ibid.
Having discussed three non-nuclear family forms of family which possess varying factors that make them more or less sociologically acceptable, it can easily be stated that children’s well-being cannot be determined strictly by the family arrangement in which that child is raised. There have been several studies that have shown that multiple “family transitions” or changes in family structure (for example multiple divorces and remarriages, cohabiting partners coming and going, etc.) have a far more deleterious effect on the emotional and psychological health of a child than having few or no changes in family structure (raised by a continually single-parent, married couple or parent and step-parent, etc.). As noted, there seems to be far more and far stronger evidence that when one gets beyond the particularities of a given family many different structures are equally able to produce stable and successful parents and children so long as economic viability is held constant. In this sense, most children (and in turn families) will be better served if a form is accepted and made stable rather than seeking to “better” a particular situation by casually adding another parent who may or may not remain a part of the child’s life over time. However, this issue of stability does not truly resolve the issue of the equality of family forms.

In proportion to their variance, family forms reflect, contain, and reproduce social inequalities. The reproduction of inequality is compounded by the fact that not all people have equal access to all family forms. Philip Cohen and Danielle MacCartney highlight that economic and social disparities leads to a shortage of “marriageable” members of a

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given sex in a particular culture. In the African American community, this has led to a shortage of males while in China, these disparities have led to a shortage of females. This reduction of available mates echoes the argument made by Graefe and Lichter concerning the negative social capital associated with single motherhood that has been previously detailed. This phenomenon has led to a cyclical nature in family forms. A child is more likely to replicate the family situation they were raised in than they are to break the cycle and “re-normalize” by forming a stable nuclear family.

A lack of acceptable mates has not only led to increased numbers of singles and single-parents. This same deficit of economic or social capital leads to an increased reliance on multi-generational or extended families. While single-parents are more likely to produce children that grow to be either a single-mother or an abandoning father, economic realities are even clearer cut. Families at the high and low end of the economic spectrum are the most likely to replicate their family’s social position as they are either granted significantly greater or significantly more limited opportunities as generated by their original status. Cohen and MacCartney offer the following two suggestions to help alleviate the inequalities generated by the replication of parental social, economic, and familial failings:

Beyond support behaviors within families, two other strategies stand out as individual and adaptive responses to poverty and inequality. The first uses the

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439 The argument holds especially true when the focus is reduced to analyzing a particular social subculture or geographic region where social and economic inequality runs rampant.
441 Ibid.
442 An “abandoning father” is defined here as “a male who does not reside with or provide significant care for their child.”
family to go outside the family and household, building networks of support to create a social safety net, especially in the absence of adequate welfare support. New studies show that family networks – including related and nonrelated members – often contribute vitally to the educational success of children. The second involves the actual form that families take. For example, with the onset of welfare reform in the US, new research has focused on the role of extended families in supporting the employment of single mothers, showing that those single mothers who live in extended households are more likely to be employed. One role for extended family members is taking care of children, especially since access to affordable day care is central to maintaining employment for single mothers.444

In short, their proposed remedies beyond self-improvement are greater reliance on multi-generational/extended families and a greater collaboration between the family and the local community.

There is a significant difference between governmental program support and the support that families have available to them through communal and voluntary social connections. Graham Crow and Catherine Maclean argue that in spite of both globalization and individualization, local communities remain an important factor in the life of a family because of our need to be connected to others. This process varies in different communities and times but it is not necessarily eroded by geographic or technological mobility.445 What has changed is a family’s ability to move geographically from neighborhood to neighborhood or city to city. That being said, there has also been a change in a family’s ability to remain connected to its social network in spite of their mobility. Essentially, the change has not been an erosion of the ties between the family and the local community; what has changed is that the definition of “local” can no longer

be solely reduced to meaning that which is in close proximity. While some tasks such as physically providing care for children still requires close physical proximity (or at least intermittent periods of close proximity), other means of familial support, such as emotional or financial support, can be done at some distance while retaining intimacy and viability. Local communities therefore retain their import even as their geographic range evaporates.

Nancy L. Marshall, Anne E. Noonan, Kathleen McCartney, Fern Marx, and Nancy Keefe looked at local communities within cities and have described the “urban village” that parents rely on to help raise their children. Although there was significant variance among parental networks, their effect seemed consistent.

The urban village was evident in parental social networks with family, friends, and neighbors, although the nature of these networks varied. Multiple regression analyses indicated that parental social networks have an indirect effect on children’s socioemotional development, mediated by parenting. Parents who received more emotional support and had less homogeneous social networks were more warm and responsive, provided a more stimulating home environment, and felt more effective as parents. These parenting characteristics, in turn, were associated with fewer behavior problems and more social competence in the children.  

Members of parents’ social networks can both support parenting goals as well as aiding in the cognitive and emotional development of children. This influence can be direct or indirect. The urban village, a term used to define inner-city cooperative neighborhoods, has been shown to possibly support both the positive development of children as well as possibly helping to alleviate the stress and strain placed on parents – regardless of family form.

447 Ibid.
Being tied into the local community has a significant positive correlation with producing mentally satisfied children who often do better in school. The authors note, “Children whose parents had stronger neighborhood social ties were more socially competent themselves, reported fewer depressive symptoms, and were described by their parents as doing better in school than other children.” Local communities can help support parents and their children which in turn strengthens the local community.

Combining the information that implies that family forms and inequality are likely to run in cycles where subsequent generations will replicate the form and behavior of previous generations with the argument that participation in and support from local communities can help to elevate the family to “better” socioeconomic status it can be noted that not all family and community interactions are equally fruitful. Positive communal interaction helps to raise the expectations and understanding of normalcy among deficient families. Of course, the counter is also true: negative communal interaction can reinforce or even lower familial expectations. One of the primary examples of this interaction between community expectations and family formation and replication is in regards to teenage pregnancy and the beginning of single-parent families. Opportunities and expectations generated in advantaged communities make it far more likely that teens in those communities will believe that they can achieve their goals and therefore not jeopardize their chances by becoming unwed teenage mothers. However, it would be wrong to raise expectations without increasing opportunities to break the cycle. With regards to expectations, local communities are capable of introducing a

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448 Ibid.
“because” into the equation. Positive and negative reinforcement have their equivalent effect on family formation and quality of family life.

Communal interaction and support can also be an important means of alleviating family stress. The stress caused simply by being a member of a family has increased over time. As parents work longer hours to support their families, they are actually becoming more conflicted in their understanding of the relationship between work and family. Sarah Winslow reports, “A comparison mean levels of conflict in 1977 and 1997 reveals that, overall, the mean level of reported work-family conflict is higher in 1997 than in 1977, suggesting that individuals are indeed finding it more difficult to balance their work and family demands. This increase is most acute for single mothers and married nonparent men with nonworking spouses.” In fact, the same study reports that the stress caused by this conflict is higher among all parents than non-parents.

Community involvement and social supports can be an effective means of lowering the level of stress on parents when trying to negotiate the work–family relationship. Across all family forms (including those discussed above) connecting the family unit with a positive community will have a positive effect on the family as a whole and the relationships it contains.

While it has been illustrated that single-parent, multi-generational, and blended families can be sociologically valid as family forms if they are supported properly,

450 For example, “Do not start a family until after sufficient education because that will be better for the whole family,” or alternatively, “Having a child at sixteen years-of-age is not a big deal because my parents will help raise the child or because all my friends are having children at this age.”


452 In some cases, the form itself is a means of secondary social support. Indeed, a multi-generation or extended family understanding is a means of incorporating outside support from within the family structure itself. In any event, positive social support of any family form nearly always improves expected outcomes and familial relationships.
there remains a cultural tension as to their legitimacy. Single-parent families are particularly viewed as problematic for society because they are often closely tied to poverty. Furthermore, that impoverished lifestyle is more likely to repeat itself in future generations. Evidence of this repetition is found in the rate of definitionally “single-parent” families that are actually multi-generational families consisting of a single mother, her child or children, and her mother (also a single mother) living in the same household. Although there will be disagreement as to if this family should be considered “single-parent” or “multi-generation,” the far larger discussion surrounds if society should be permissive of this type of family in the first place. It appears that society has decided that arguing against step-parenting or the blending of families is fruitless. In fact, there remains a significant portion of people who believe that marriage is always preferable to raising children alone – even in the case of second or third marriages. While sociologists have done their best to develop techniques and data to analyze the successfulness of various family forms, the public continues to discuss if non-nuclear family forms are authentic families. The discussion continues in the face of the demographic realities and sociological findings. Lisa Sowle Cahill notes that “this climate makes it very difficult to reach social consensus either about what structures of marriage and parenthood best serve the well-being of family members or about the importance of families taking responsibility for one another broadly across society – not only in social groups made up of similar families of similar socioeconomic standing.”

L.L. Cornell presents the argument that the public, as well as sociologists, are still studying the family using an incorrect methodology. He argues that families should be viewed as any other work center where necessary tasks are distributed and to varying

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degrees accomplished by various members of the system. Parenthood, marriage, and other terms continue to view the members of the family as having particular roles that need to be fulfilled. He proposes that there should be a shift from static roles of parent-child to a fluid understanding of work contributions and changes (including the contributions of children) over time.\footnote{L.L. Cornell, "Constructing a Theory of the Family: From Malinowski Through the Modern Nuclear Family to Production and Reproduction," \textit{International Journal of Comparative Sociology} 31, no. 1-2 (Jan-Apr 1990): 67-78.} By focusing on love and quality of relationships, there is not enough attention paid to if families are accomplishing their “work” of production and reproduction.\footnote{Of course, for Cornell’s thesis to be correct there would need to be some common understanding of what the “product” of the family should be.}

While Cornell’s thesis would allow for an easier comparison between family forms in terms of what they are capable and likely to accomplish, it removes the familial nature from the definition of family. Perhaps the most successful “work” of the family is to build and maintain relationships in an intimate and procreative fashion. Demographers have shown that society is moving in many directions and gravitating to new means of living out those familial relationships. What sociologists have shown is that some of the new and growing family forms do have difficulties inherent in them, but with proper social and intergenerational support those family forms can be as successful as the nuclear family. Even if these family forms do not generate the success rates in terms of economic prosperity, children’s outcomes, or sustainability of relationships, there appears little doubt that more and more families are going to be non-nuclear in their composition. Also, these growing family forms are not inherently deficient if placed in proper social context. Judith Stacey comments, “For better or for worse, the post-modern family...
revolution is here to stay.” Perhaps the revolution has already come and gone and now we are firmly entrenched in the post-nuclear family era.

Sociology of Family and Religion

Having briefly detailed the demographic composition of families today as well as the sociological abilities for those families to flourish, a third lens for viewing the family can be added. When approaching the sociology of religion and family a simple question of approach must be addressed. Namely, “Is the assessment to be measured addressing the effect of ‘family’ on ‘religion’ or the effect of ‘religion’ on the ‘family’?” If this idea is addressed by noting religion’s effect on the family, religion becomes the a priori sociological construct. In the Christian context, sociologically defined societal failings can be defined as “social and structural sin.” In turn, the means of overcoming sin can be found in and through the Church. Hence, societal failings are not simply statistical data or cultural inevitabilities; they are consequences of human frailty and failing and can be dealt with in a religious manner. The construct of religion, and namely the Church, can be a source of correction and strength for the family in the face of personal and social sin. To approach the sociology of religion and family with family as the given, religion is reduced to simply another variable output based on given constraints of the family such as income, composition, geography, etc. However, Darren Sherkat and Christopher Ellison state that “research consistently finds religious beliefs and behaviors can be a function of: (a) family and denominational socialization, (b) gender, (c) social status, and

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(d) life course events and aging.”\textsuperscript{458} Their research clearly indicates that religious beliefs and religious participation ebbs and flows in relation to life events but is often rooted in family of origin and upbringing. Through this section of the text, differing authors and studies cited will approach the topic from either or both understandings. Practically speaking, the entire debate of which factor comes first may be a chicken/egg type of question. The debate is complicated by the fact that both families and religion share in the fact that they are both public and private institutions\textsuperscript{459} that socialize their members in a similar fashion. Just as participating in a family’s daily and special rituals brings together and strengthens the family, Bryan Turner defines his understanding of the sociology of religion in a similar vein. “A religion is that which binds a people by its rituals and customs, and as a consequence religion forms a society. This notion of religio as constituting community through adherence to rituals that separate the sacred from the profane was the basis of the sociology of religion.”\textsuperscript{460} As both religion and family are public and private and both are based on participation as a central means of socialization.

Which is the root of the other may remain in debate, but what is not in question is the fact that religion remains a central means of understanding the family in American society. Turner reports that “Christian churches in the US have remained relatively central to American culture and politics, and this resilience was reflected in the social impact of fundamentalism in the late twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{461} His mention of fundamentalism relates to the fact that many religious, as well as secular, people believe

\textsuperscript{461} \textit{Ibid.}, 296.
that there are several problematic trends in family formation, dissolution, and composition and that those assertions are heavily based on religious moral expectations and norms. As a part of Penn Edgell’s Religion and Family Project\textsuperscript{462} - upon which much of this section relies heavily – she found that virtually all pastors (ninety-seven percent) she talked to in her study believed that families today are in crisis.\textsuperscript{463} This belief grows out of the fact that attendance of religious services such as Mass remains rather flat while participation in “extra” programming such as religious education for children or service projects is relatively unattended. Hence, religious people see a growing failing in families because they perceive that families are slipping away from their religious roots. Or, in the very least, the non-participation in the religion by families is a cause of the crisis. Furthermore, religious leaders and participants argue that religious practice (especially Christian practice) can alleviate or relieve the crisis besieging families today.

While there is a danger in the belief that religious persons and families do not have problems,\textsuperscript{464} the research that will be detailed here certainly argues that religious participation is primarily beneficial to the family. However, the family today faces more choices of where they can spend their time both between religion and other pursuits and among religions (or even among parishes within a religion). There is also a growing trend in claiming membership while not participating (or regularly participating) in that religion.

\textsuperscript{462}This program was funded by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research and was the seed for several of Edgell’s published works. Information on the project itself can be found at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/edgell-projectindex.html and the individual works will be cited for their specifics as needed.

\textsuperscript{463}In fact, half (fifty percent) believed “strongly” that families today are in crisis. [Penny Edgell, Religion and Family in a Changing Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).]

\textsuperscript{464}Gerald Foley, Family Centered Church: A New Parish Model (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995).
One means sociologists have at their disposal to assess the relationship families have with religion is to borrow from economics. There remains an abundance of supply of religion. A family, or an individual, does not have to look long or far to find a religious organization or church to join. What is in question is the level of demand for religious institutions. The reason for the questionable demand is that there appears to be a rising cost in religious participation while being a stagnant or declining benefit for individual families. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark define the religious economy as “consisting of all the religious activity going on in a society, including a ‘market’ of current and potential adherents, a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents, and the religious culture offered by the organization(s).”  

Additionally, it is not that there is simply competition between religions, there is also a cost/benefit attached to non-membership and participation altogether.

The benefits offered by religious membership and participation are often theologically reduced to salvation or a (better) relationship with the Divine. However, these benefits are not easy to measure in a sociologic or economic way. The practical benefits of membership in a religious congregation are more often observed through participation in religious services as well as those programs offered by the congregation that are in addition to “worship”. These additional programs are seemingly either not living up to the demands of families, are too costly to participate in, or are simply geared towards an insufficient number of congregants. Penny Edgell argues that the supply of programs is predominantly aimed at nuclear families with what the church feels are

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typical problems and concerns. She calls these expected programs “the standard package.” In her own words:

The standard package not only assumed a two-parent family, but was based on a specific middle-class male-breadwinner version of it. Of course, the male-breadwinner family did not describe a majority of Americans even in the 1950s. But it was upheld as an ideal, and congregational practices and rhetoric were organized around supporting the middle-class, suburban, organization-man lifestyle.\footnote{Penny Edgell, \textit{Religion and Family in a Changing Society} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 15.}

Given the demographic reality and trends discussed earlier in this chapter, it can easily be seen that the “standard package” will leave a large and growing proportion of the market without the benefits a religion can possibly provide because it is not meeting all of its congregational families’ demands.

One of the prime reasons that the cost of participating in religious activities has increased is because of the time crunch facing families. With the increase in single-parenthood and dual-earner families, people in general (and parents specifically) are not available for non-worship church activities. The time spent away from the workplace is often crammed full of family activities as well as typical family errands. When churches schedule their programs at times when the post-nuclear family cannot attend, they are clearly showing a preference for certain family forms as well as raising the cost of participation for those who do not meet those expected forms. As Edgell states, “Churches send messages about appropriate family lifestyles when they offer support groups for single parents or parenting classes designed for men. When women’s group meets at 10 a.m. on a Wednesday, women who work outside of the home may conclude that traditional church-based women’s groups are not relevant to their lives and not
responsive to their concerns.\footnote{Ibid., 4.} In order for families to participate fully in the life of their religion, there must be some way to lower the opportunity costs associated with forgoing other activities so that the family (and its members) can attend and participate in non-worship activities.

Adjusting the scope of the discussion to a slightly more macro understanding of choosing between religions or at the very least parishes, it can be seen that these choices also have costs and benefits associated with them. Familiarity and ease of entrance would certainly lower the cost of membership. Edgell notes:

Religious socialization into a particular tradition during childhood makes it familiar and lowers the cost of participation, leading to stability in religious preference. For an adult, a spouse who attends a particular church may either exert a normative influence on one’s own choice to attend or provide information that makes a particular church (or mosque, or synagogue, or Wiccan group) more familiar or more trusted, reducing the learning costs associated with participation.\footnote{Ibid., 33.}

In any case, participation of other family members makes it less costly for a different family member to be a part of that religion. This same logic carries through when one looks at the benefits of religious participation. Even when reducing the benefits to a purely practical\footnote{In this instance, “practical” references all those benefits that are not “spiritual”.} level, if a single or multiple family members gains a disproportionate benefit from their participation, other family members are more likely to continue their participation in order to support the family’s endeavors. Furthermore, families are most likely to attend, participate, and be members of a religious organization and parish that benefits themselves and their families. Families that are not gaining sufficient benefit to overcome the associated cost will either lessen or stop their participation in the religious body or they will simply take their “business” elsewhere and find a religious body or

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid., 4.]
\item[Ibid., 33.]
\item[In this instance, “practical” references all those benefits that are not “spiritual”.]
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parish that will benefit them. In short, the costs and benefits of religious participation are shared among family members. Families are going to choose a religion and a parish that has the lowest cost, the highest benefit, and the offerings that best match the unit’s needs.

Religious affiliation has a significant effect on the choices people make over the course of their life-cycle due to the impact religious beliefs have on the perceived cost and benefit of activities. Behaviors that pertain to married couple households share in this effect as religion is a “complementary trait” to the marriage.\(^{470}\) This effect carries even further into the life of the family as a unit. The religious cost/benefit implications shift the implications of activities in holding up religious beliefs as well as conforming to the communal religious beliefs of the family. The lower religious participation of non-nuclear and blended families is less symptomatic of a lack or religious interest or a disagreement with a church’s moral teachings and more to do with the cost of participation. Single parent families simply have less time to balance work with parenting. On balance, they often feel that the benefit of formal religious participation is not as great as other endeavors. Blended families (or interreligious marriages) in which the parents are of different faiths often find it easier to engage neither in order to be non-divisive to the family.\(^{471}\)

According to Douglas Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William H. Meredith, “There are five ways that religion may be advantageous to family life: (a) by enhancing the family’s social support network, (b) by sponsoring family activities and recreation, (c) indoctrination in supportive family teachings and values, (d) by providing family social and welfare services, and (d) by encouraging families to seek divine assistance with


personal and family problems.” All of these are possible benefits – not guaranteed benefits. Each religion, and in turn each parish, may offer services and opportunities that speak to each advantage more so than others. Additionally, the demand for each benefit will fluctuate in accordance with each family’s needs. One specific reason for participation in religious organizations is that they may provide some families with greater social capital which can in turn allow greater social outcomes for children, parents, and families. However, some families today do not believe that this accumulation of social capital is possible given that they are excluded from many programs due to their form or the timing of the programs being offered.

The underlying question becomes which side is the actual supply and which side is actually the demand. To wit, should the understanding be that families are demanding certain services and opportunities that churches are to supply them or are churches demanding of the (somewhat) limited and shrinking supply of families and therefore churches are “paying” for these families by providing services? The dominant and most accepted understanding is that religions and churches are the suppliers of services, both worship based and those more practical in nature, and families are shopping for the religion and or parish that best meets their demands.

The changes that have shifted an economic understanding of the relationship between families and churches transcend demographic and sociological shifts in the family. The “church” has transformed from an all-encompassing institution imbued with total authority into a voluntary association where people are capable of exercising choice

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as to the level of authority they cede to the church. The costs to families for non-membership and non-participation have also plummeted in the current age. Individuals and families are far less likely to experience a feeling of social stigma associated with not having a high level of religiosity. As David Martin concludes, “Ecclesiastical monopoly gives way to a religious laissez-faire in which rival religious firms compete on the market for souls.” Churches themselves have to address the needs of the public in order to be more attractive to them. Failing to address the needs of a particular segment of the population makes it much more likely that subset of the population will establish their religious membership within another organization which can meet their needs. Supplying programs that modern families demand and lowering the cost of participating in those programs is the primary means that religions/parishes have for finding more customers/parishioners.

If there is an acceptance that there is a marketplace for religion, there has to be some accounting for the divergent levels of participation in religion that families engage in. In this case, what is being examined is the participatory portion of religiosity. Religiosity is simply defined as “being religious” in both actions such as attending and participating in rituals and values such as placing importance in one’s religious beliefs and ethical principles. While there appears to be a continued reliance on people acting

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475 There is not only competition between religions and parishes for members; it is also a viable social option for families to simply not be members or participate in any organized religion. The social stigma of not being affiliated with a particular house of worship or religion has greatly receded throughout most of the country. Additionally, there are many secular sources that offer similar social support programs similar to many churches. If all that distinguishes religious social offerings from secular social offerings is some notion of spirituality (while also adding on some level of cost to be found in the judgmental moral teachings of a religion), many families will find it easier to simply choose the secular option.
based on their religious values, there is a decrease or stagnation in worship attendance and non-worship program participation. One interesting facet of these trends is that religiosity correlates with age and family status.

Among Catholics, an individual’s age and that age’s relationship to the timing of the Second Vatican Council is highly predictive of religiosity. According to a survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, “Older Catholics, especially those who came of age prior to Vatican II, are typically more involved in Church life and more frequently attend Mass than younger generations of Catholics…knowledge of theology and Church rules is usually higher among older Catholics, but knowledge of the Bible may be greatest among younger generations.”

Perhaps this disparity is reflective of a ceding of authority from the Magisterium which was later moderated by the rise of Christian Fundamentalism which has made the Bible a more central metaphor for the cohort of young people. Of course, the simplest explanation for participation gap among Catholics between young and old is more reflective of the cultural expectations that were placed on adults in their youth than on any specific relationship to the timing of Vatican II.

With regards to life cycles and family form, Penny Edgell’s survey yielded the information which follows here. Married adults with children are far more likely to have higher levels of religiosity than are single individuals or married couples who do not have children. Single parents are more likely to be involved in non-worship activities than are

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Georgetown University, 28/12/2009 
http://cara.georgetown.edu/MarriageSum.pdf

478 There remains the argument as to if the Magisterium “ceded” some authority or if the laity, at some point and for any number of reasons, no longer assented to the Magisterium’s authority.
those without children, but are no more likely to attend worship services. Also, “highly involved” families (those who attend religious worship services at least monthly and also rate the importance of religion in their lives as “very important”) are more likely to be married and have children than either alternative. Reproductions of Edgell’s results are below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Single Parent</th>
<th>Married, No Children</th>
<th>Married With Children &lt;6</th>
<th>Married With Children 6-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attends Church At least monthly</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends Church Weekly or more</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in at least one organized congregational ministry/activity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent involved in at least one organized congregational activity and so is at least one of respondents children</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in other religious organization</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion “very important”</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High involvement – religion “very important” and attends church monthly or more</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The above data measures across religious traditions. Among Catholics, Mass attendance is the primary measurement of participation. CARA’s study of marriage in the Catholic Church found that “Frequency of Mass attendance is a strong indicator of the general importance of Catholicism in a person’s life and of his or her level of commitment to living out the faith.” This trend also carries into participation in non-Mass Church events.  

The obvious explanation for these results is that family formation through marriage or birth are the most likely instances that will bring people back into their church if they had lapsed or will intensify religious commitment somewhat because of the expected benefit to the couple in their marriage or to their children. Tim Heaton and Kristen Goodman comment that, “The influence of religion begins when parents use religious values in socializing their children. Religious rites mark major events in the life cycle including puberty, marriage, births of children, and death. Religion regulates premarital sexual behavior, mate selection, family size, and marital stability.” While there are and have been secular rituals denoting changes in life cycle, there is still a great level of social importance tied to the religious commemoration of life changing events. Events surrounding family formation are important both secularly and religiously important. Furthermore, there are the benefits children receive when religion is a part of their upbringing.

482 For example: reception of a birth certificate and social security card, graduation ceremonies, obtaining a driver’s license, civil marriage, etc.
Evelyn Lehrer notes that participation in religious activities leads to personal well-being. When young people are regularly participatory in religious activities, they tend to do better academically, wait longer before engaging in sexual activity, and are less likely to engage in other risky behaviors. She states that these outcomes are likely because religions “help integrate people into supportive social networks, the teachings of religious traditions and the norms of religious groups generally encourage healthy, constructive conduct, and participation in religious activities can generate important psychological benefits.”

For the family as a whole, continued religious participation also has positive impact on proper formation and stability of the family. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge report that membership in a moral community (i.e. a church) has shown to lead to decreases in divorce and single-parenthood. In fact, this membership has a marked effect on nearly all forms of non-marital sexual expression. Participation in a religious community is good for children but also for their families.

Even though it can be considered common knowledge that being a member of and participating in a moral community such as a parish specifically or a religion generally yields positive benefits for those who are active within the community, there is a growing trend of families (as well as individuals) claiming membership while not actively participating in the community. Membership for many has become a marker of identity while not being a source of activity. People retain their membership labels as a means of personal identification and as a way to continue family lineage or other “tribal”

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associations over time. Religious activity is often at its height in subgroups of religions or within those groups which are actually interreligious in nature. Alcoholics Anonymous, Promise Keepers, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the like allow for outlets of religious practice that transcend religious tribalism while allowing individuals to retain their personal religious identity. These quasi or inter-religious organizations provide rather specific services to families and their members without having to develop an intricate moral code or enforcing any hierarchical authority. Local parishes are often caught between adherence to moral doctrine and being compassionate and caring to their members. Furthermore, these groups tend to schedule their activities in a manner that allows for maximum participation from those who would demand their services. In short, these groups lower the cost of membership and participation while granting specific benefits.

There is significant disagreement about the rate of religious participation in the US. Although there seems to be a general acceptance among sociologists that approximately forty percent of US population attends a religious service in a given week, Mark Chaves and Laura Stephens contend that the actual number is roughly half of that.


486 While every religion would appear to have some moral claims that some of its members disagree with, there is (to my knowledge) no study that measures the number of people who have left a religious institution over a particular moral teaching. Certainly many Anglican Churches have had schisms and lost members over their allowance or disallowance of homosexual ministers or same sex marriages. The Catholic Church has certainly lost members for the reason of any number of its moral teachings. Additionally, the situation surrounding the Catholic Church’s handling of the occurrences of priests committing sexual assault has certainly driven members from the flock. However, there is no easy way to directly link a specific moral teaching or occurrence of moral failing by the hierarchy of a faith to a recession of membership or participation. Furthermore, the assessment would have to measure the number of families/people who stopped their religious participation and membership altogether, the number who left their particular faith/church and found another, and those who retained their membership identity while ceasing or limiting participation. Certainly, the fact that the types of organizations mentioned above are able to gain and retain members to the extent that their “moral teachings” are either not as formal or speak only to a limited portion of their member’s lives.

Either of these numbers illustrates the disparity between claiming membership and active participation with Chaves and Stephens’ assessment obviously showing an even greater disparity. Roughly two-thirds of the US population claims some affiliation to a religion. If two-in-three people claim membership while only one-in-four attends services, there can clearly be seen that many people are members in name only.\textsuperscript{489} Even after granting that the quarter of the population that attends religious services weekly is not the same each and every week, there would have to remain a rather significant portion of those who claim religious membership are utterly non-participatory.

It can be argued that non-participation is a function of a shifting understanding of religion’s place in our cultural zeitgeist. Until recently, studies and common understanding sought to understand the differences among religions. In the 1960’s there was a great divergence in the family and childrearing behaviors between Catholics and Protestants. As Catholics moved up the economic ladder, those differences receded and the defining difference was overall religious attendance and participation and not a particular version of Christian worship.\textsuperscript{490} While there certainly remain differences among religions in their familial practices today, the real differentiation is between those who are members (and participants) of religions and those who are more secular (and non-participants in any organized religion).

Within a religious family, there remains a sense that all of life is imbued with religious implications. Annette Mahoney, Kenneth Pargament, Aaron Murray-Swank,

\textsuperscript{488} Mark Chaves and Laura Stephens, "Church Attendance in the United States," in \textit{Handbook of the Sociology of Religion}, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 85-95. The numbers for Catholic participation are higher in both instances. The “accepted” and standard number for Catholics has been roughly forty-six percent. Chaves and Stephens have found that the actual numbers are closer to twenty-five percent of self-identifying Catholics attend Mass on a given weekend.

\textsuperscript{489} \textit{Ibid}.

and Nichole Murray-Swank’s article “Religion and the Sanctification of Family Relationships” details the manner in which religious families tune their understanding of their religion’s place in the greater secular culture. “Sanctification” is defined as “a psychological process in which aspects of life are perceived by people as having spiritual character and significance.” Religion fills family life with a spiritual character and, therefore, allows the family to be a vehicle for sanctification. Mahoney et. al. state that family sanctification happens when an individual perceives an object (in this case the family or some aspect thereof) as manifesting one’s beliefs or lived experience of God. This process begins at the earliest stages of individual and family life. “The spiritual significance of birth is highlighted by the universality of religious naming ceremonies in which God’s role in the creation of a new human being is duly noted (for example, Catholic baptisms).”

There are many benefits to perceiving the family as a sanctified institution. The authors list the following: individuals develop a deeper sense of meaning from family life and relationships, a greater feeling of security in family relationships (as they are understood to also involve God), and spiritual benefits such as facilitating personal spirituality, greater ability to cope through religion, and significantly enhanced intergenerational transmission of religious faith and practice. Furthermore, individual members of the family will likely be more willing to make greater sacrifices to benefit the family, be more forgiving to other family members, and be more constructive in repairing strained or fractured family relationships because they understand the family as

492 Ibid.
493 Ibid., 223.
a unit to be their route to sanctification. These benefits are mediated by the dissonance that can be found between the quasi-divine expectations of a sanctified family versus our common human failings.\textsuperscript{494} However, these benefits are limited by the fact that a family that views their existence as being sanctified seem to be limited to the family unto itself and do not translate to the family’s relationship with the larger world. A family’s ability to effect communal change is mediated by its ability to have its worldview be understandable to those who do not share it. Personal, salvific notions of religion remain deeply personal. Popular manifestations of religion are functions of culture.\textsuperscript{495}

Hence there arises the conflict between secular culture and religious culture. While there are some parallels between the two such as an increased reliance on understanding marriage in terms of romance,\textsuperscript{496} there is an increased tension between the two worldviews. While many people do not see the increased passivity with regards to religious practice as being a threat to our overall culture, those individuals and families who are highly religious are significantly more likely to feel that their lifestyle is under attack by secular culture. Because secular culture places less emphasis on religious practice than at previous times in history, those who are devout practitioners see institutions such as the family as being threatened by that same non-involvement. This situation leads to a hardening of ideology and a backlash against the dominant cultural understanding of the day. Bryan Turner points out that “Christian fundamentalism in America is a direct response to secular humanism. A major feature of such

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid.
fundamentalist movements is the desire to restore family values, improve Christian education, and protect children from lifestyles that are simultaneously anti-American and anti-Christian.\textsuperscript{497} However, the dynamic is not truly dualistic in its nature. There are families who are actively religious, families who are actively secular (or anti-religious), and those families who are either passively non-religious or simply too burdened by the other constraints of their lives to have a legitimate stake in the issue.

One area of a family’s life where the family’s self-understanding reflects how likely they are to go along with dominant cultural expectations is in work patterns. Higher rates of church attendance make it less likely that a person, especially a parent, will accept a greater work load that will further limit the time that they can spend with their family. This unwillingness to sacrifice family time is true even in the face of (significant) economic gain.\textsuperscript{498} There is no direct equivocation among those who do not attend religious services\textsuperscript{499} but the dominant cultural understanding would be that the individual should accept the increased workload, especially if it offered an increased income, because that would be of greater value to the family than increased time together. A Christian understanding of the family should certainly lead a family to value time together above one of its members working extended hours. Or, as Rosemary Radford Ruether comments, “Working all the time is not a virtue but a sin, a grave violation of our relation to God and to one another in life-sustaining rhythms of creation and re-

\textsuperscript{497} Ibid., 298.
\textsuperscript{499} What the above statement means is that there is no correlation between accepting or turning down increased work hours except in the case of those who attend church services regularly in which case, they are far more likely to not accept the increased workload.
Consequently, the dominant secular understanding of the importance of work is in direct conflict with a Christian understanding of a family’s responsibility to itself.

As secular culture continues to expand and participation in religion wanes, those who remain religious are finding themselves out of the cultural mainstream. The argument that religion is actually a controlling cultural force is rebutted by Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge when they state, “Often enough, religious organizations and movements challenge the prevailing secular culture, and in so doing can be seen as a source of deviant behavior rather than a source of social control.”

Given that the secular trend is moving further away from a stable two-parent married family, what most Christian churches preach as standard are becoming a “deviant” lifestyle. Religions are bound by their own moral codes, not by prevailing social norms. Indeed, conformity to a religion’s moral code is one significant factor in establishing attachment to that organization. Therefore, the central means of passing on Christian moral norms is not through the general culture of the country, it is through the family itself.

The passing on of religion from familial generation to subsequent generations has been taken for granted. While this process remains the most common means of any person becoming a member of a religion, there is an increase in individuals who do not practice their parent’s religion as they become adults. As family forms and cultural

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502 Ibid.
503 Primarily, these individuals are moving from a particular religious tradition into either non-participation or no organized religion at all. In essence, their parents’ religion loses its meaning in their lives. However, there remains a significantly smaller number of people who leave their parents’ religion for another religion.
expectations have drifted from those previously thought to be both static and normative, the transmission of religion across generations has also begun to wane. As Edgell sums up, “For individuals, religious participation is associated not only with traditional family forms and practices, but also with happiness and satisfaction in marriage and parent-child relationships. Religious institutions depend on families to pass on the religious tradition and for the resources – money, time, membership – that enable them to survive.”

The danger to families and religions is that they will lose their linkage. If this separation continues, families will begin to lose the stabilizing force and other positive effects of religion and religions will continue to lose social import and members. A significant portion of this problem can be explained by the attitudes of parents and of religious leaders. As outlined in earlier chapters of this work, the Roman Catholic understanding of the family as a domestic church focuses almost solely on nuclear families. It can be argued that parents are taking the issue far less seriously than religious leaders are. In fact, the Religion and Newsweekly survey cited earlier in this chapter found that only twenty-six percent of parents were worried “a lot” that their children would maintain their religious tradition while sixty percent of respondent parents believed that it was up to their children to decide their religious views. Yet, of those same parents, seventy-four percent believed that it was likely (forty-five percent responding “very likely”) that their faith of their own choosing or (slightly more commonly) they will join the religion of their spouse. These phenomena will be discussed later in this section.


Although, it must be noted that the Magisterium does seem to understand (at least John Paul II did in his writings) that the future of the Church is built upon the continued participation of families. Perhaps one could argue that the Magisterium understands the gravity of the situation, but is wanting when it comes to a means of dealing with the challenge.
children would remain of the same denomination or faith tradition.\(^{506}\) This study found that these responses were “true regardless of household structure, though more religious and religiously conservative parents express more confidence than their less religious or more religiously liberal counterparts that their children will inherit their parents’ religion.”\(^{507}\) Therefore, the question is, “who or what can help in the transmission of religion from practicing parents to their children?”\(^{508}\)

Marjorie Lindner Gunnoe and Kristin Moore’s article “Predictors of Religiosity Among Youth Aged 17-22: A Longitudinal Study of the National Survey of Children” analyzes those factors that are most likely going to impact the continuance of participation in a religion as an individual grows from a child under the control of their parents into early adulthood. Their work finds that:

The best predictors of youth religiosity were ethnicity and peers’ church attendance during high school. Other predictors were, in order of decreasing magnitude: residence in the south, gender, religious schooling during childhood, maternal religiosity, church attendance during childhood, the importance mothers placed on childhood religious training, and an interaction variable identifying religious mothers who were very supportive.\(^{509}\)

Of course, one variable that these results seem to leave to the side that is certainly relevant is parental control over who their child associates with as a peer. Parents select schools and do their best to surround their children with peers that will correspond with

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http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week908/ReligionAndFamily_Questionnaire.pdf


\(^{508}\) The question of “What is to be done with those who have already stopped or never started practicing religion?” will be addressed below. It is certainly a different sociological – and theological – issue to consider how to keep a person a practitioner versus how to make a person return or become a practitioner.

their own views.\textsuperscript{510} Perhaps their variables of “peer church attendance” and “religious schooling during childhood” may have a significant overlap. Another factor that bears mentioning is that there is an increase in the weight of the variable in its relation to the strength of the bond. For instance, another study found that matrilineal religiosity has a significant effect on the strength of mother–child bonds.\textsuperscript{511} It can be assumed that the religiosity of an adolescent’s best friend specifically, or peer group in general, will have a significant effect on the religiosity of the adolescent-come-adult in question.

Going beyond specific individual relationships, religious role models have the greatest effect on religiosity among youth. The status of the relationship of that role model (be they parent, sibling, peer, etc.) is less impactful than their simple existence.\textsuperscript{512} If parents are concerned with the intergenerational transmission of religion then they are certainly capable of attempting to make themselves into the needed role model. This is also an instance where a religious leader has the opportunity to step in and become a model for future religious behavior. However, that leader would first have to have an opportunity to do so; parental indifference to the transmission of their religion to their child would certainly preclude such an event. Beyond role models, Gunnoe and Moore’s study remains somewhat inconclusive. “Religiosity is also predicted by socioeconomic status, race, and family structure, but articulating these associations is complicated by the confounding of these variables with each other and the fact that they predict various

\textsuperscript{510} This control is exerted with varying degrees of success. However, there seems to be little doubt that parents’ ability to choose the geographic, residential, and educational location for their family has an enormous effect on what their child’s peer group will be.\textsuperscript{511} LD Pearce and WG Axinn, ”The Impact of Family Religious Life on the Quality of Mother–Child Relations,” \textit{American Sociological Review} 63 (1998): 810-28.\textsuperscript{512} Marjorie Lindner Gunnoe and Kristin A. Moore, ”Predictors of Religiosity Among Youth Aged 17-22: A Longitudinal Study of the National Survey of Children,” \textit{Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion} 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 613-22.
aspects of religiosity differently."\textsuperscript{513} Or, to summarize, role models, especially among the peer group (among other factors) have been shown to have a positive effect on the religiosity of young adults; yet, there remains a great deal of explanation left to be concluded.

Even if parents do their best to become a “good” religious role model for their child or children, there is no guarantee that it will ultimately assure that their child retains their religion or that their religiosity will be lived out within the same faith. Andrew Greeley argues that revolt against one’s parents can be seen as a revolt against their religion; additionally, the inverse is true. Revolt against one’s religion can be viewed as a revolt against that child’s parents.\textsuperscript{514} Hence, the (arguably) natural tendency of all children and young adults to test their parents’ limits or to outright rebel against their parents’ belief structures may have a negative impact on long term religiosity. But it must be noted that this impulse is not new to the human condition while the reduction in the transmission of religiosity is indeed novel.

Perhaps the true change is in the lack of effort often placed on being educators of children by their parents. In the past, nearly all education (including religious education) was the realm of the family. As children have begun to attend school away from the family at an earlier and earlier age, educational control has been ceded to a public institution.\textsuperscript{515} Given the separation of church and state, in the absence of the family’s choice to send their children to a religiously run school or farm out the duty to some other

\textsuperscript{513} Ibid., 615.
\textsuperscript{514} Andrew Greeley, \textit{Religion, a Secular Theory} (New York: The Free Press, 1982).
non-familial entity,\textsuperscript{516} many children are not receiving a religious education because many parents do not view “education” (let alone “religious education”) as something they are responsible for. Or even stronger, they no longer view religious education as a necessary part of educating their children. Family is the primary source of information and explanation relating to the supernatural. Because of this fact, families, and indeed parents, are the primary influence on a child’s (later an adult) religious preference. The second biggest influence in religious preference is that of the spouse. In this case, it is far more likely that the more religious spouse will “pull” the other spouse over to their religion.\textsuperscript{517}

Because most people who are religious practice the religion of their parents, fertility rates greatly affect the religious composition of a society.\textsuperscript{518} While most people who have changed their religion have done so in order that they and their spouse will share a religious membership,\textsuperscript{519} most people who leave a particular religion actually leave religious practice altogether. However, there remains a need to account for those individuals who fall away from or simply stop practicing their religion only to return as a member of a family later in life. Even those people who practice their parents’ religion as they are being raised often stop practicing for a period before returning. The “normal” life event that brings a non-participant back into active membership is normally their marriage or the birth of their child. However, even that is not as much of a given today.

\textsuperscript{516} This argument would include efforts to send children to CCD or CCD type programs associated with a particular church or faith.


\textsuperscript{519} Ibid.
as it was in the past. Edgell notes, “The natural and automatic link between religion and family formation is not so automatic today, but rather depends on how people interpret the meaning of religious involvement and its relevance to their own lives.”

That being said, she continues that “For both men and women, being older, being married, and having children in the home all predict higher levels of church attendance.” As becoming and being married and having and raising children are integral in the process of forming and maintaining a family, they are of concern here.

Marriage is a central opportunity for bringing lapsed members back into the religious flock. In the Roman Catholic faith, the requirement of formal marriage preparation classes prior to a church wedding clearly can be an impetus to returning. At the very least, a couple who wishes to be married within the faith in which they were raised (in this case) will have to contact a local pastor and make certain efforts so that they can fulfill the requirements of the religion. If the couple in question views this process as indicative of a lifestyle change, they may continue their participation. Furthermore, if the couple actually surrenders to the religious meaning of the marriage, over and above its secular meaning, they will be likely to view their marriage as an opportune time to return to their religion. An important caveat to this point is that fewer couples today feel it necessary to involve the Church in their marriage. Furthermore, many fulfill the requirements of their marriage preparation as directed by the Church, but then return to a non-participatory lifestyle. The point made here is not that there is a

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522 Theologically speaking, the preparation, Church involvement, etc. deal with the sacramentality of the endeavor. While that may be important under the greater context of this work, sociologically speaking, the issue at hand is the opportunity to return to participatory membership.
guarantee that a Church Marriage will return lost members to the Church. Rather, a Church marriage and the preparation that it entails can and, in some cases is, the opportunity a couple seizes to facilitate their return to regular Church participation.

Another instance within the context of a marriage that may bring an individual, if not the entire family, back into a participatory membership in their religion is marital problems. Even those who are non-participatory or marginally members of a faith may return to it or seek counsel from its members in a time of crisis. The religious facet of the family may sometimes be muted but retained in a manner that will increase the likelihood that religion can be a source of answers in light of problematic or difficult marital circumstances. Sixty-six percent of married Catholics say that they would seek out help if they were experiencing marital difficulties.

Many if not most religions have programs in place to support troubled marriages. Individuals and families may be more likely to seek support from their religion than from a secular or public institution due to the stigma attached to asking for help. Douglas Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William Meredith posit that “Family services provided by a religion may not have the social stigma associated with using community-based programs, thus families may be more likely to seek help provided by the church…Social support was most highly related to family satisfaction.”

In order to reap more fully the benefits of being in a marriage and family, married couples and families turn to religion for support and initial welcoming and acknowledgement of the life stage change.

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The other major life transition that commonly brings individuals and families back into a religion is the birth of a child. The movement from single individual or married couple to parent is also an instance that begs for religious involvement. Many studies have found conclusions that parallel what the Religion and Ethics Newsweekly survey found. “Parents, regardless if they are married or not, remain quite religious. Though unmarried parents attend church less than married parents, religion is every bit as important in their lives, and they adopt many informal religious practices outside of church.”

The birth of a child may also bring new parents back into their religion because they believe that religion will have a positive and structuring effect on their children. “Religions and families reinforce one another in two ways: through social support and social control. The social support dimension emphasizes that religion supports family life through norms that encourage love, family solidarity, and marital satisfaction; the social control dimension emphasizes the impact of religion as constraining behavior – for example by sanctioning deviance.” In short, parents tend to initiate or escalate their religiosity after the birth of a child because they want the benefits of membership for their child or children.

The final family formative situation that often brings a person into a “new” religion is when one spouse marries a person of a different faith and converts for the purpose of their marriage. In a marriage in which one spouse is a Protestant or Catholic and the other is not, conversion to the religion of the Protestant or Catholic spouse so that


there is religious homogeneity makes the couple as statistically likely to remain stable as
couples who came to the relationship already members of the same religious tradition.527
While there are always theological underpinnings to this decision, there is also often a
familial basis to the decision. Due to the limited time families have to undertake
communal action and the complexity in explaining to children why mommy and daddy
do not go to the same church, it is also easier for the spouses to be of the same religion if
they are going to participate in any religion.

Religiosity is most commonly raised when life events are tied to family
formation. Becoming a parent and/or getting married are the two primary instances for a
family to possibly begin or resume their religious participation. Darren Sherkat and
Christopher Ellison summarize while adding in the notion of timing to the argument.

The close association between religious commitments, family formation, and
childbearing evidences itself in a number of life course influences on religious
behaviors. Generally, marriage and childbearing boost religious participation,
while divorce and cohabitation reduce religious activity. Importantly, the timing
of the life course events has been shown to mediate their influence on religious
behaviors. When individuals marry and have children at ‘normatively
appropriate’ ages, they will benefit more from the social support provided to
parents in religious organizations. Research shows that people who have children
in their late 20s and 30s increase their religious participation while those who rear
their children earlier do not.528

While families are participating less in religions and their tangential activities, there
remain times in their life cycles that often inspire families back into practice. If

527 Evelyn L. Lehrer, Religion, Economics, and Demography: The Effects of Religion on Education, Work,
528 Darren E. Sherkat and Christopher G. Ellison, "Recent Developments and Current Controversies in the
Sociology of Religion," Annual Review of Sociology 25 (1999), 368. The authors cite the following works
in the passage: Stolzberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite, "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood: Age, Family,
Thornton, Axinn, and Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," American
"Counterculture or Continuity? Competing Influences on Baby Boomers. Religious Orientations and
participation and membership is to be increased, one must ask if it is the responsibility for
cfamilies to see these life changing events as a calling back to their religion or if religions
should be more active in their pursuit of having members return to engaged membership.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty in attracting families back into religious practice is
that the points of re-entry are often viewed as “events” and not true life changes. The
birth and baptism of a child does not always mean that child’s family will return to active
church membership. Many couples view marriage preparation and the marriage
ceremony as an event that their church of membership should be involved with, but do
not view marriage as something intrinsically tied to their religious existence. The reason
for this conflict is certainly due to the tension between secular and religious
understandings of parenthood and marriage. However, it is also most likely due to the
fact that most churches do not address families as they are; they address families as they
wish they were. The “standard package” for family programming was settled on in the
1950s and has not truly reformed to current demographics while continuing project
anachronistic expectations on families.\(^{529}\) That standard package is based on a traditional
nuclear family form encompassing a married couple and their children in which the
husband works and the wife stays home and raises their children. Few families meet
these expectations today. While it is true that marriage and parenting often lead to
increased religious involvement (relatively more so with men than women),\(^{530}\) families
will only participate in the life of their church to the extent that they view it as a
worthwhile endeavor. As long as there is a discord between how families actually exist
and their specific forms and how churches teach families should be, religion will have a

\(^{530}\) Ibid.
limited role in the number and types of families they can reach. To quote Arland
Thornton, “As religious groups try both to support traditional values and behavior and to
assist individuals who are experiencing nontraditional living arrangements, they are
likely to experience continual strain and ambivalence.”

As illustrated earlier in this work, there is a significant divergence between how
the Catholic Church expects the family to be – nuclear at least – and the demographic
realities of families. This leads to a reality where the Church can only offer certain
services and remain faithful to its own dogma. This divergence may by the explanation
as to why Edgell found that Catholic Priests tend to have the biggest divergence in their
rhetoric as a response to changes to the family. While there are liberal minded priests
who try to make their parishes and programming as open and accepting as possible, there
are more conservative minded priests who attempt to stick with the standard package and
do not welcome non-nuclear families through their words or programming. In fact, both
Catholic Priests and Protestant Ministers are likely to espouse a language of inclusion
while at the same time affirming dogmatic and neo-patriarchal ideals of family forms and
behavior. Edgell summarizes the issue the following way:

Congregations thrive when they balance an authoritative voice that speaks to
“what is right” and provide a strong moral vision of the good family while also
acting authoritatively to achieve “what is caring” and inclusive. They thrive when
they adapt to changes in the family while providing a distinctive moral voice that
helps members assess new family realities in light of an enduring religious
tradition. Ironically, congregations that do this also find themselves attracting not
only “traditional” families but also single parents, single adults, childless couples,
and those who attend primarily to express their own religious values and not

531 Arland Thornton, “Influences of Family and Religion in a Changing World,” Journal of Marriage and
Family 47, no. 2 (May 1985), 388.
155.
533 Penny Edgell, “In Rhetoric and Practice: Defining the "Good Family" in Local Congregations,” in
Handbook of the Sociology of Religion, ed. Michele Dillon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2003), 164-78.
because the congregation in intimately intertwined with their own family or the raising of children.\textsuperscript{534}

Basically, families have already changed; it is up to churches to meet this new reality.

This change is necessary not only for the betterment of families, but also for the continuance and strengthening of churches. Gerald Foley points out those families who do live out their religious commitments are an important means for individuals, other families, and the Roman Catholic Church as an institution to realize their/its true mission. “In a church which stumbles over social justice awareness, families with a sense of mission teach us greater concern for our brothers and sisters…families remind us that God is present in our unpredictable relationships with one another.”\textsuperscript{535} Religion in general and religiosity specifically has shown time and again to have a positive effect on the family. It contextualizes the family in a new and sanctified way. Religions are capable of organizing large numbers of people into a mobilized force for social change because they provide divine (as opposed to worldly) moral explanations as to how the world should be. However, religious involvement and the intensity therein do not necessarily dictate that there will be involvement in social action; merely that it is one opening for the possibility.\textsuperscript{536} Churches need to be inclined to encourage membership, but also to find ways that encourage participation in programming. Programming should be geared to meeting the needs of families as they are because that will increase the number of families who are active which will benefit more families, the church in question, and society as a whole. Because religions are the connection between the


ordinary and the divine, Douglas Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William Meredith state plainly that “Religious leaders may have much greater opportunity to intervene in behalf of families than other community agencies or educational institutions.” When families engage (or in some many cases re-engage) in religious practice, religious leaders gain significant influence over the expectations of that family. But this influence will not exist if families are not filling the pews, participating in the greater life of a church, or seeing the value of its teachings.

Conclusion

The “family” as we know it today is not the family as it has been. People are getting married later in life and the previously considered intrinsic relationship between marriage and procreation is slowly transitioning into two separate (yet related) topics. These changes are rooted in changing cultural mores as well as the demographic changes that they bring about and reinforce. Rose Krieder and Diana Elliot illustrate all of these points in their presentation of the demographics of American living arrangements.

Changes in the number and type of households are influenced by patterns of population growth, shifts in the age composition of the population, and the decisions individuals make about their living arrangements. Demographic trends in marriage, cohabitation, divorce, fertility, and morality also affect family and household composition. Moreover, shifts in social norms, values, laws, and the economy and improvements in health care also influence how people organize their lives. Individual decisions produce aggregate societal change in household and family composition.

Due to increased longevity, economic shifts, single-parenthood, and other factors, multi-generation families are becoming more common. While there is an increase in multi-generation households, what is even more prevalent is an involvement of the grandparent

537 Douglas A. Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William H. Meredith, "Religious Belief and Practice: A Potential Asset in Helping Families," Family Relations 39, no. 4 (October 1990), 447.
generation in the normal parenting activity of the family. Demographically speaking, it would be at least anachronistic if not altogether incorrect to equate “family” solely with the nuclear family.

Sociologists today are becoming more accepting of the idea that studying the family as solely the nuclear family while treating all other forms as perversions has outlived its usefulness. The post-nuclear family is best understood in terms of relationships and outcomes rather than formation and form. Sinikka Elliott and Debora Umberson note that “Using the two-parent structure as a benchmark against which all other family arrangements are compared also masks the importance of the quality of the relationships.”

Non-nuclear families are capable of maintaining and supporting positive familial relationships while having their own difficulties and benefits relative to the nuclear family. What separates successful families from unsuccessful families is if they are (1) capable of meeting their own needs or (2) have sufficient support in meeting their needs if they are incapable of meeting them on their own. In some cases that support is found in the extended family while in others that support is provided by a non-family source. With regards to this work, the source of support that is currently underutilized is religion.

Stephen Post points out that “It would be regrettable not to encourage a religious partnership with the commonweal, so long as public marriage and parenting programs stress commitment and responsibility in marriage and family as basic values.”

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families are either directed at an increasingly small number of families because non-nuclear families are either unable or unwilling to participate in such programs. All families are in need of support. Religions can offer that support as well as additional benefits that are found through religious participation and a view of the family as a possibly sanctified structure. Yet, religious dogma (as well as scheduling and some other practical concerns) often scares away the families that are most in need of their assistance. Religion, culture, and the family have to be reconciled in some manner so that they can all benefit from the other.

Religions still have power in shaping cultural expectations in the realm of family life. Edgell proclaims, “The message that local religious institutions send are powerful because they shape the way that religious institutions include or exclude people based on their family situations. And they are powerful because of the cultural influence that religious institutions have on the larger society and the way religious discourse can shape broader public conceptions of what kind of families are morally legitimate.” Given the current state of family demographics, it appears that legitimacy (or as the case may be illegitimacy) in the eyes of religions have not prevented an escalation in the number of non-nuclear families. However, religious institutions have seemingly retained their ability to label those forms as illegitimate. The following chapter will seek to reconcile the Roman Catholic understanding of the family as domestic church with the sociological data found in this chapter.

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Chapter 4: A Theological Analysis and Critique of the Concept “Domestic Church”

Introduction

It has been previously established in this dissertation that the Roman Catholic Church reintroduced\(^{542}\) the understanding of a family’s possibility of being a “domestic church” or a “church in miniature” as part of the proceedings of and documents generated through Vatican II. That theological presentation has been built upon by Pope John Paul II and the US Catholic Bishops and has been given a somewhat clearer and more definitive analysis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. By presenting the Church as the “people of God” and families as a specific collective manifestation of those people Bernard Boelen writes that, “The members of the Church and their families, therefore, are seen as constituting the reality of the Church rather than subjects of the ecclesial institution.”\(^{543}\) The family as a domestic church is a specific incarnation of the Church itself.

Furthermore, as the point of connection between the Church and the world, families find themselves wholly as members of both realities and able to effect change in the world. Mitch and Kathy Finley point out that “The domestic church/family is an especially good position to play an effective part in this mission proclaiming the gospel in ways that are credible in today’s world. For the ideals and values upon which the family

\(^{542}\) The idea of this term as being “reintroduced” can certainly be disputed. The shift in what we understand to be a family and a contemporary understanding of ecclesiology can be seen as a point of departure from any use of the term *ecclesia domestica* pre-Vatican II. However, the notion of the term’s “reintroduction” is in line with the understanding put forward specifically in the documents of Vatican II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Perhaps “appropriating the term for contemporary usage” would be a more adequate wordage for the process that has occurred, but the choice here will be to remain in line with the Church’s self-understanding of the process.

is founded are precisely the ideals and values for which so many people long.”

Their choice of words and method of presenting the argument indicates that they seem to be arguing that the family is especially capable of presenting the message of the Gospel because people better know and identify with families than they do the Church. This certainly may be more in line with the lived reality of the laity, but it is not as clear in the thought and theological presentation to the laity. In any event, there is consensus among the Magisterium and among theologians that the family can be a domestic church providing a real presence of Church in the world. The root cause of the ability to make the Church, and in turn Christ, present in the world (as well as the obligations of that call and ability) are still somewhat open to debate. The primary source of the tension all reduces to if it is solely a nuclear family sacramentally rooted in Christian marriage that is capable of being a domestic church or if any/some/all other forms of family are equally capable of being a domestic church.

The sociological underpinning to this theological understanding of the family is that there has been and remains to be an inherent link between family formation and religious experience and life. As previously stated in this work, Penny Edgell notes that “The natural and automatic link between religion and family formation is not so automatic today, but rather depends on how people interpret the meaning of religious involvement and its relevance to their own lives.” Essentially, individuals and families who already exhibit high levels of religiosity will almost certainly recognize their life events as religious events, while families that are either marginal or non-participatory

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members of a religion may not see the religious aspects of specific or general events of their or their family’s life. While the tension continues among theologians as to what form(s) of family can be accepted as “normal” (or sufficient in their form to be counted among domestic churches), there is no doubt among demographers and sociologists as to what is “normal” for a family in the contemporary United States. The US Census Bureau defines a nuclear family as a married couple living with their own biological children. Only half of all families nationally with children under the age of eighteen in the home meet this definition. Even beyond this understanding of families with children as being necessarily nuclear is the fact that adulthood is no longer solely defined by marriage and parenting. Quoting Edgell again to further the point, “Most Americans spend some portion of their adult lives outside of a nuclear family, forming and reforming familylike connections periodically over the course of their lives, causing many to rethink long-held assumptions about the necessity of marriage and parenting for adults’ happiness, security, and well-being.” Sociologists are beginning to recognize that defining “family” by structure is merely a surface means of commenting on a much more complex reality characterized by deep and abiding relationships. Sinikka Elliott and Debora Umberson comment that “Using the two-parent structure as a benchmark against which all other family arrangements are compared also masks the importance of the

546 It can be inferred that there is also tension between those theologians who believe the Magisterium’s presentation of the domestic church as only being modeled by the nuclear family is too restrictive and not in line with the lived experience of the everyday believer.
quality of the relationships." This change in sociological understanding and analysis of the family is being coupled with the reclaimed understanding that “traditional nuclear family” that so many are pining for to return to its central means of defining family is an anachronism. Donald Miller summarizes that “There never was a ‘golden age’ of the traditional family. There have been only real families coping with changing demographics.”

The point of connection between the theological hermeneutic of the family as domestic church and sociological understanding of how the family and religion are interrelated is centered on participation in the religion and the family’s interaction with their communities (both secular and religious). Families are most likely to turn to social structures which they feel will most benefit their continued existence and even flourishing as a family unit. By identifying the family as a domestic church, the Roman Catholic Church has recognized the family as a social structure that should be nurtured and supported in the faith and as a collective social unit that exists in the world. Families’ self-identification as a domestic church implies that there must be a social mission for the family if that identification is to remain in line with Catholic Social Teaching. Also, by acknowledging themselves as a domestic church, the family will, to whatever extent it is capable of, understand its daily and mundane activities as possible occasions of religious experience.

550 Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christfides Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 51.
To the extent that the preceding is correct and as a means of outlining the analysis that will be undertaken in this chapter, the definition and function of a domestic church must be assessed. The term “domestic church” is at once a sacramental, ecclesiological, sociological, and moral definition of the Christian family. It is sacramental in that it is clearly identifying the family as a possible symbolic revelation of Christ and a path to salvation. It is ecclesiological in that it is defining the family’s relationship to the Roman Church and its specific ability to be the smallest unit of a specific church, the Roman Catholic Church. It is a sociological definition in that it seeks to establish acceptable family formation and forms. Domestic church is a moral definition in parallel to its sociological component of proper formation and acceptable forms and also in that the term implies actions to be taken by the family’s members and it characterizes the familial relationships and the relationships that members (individually and collectively) are to have with those outside the church (both domestic and Universal). Perhaps this moral call is best stated by Lisa Sowle Cahill when she says, “The vocation of Christian families is to embody discipleship in all the ways and in all the particular relationships that make up their daily existence, with all its complicated ties to others near and far. In so doing, the Christian family will begin to transform civil society and all the other co-arising institutions through and which Christians exist with others on this planet.”

While this understanding of the family as domestic church certainly requires that families recognize themselves as such, in order for the definition to be practical and functional, it must also be met by some shift in understanding, or at least an expansion of possibilities, by the Church itself. A family’s self-understanding as a domestic church should “bring people to more responsibly participate in the larger reality and, indeed,

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mystery of the Church.” However, as previously noted, that participation will be sustained if the Church responds by supporting families as they are and offer religious and practical programming that will allow families to live as a domestic church and succeed as families in the world. Florence Caffrey Bourg notes that the “task in exploring or working with domestic churches is not to concentrate solely on ideals, nor to give up on them as unrealistic, but to attend to the dynamic and often tense relationship between the two which is at the heart of the families’ growth as humans and as Christians.” By focusing solely on ideal families, those families most in need of support are left out or feel neglected in a manner that will lead them to find support and comfort elsewhere. To the extent that a family must acknowledge their Christian mission of being church in their lives, it must be an integrated facet of the entirety of their life. Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz make this point in the following manner:

A family is Christian when Christ is placed in the hearts of its members, and not only on the walls of the bedroom or dining room. A family and a marriage are Christian, when they acknowledge in theory and practice, the Lordship of Christ; when they profess in words and deeds that Jesus is the ‘sole Lord.’ This is the profession of the Church, the profession which the ‘little church,’ which every Christian family, must profess.

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555 The focus solely on ideal families may and can lead to some families to leave a specific parish if not the Church altogether. If the Church’s message as it relates to families only pertains to half of the families that comprise it, there is going to be a significant level of disconnect. However, as further discussed at several points in this chapter, this work does not advocate that the Roman Catholic Church drop all of its moral understanding of right sexual relationships in order to reach all families. Particular alterations to Church Teaching are beyond the scope of this work. However, there remain a significant number of non-nuclear families who are not continuing their existence through an illicit familial lifestyle. These families must be accounted for.
556 Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz, *Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church*, trans. Aloysius Owen (Staten Island: Alba House, 1982), 21-22. It is worth noting here that Alessio and Munoz do not theologically accept a family not rooted in Christian marriage as being a possible domestic church. Hence, while their quotation cited above can apply to all families as will be discussed herein, the authors themselves would not make such a claim.
In essence, there must be a greater acknowledgment on the part of families that they can be domestic churches and that acknowledgment must be met with a somewhat more open understanding by the Church of what families are capable of living that reality.

What follows here is an understanding of the family that acknowledges both the sacramental and ecclesial facets of the definition of domestic church. A deepened understanding of the domestic church as a sacramental and ecclesial reality will then give rise to the sociological understanding of family that can meet those aims as well as the moral obligations implied therein.

**The Church is a Sacrament, The Family Can Be a Church, the Domestic Church is a Sacrament**

In order to critique the theology of domestic church as it is understood by the Magisterium and other theologians, some questions must first be settled. The first of these issues to be addressed is the basis for understanding the family as a sacramental reality. What will follow here is a presentation that the family is not primarily a possible place for the experience of Christ because of the ritual sacramental interaction(s) between individual members of the family and Christ (or through the experience of a specific Sacrament of the Church), but rather because the domestic church is a Church.

Following this analysis will be a look at what ritualized Sacrament is the root cause of the domestic church’s ability to be Church.

Just as the notion of the family as a domestic church traces its roots back to the times of house churches, the discipleship found in house churches and other gatherings of worship was found to be sacramental in the early Church. Bernard Cooke presents this historical and sacramental analysis in the following way, “The experience of Christian
discipleship was sacramental of Christ’s presence. As a Christian, one could, along with the other members of the community, ‘sense’ the presence of the risen Lord whenever the community assembled (for example, for the ‘breaking of bread’), and this awareness could extend to the whole of life.”

Cooke’s final point is central to the understanding (then and now) that a Christian social collective – which we come to know as Church – can manifest the reality and presence of Christ in a manner that is transformative of those who share this experience even after the assembly has concluded. We can experience the Risen Christ in social groups and gatherings in a manner that binds the group together and extends into both the religious and non-religious aspects of that social group’s life as a collective and as individuals.

While this understanding of Church as sacrament can be found going back to the earliest forms of Christian churches, the theology was formally reclaimed in the proceedings and documents of Vatican II. Peter Fink summarizes this theological understanding by stating, “As Christ is the sacrament of God in history, namely, God’s visible manifestation, tangible presence, and embodied saving grace, in like manner the church is Christ’s sacrament in history until he shall come again. This extension of the word sacrament to the church is crucial to Vatican II’s theology of sacraments.”

Christ is the actual historical presence of embodied salvation and the Church is the historical and structural manifestation of Christ’s continued presence in history. When discussing the model of Church as Sacrament in his Models of the Church, Avery Dulles makes the following statement. “The bonds [forming the Church] are all the social, visible signs of

558 Specifically found in LG #1 and several other passages. This passage will be analyzed within this chapter.
the grace of Christ operative in believing Christians. Grace comes to expression in them when they manifest their faith, hope, and charity by witness, worship, and service.”

Hence, the sacramental nature of the Church is made present in and through its members. As both members and as a specific manifestation of the Church, the family (as domestic church) can be sacramental as the larger Church through the grace filled bonds of the family (within itself and with Christ) that can be made manifest in the family’s religious and day-to-day lives. The family and the Church should be in a reciprocal relationship centered on their Christian character. Maureen Gallagher reaches this conclusion when she states “that the larger church community is enriched by the sacramentality of the family and that the family is nurtured by the holiness present in the larger church community.” These sentiments are echoed by Donald Miller. “With the sacramentalization proper to the family there is a two-way relationship whereby the family effects, affects, and is affected by the larger realities which it makes present, namely, society and the Church.” The affectation that takes place between the domestic church and the Church certainly evidences the relationship between the domestic church and the Church’s founder, Christ.

In order to reach the above conclusions, this portion of the text will follow a three step analysis. First, a theological explanation of how and why the Church is considered a sacrament will be presented as the basis for what follows. Second, an exposition of how and why the domestic church is a specific form of Church will be undertaken. Finally,
the previous two arguments will be synthesized to show that the sacramental basis of the family as domestic church (a specific embodiment of Church that shares its mission and ability to be salvific) is that it is an authentic iteration of Church.

The theological analysis that the Church itself is a sacrament can be traced to several writers who, even before Vatican II, were presenting the case that the Church is the historical and communal manifestation of the saving reality of Christ. Perhaps the simplest understanding of this sacramentally transitive presence of Christ made manifest by the Church was voiced by Henri de Lubac in his work *Catholicism*. “If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, and in the full ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation.”

Hence, because humankind can come to know Christ through the Church He instituted, the Church is a sacrament. While the salient point of this theological labeling of the Church as sacrament will be to draw that reality out and apply it to the domestic church, some further attention must be paid to the theological presuppositions that will be built upon. To that end, some acknowledgement of a few influential theologians must be mentioned along with the actual theology that results from Vatican II.

Possibly the strongest, or most influential, voice on the establishment of the Church as a sacrament was Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009). One example of his thoughts on the matter that can be found in his *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* follows below:

We have said that Jesus as man and Messiah is unthinkable without his redemptive community. Established by God precisely in his vocation as representative of fallen mankind, Jesus had by his human life to win this community to himself and make of it a redeemed people of God. This means that Jesus the Messiah, through his death which the Father accepts, becomes in fact the head of the People of God, the Church assembled in his death. It is thus that he wins the Church to himself, by his messianic life as the Servant of God, as the fruit of the sufferings of his messianic sacrifice: "Christ dies that

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the Church might be born.” In his messianic sacrifice, which the Father accepts, Christ in his glorified body is himself the eschatological redemptive community of the Church. In his own self the glorified Christ is simultaneously both "Head and members."

The earthly Church is the visible realization of this saving reality in history. The Church is a visible communion in grace. This communion itself, consisting of members and a hierarchical leadership, is the earthly sign of the triumphant redeeming grace of Christ. The fact must be emphasized that not only the hierarchical Church but also the community of the faithful belong to this grace-giving sign that is the Church. As much in its hierarchy as in the laity the community of the Church is the realization in historical form of the victory achieved by Christ. The inward communion in grace with God in Christ becomes visible in and is realized through the outward social sign. Thus the essence of the Church consists in this, that the final goal of grace achieved by Christ becomes visibly present in the whole Church as a visible society. ⁵⁶⁴

By being a “saving reality” the Church is necessarily a sacrament. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx is pointing out that the visible communion of grace that is Church is made manifest through its social nature which is composed not only of its hierarchical leadership, but also through the laity of the Church. Elsewhere in his writings, Schillebeeckx is right to distinguish that the sacramentality of the Church and the grace that is operative through the Church does not exclude sacramentality or grace being experienced outside of the realm of Church. “The unique and absolute nearness of God in Christ and therefore in his church is not dialectically opposed to the nearness of the same God of grace in man’s secular activities, but it does illuminate the deepest final meaning and value of these activities.”⁵⁶⁵ Taken in total, the approach taken evidences that the Church is the concrete historical sacrament of Christ, it is a means of salvation and grace not only in its hierarchy but also in its members, and that the sacrament that is the Church can be experienced outside of the Church in its members’ secular activities.

Susan Ross summarizes his understanding of the relationship between sacramentality, the Church, and members in Schillebeeckx’s writings through the lenses of relationship and action. “Thus the church’s sacramentality lays not so much in its visible structures, which it shares with other human institutions, but rather in its way of living out the message of the gospel. However, while the church is a place of action, it is not simply an organization of activists. Its action is ultimately grounded in its relationship with God.”

In summation, Schillebeeckx’s understanding of the Church as sacrament is rooted in relationship between Christ and the Church, because of that relationship, the Church (its hierarchy and its members) gives historical presence to Christ through its active living out of the Gospel message.

The thought of Schillebeeckx and other theologians was made part of Church Doctrine at Vatican II, specifically in the composition and publication of Lumen Gentium.

In detailing the mystery of the Church, the Council states:

Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men – she here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission. The condition of the modern world lends to greater urgency to this duty of the Church; for, while men of present day are drawn ever more closely together by the social, technical, and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ.

The council and theologians writing after the fact have considered the Church to be a sacrament by its very nature; that is to say that because the Church has a particular relationship with and ability to give presence to Christ, it can and does manifest the sacramentality natural to the person of the Risen Christ. One thing that must be observed

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567 LG #1.
as it relates to the previous point is that the Church does not then become the sole opportunity or means of sacramental encounter with Christ. The generally accepted Rahnerian conception of the wholly prevalent nature of grace leads to the theological presupposition that *all* of life can be a possible opportunity for sacramental encounter with Christ. Bernard Haring ties these points together by stating that, “Far from monopolizing God’s presence, the Church has to direct attention to Christ and thus to all signs of God’s saving presence in the world.”\(^{568}\)

What is not of paramount concern here is if the sacramentality of the Church excludes sacramentality elsewhere in history or life or if the Church is a/the “foundational” sacrament of Christ.\(^{569}\) What is of paramount concern is that the Church understands itself to be a historical sacramental reality operative within the world necessitated by its giving presence to Christ and its mission to carry on His works. As a means of making this theological presupposition operative and practical the sacramentality of the Church must be attached back to the sacramentality of the Lord. Haring expresses this understanding of Christ by stating, “When we speak of Christ as Sacrament, we mean that he is the encounter of God with man and that, in him and through him, man comes to the saving awareness of God reaching out to man.”\(^{570}\) Christ is our means to God and the Church is our primary historical and structural means to Christ. An understanding of Church as Sacrament is a novel way of discussing the long held belief that the Church is our path to salvation. Joseph Martos voices this thought by


\(^{569}\) A discussion of the importance of if the Church and or Christ are to be understood as a/the “foundational” sacrament would be by its very nature an exclusionary sacramental understanding of operative grace. That discussion will be had here at a later point in this section primarily through dialogue with the work and thoughts of Keenan Osborne found in *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*.

stating that “Traditional theology spoke of the church as a source of salvation because through the community people were introduced to Christ and to the life of self-transcendence that he made possible. The church was thus and continues to be a sacrament, a sign of Christ and a channel of grace in the world.”

Before moving onto further establishing the domestic church as an authentic expression of Church, a few words must be said of more recent ruminations on the sacramentality of Church as being a/the “foundational” Sacrament.

The first issue at hand if one is to consider the Church to be a foundational sacrament is exactly what “church” is being discussed. Does the passage cited above and the overall content of Lumen Gentium speak only of the Roman Catholic Church, the Roman Church along with the Eastern Churches (and those separated Eastern and Western Churches), or some other non-structurally distinct church (for example the “universal Church”)?

To the extent that any of these definitions of church are acceptable for defining the totality of Church that is a historical sacramental structure, Kenan Osborne bases his thoughts on the matter on the relationship between the offer of grace by God and the acknowledgement and acceptance of that grace by the specific members of whatever church it is being assessed.

There cannot be foundational sacramentality in the church unless both the divine and human interplay takes place. Is this interplay an ongoing, unchanging situation? I argue that it is not. Only when and to the degree that there is communication in both a moment (temporality) of a disclosing God and, at the same time, in a moment (temporality) of responding Christians, can one speak of a sacramental event, can one speak of the event called church as a foundational

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571 Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred (Garden City: Image Books, 1982), 145.
572 Kenan Osborne, in Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), lists the following understandings of church found within Lumen Gentium: the universal Church “from Abel” to the end time (LG #2), churches that exist outside of the Roman Catholic Church (LG ##8, 15, 16), and a “heavenly” Church (LG #7).
sacrament. Subjectively, not all such moments are the same, and therefore there can be degrees of foundational sacramentality.\textsuperscript{573}

Hence, Osborne believes that even the experience of Church as sacrament is inherently subjective due to its dependence on the acknowledgment and acceptance of that sacramentality by the members of that Church. Due to the temporality of that give-and-take, the sacramentality of any church can only be to some degree foundational. If it is only proportionately foundational, is it truly foundational at all? Osborne continues:

Since there is a dual dimension to sacramentality – the unique revelatory event of God and the secondary response of human individuals – a sacramental event that only takes place when this secondary response occurs. The human response is intrinsically temporal, intrinsically limited, intrinsically subjective, and intrinsically ipsete. The return to the subject is not simply a return to human nature, which is only a return to the “same.” Rather, the return to subjectivity is a return to the “self.”\textsuperscript{574}

Or, in brief summation, “It is important to understand that sacramentality is a disclosure event. God is disclosing and we humans are responding.”\textsuperscript{575} Because of the dependence of the temporal reaction of the receiver, there is great difficulty in labeling any “church” as being a foundational sacrament. Understanding sacramentality as a dynamic response to God is central to any attempt to understand the Church as a sacrament – be it a foundational sacrament or otherwise.

When pressed on this specific issue\textsuperscript{576} in an interview Pope Benedict XVI seems to explain that the Council was commenting on the sacramental nature specific to the Roman Catholic Church. The context of these statements is that they were given as a response during an interview with the Pontiff in \textit{L’Osservatore Romano} in late 2000

\textsuperscript{573} \textit{Ibid.}, 121.
\textsuperscript{574} \textit{Ibid.}, 197.
\textsuperscript{575} \textit{Ibid.}, 120.
\textsuperscript{576} The issue at hand being which church, exactly, is at being discussed in \textit{Lumen Gentium} #1 and the relationship of that Church to other churches. Benedict’s response and his discussion of the questions are brought to light in part of a discussion of \textit{LG} #8’s explanation that the Church of Christ “subsists” in the Catholic Church.
concerning *Dominus Iesus*, a declaration from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith discussing the unicity and universality of Christ and His Church. *Dominus Iesus* twice quotes *Lumen Gentium* #8 in its discussion of the relationship of all Christian Churches. The passage reads:

This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority, which He erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth". This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.  

When this passage is quoted in *Dominus Iesus*, a footnote is attached to the passage which reads “The interpretation of those who would derive from the formula *subsistit in* the thesis that the one Church of Christ could subsist also in non-Catholic Churches and ecclesial communities is therefore contrary to the authentic meaning of *Lumen Gentium*.”

This statement would seem to make the issue clearly decided that the “church” in question in *Lumen Gentium* #8 (and implicitly #1) would be the Roman Catholic Church and to some degree the other churches that are in communion with it. However, there remain those who have not accepted this interpretation of the conciliar document. To those individuals, Benedict XVI had the following response:

The Second Vatican Council tried to accept this different way of determining the locus of the Church by stating that the Evangelical Churches are not actually Churches in the same way that the Catholic Church claims to be so, but that "elements of salvation and truth" are found in them. It might be that the term "elements" was not the best choice. In any case, its sense was to indicate an ecclesiological vision in which the Church does not exist in structures but in the

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577 *LG* #8.
578 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "*Dominus Iesus,*" August 6 2000, 20/10/10, foot 56. The original quotation of *Lumen Gentium* #8 appears in ##16 and 17.
event of preaching and the administration of the sacraments. The way in which
the dispute is now being conducted is certainly wrong. I wish there had been no
need to explain that the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the
Faith has merely taken up the Council's texts and the postconciliar documents,
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}}

In essence, there should be no doubt that the “Church” referenced in \textit{Lumen Gentium} that is labeled “in the nature of sacrament” is specifically the Roman Catholic Church. These statements do not preclude that sacramentality can be found in other Christian communities that are often given the title “church,” but they are not \textit{by their nature} sacramental. When questioned concerning the possibility of the Church being understood as a fragmental reality, the Pope replied, “But if this were so, subjectivism would be warranted: then everyone would invent his own Christianity and in the end his personal taste would, be decisive.”\footnote{Ibid.} To give further explanation he states that “The Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Church, is convinced that a definition of this kind [a fragmentary Church] is irreconcilable with Christ's promise and with fidelity to him. Christ's Church truly exists and not in pieces.”\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, Osborne’s questioning of what Church is being discussed as a foundational sacramental reality in the conciliar documents would appear to be answered: it is the Catholic Church. As for the foundational nature of the sacramentality of that Church, there is a much less clear answer. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, forward progress can be made by establishing that the Church – specifically the Roman Catholic Church – is a sacramental reality which is given specific iteration in the domestic church. The understanding of family as a domestic church means that the family is Church.
How do we come to know the family as a domestic church that is Church? In *Follow the Way of Love*, the US Bishops address the answer by stating how groups come to be known as churches. “We give the name church to the people whom the Lord gathers, who strive to follow his way of love, and through whose lives his saving presence is made known. A family is our first community and the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.”582 Because of the communal nature of the family and of the Church, because of their shared mission, and because the Lord can act through the family as a unit, the Christian family is given the status of a church, a domestic church. Pope John Paul II stated this ecclesial fact in *Familiaris Consortio* in the following way, “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church.’”583 Later in that same document, he provides a lengthier understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the domestic church and the larger Church.

It is, above all, the Church as Mother that gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family, by putting into effect in its regard the saving mission which she has received from her Lord. By proclaiming the word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family their true identity, what it is and should be according to the Lord's plan; by celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ for its sanctification to the glory of the Father; by the continuous proclamation of the new commandment of love, the Church encourages and guides the Christian family to the service of love, so that it may imitate and relive the same self-giving and sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church: by virtue of the sacrament, Christian married couples and parents "in their state and way of life have their own special gift among the People of God."

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583 *FC* # 21.
For this reason they not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community. In this way, while the Christian family is a fruit and sign of the supernatural fecundity of the Church, it stands also as a symbol, witness and participant of the Church's motherhood.\textsuperscript{584}

Previous to either of these works, Pope Paul VI proclaims the domestic church is a deserved title for the family and that this title “means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.”\textsuperscript{585} The larger Church, from Vatican II until the present, has been quite clear that the domestic church is a specific revelation of the Church made manifest through its active living out of its ecclesial and Gospel calling. It is important to note that the family’s ability to be a domestic church is in that it is a specific instance of the Roman Catholic Church which is itself a sacrament. That is to say that the domestic church’s sacramentality as Church is tied to its being Roman Catholic in its life and lifestyle and not some abstract understanding of “church”. Just as Pope Benedict XVI has made known that the “Church is a sacrament” is specifically referencing the Roman Church, so too does the theology of the family as a domestic church specifically reference its ability to give presence to the Roman Church. Therefore, the distinctions between the “Church,” the “Roman Catholic Church,” and the “domestic church” can be relaxed if not removed altogether.\textsuperscript{586}

\textsuperscript{584} \textit{Ibid.}, # 49
\textsuperscript{585} Paul VI, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} #71(Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975).
\textsuperscript{586} David Thomas makes this point in his work but does not extend it to the distinction between the “Church” and the “Roman Catholic Church”. [David Thomas, "Home Fires: Theological Reflections on the Christian Family," in \textit{The Changing Family}, ed. Patricia Vojdanoff Stanley Saxton, and Angela Ann Zukowski (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984).] Given the discussion that precedes this point, I feel that the point must be extended to that distinction as well.
Numerous theologians have also given voice to the notion that the family can be Church. In her reflection on the family as a sacrament, Maureen Gallagher reaches the following conclusion reflecting humanity and relationships, “As church is a sacrament, so the family, as domestic church, is a sacrament. And just as the church celebrates sacraments in the community, so does the family ritualize its gifts, its ups and downs, its brokenness, its giftedness. It celebrates its relationships.”

The family is a sacrament by the nature of what it is (Church) and by the things it does (ritualization and sacralization of its gifts as a domestic church). This process is analogous to the means by which Bernard Haring presents the local church as actualizing the universal church. Although neither can “dispose the grace of God,” each church, at every level, contributes to this disposition of its members and those who come in contact with it in a manner proportionate to his/her/its own degree of faith. Just as the local, diocesan, and Universal Church are constantly being built up and renewed the domestic church must continue its path of development to further exemplify and make more concrete its reality of being church among its members and within its communities.

Ernest Falardeau presents the domestic church as Church not so much through its natural capacities or its manner of life, but rather through its natural place of origin for all people and its bond to the Church. “At the heart of this theology of the domestic church

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588 This analogy is correct as the domestic church is the most local of churches. Just as the local church, or better stated, local parish, makes present the fullness of the Church, it would be incorrect ecclesiologically to state that any church, sans an apostolic successor (Bishop), can make present the fullness of the “Church” within the context of Roman Catholic Theology. Hence, it is most likely a better understanding of the domestic church to call it the most local of local churches than it is to describe it as a church in miniature.
is the idea that the Church does not exist except in the family. Everyone belongs to some family. We came into the world as members of a family. There is a bond between each individual and the family (even a one-parent family). And there is a bond between each family and the Church.” 591 While there is nothing explicitly incorrect in his statements, the notion that the Church does not exist except in the family may be a bridge too far in an ecclesiological sense. However, even if this statement is taken at its face value, it does not contradict the point being made throughout this text. To wit, the Church is a sacrament. This statement refers explicitly to the Roman Catholic Church. The domestic church is a Church. This statement is also specifically referencing the domestic church’s position within an explicitly Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The ability of the domestic church to be Church is made manifest through its relationship to the Roman Church and the actions undertaken as part of that reciprocal relationship. This understanding is somewhat encapsulated in Donald Miller’s writings. “The Christian family makes present the universal Church of which it is a fundamental and foundational cell or a domestic church.” 592 His understanding allows for conceiving of the common daily activities and tasks of the family as being acts of “ministry, evangelization, and worship” appropriate to the family in its role as a domestic church. 593 The domestic church is a specific instance of Church.

To complete the transitive logic at place in this section of the text, some attention must now be paid to the notion of the domestic church as a sacramental reality because it is Church.

592 Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christfideles Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 223.
593 Ibid.
One example of this conjecture is Maureen Gallagher summarization of the family’s ability to be seen as a sacramental reality based upon *Familiaris Consortio*:

1. Grace is seen as permeating all life (FC #21, 39, 56).
2. The family is recognized as the “domestic church” (FC #21, 49, 52) thus implying participation in the sacramental dimension of Catholic Christianity.
3. Holiness is inherent in family life (FC #21). This is congruent with the church’s theological understanding of sacramentality.
4. The family is seen to operate as community of system (FC #50). Community is an essential theological symbol of sacramentality.

Family and the larger church community are seen in a reciprocal relationship. This, in the context outlined above, implies that the larger church community is enriched by the sacramentality of the family and that the family is nurtured by the holiness present in the larger church community (FC #64, 86, 50).  

This work takes the position that not only is the domestic church is more than a “theological symbol of sacramentality,” it “is in the nature of sacrament” because it is a specific incarnation of the Church which is itself “in the nature of sacrament.” Kenan Osborne states this position in light of the works of Vatican II the following way, “If sacramentality is foundational to the church and the church is foundationally sacramental, then wherever and whenever there is church, there will be something sacramental.”

However, the Church is never the complete historical revelation of Christ in like manner to the fact the domestic church is never the complete historical revelation of Church. “The church is the sacrament of Christ only partially realized at any point in its passage through human history. The church too is on a journey of initiation and transformation which will not be complete until ‘he comes again.’” The idea that there is only partial realization of the sacrament of Christ found in the Church or the domestic church at any historical point in time does not negate that there is (or at the least *can be*)

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595 *LG* #1.
some portion of historical realization that legitimizes the Church and the domestic church as a sacramental reality. Christians living out their Christian calling in communities that we call churches of varying sizes and degrees give presence to the sacrament of the risen Christ. 598 Hence, the ecclesial character of the family can be defined as “the family is a presence of Christ, a locus of evangelization, and a place of prayer and charity.” 599

Avery Dulles attempts to give ecclesiological explanation to the notion of the Church as sacrament as one of several “models” of understanding the Church. Within that chapter of his text, he relates the operative definition of “sacrament” back to the family:

Man comes into the world as a member of a family, a race, a people. He comes to maturity through encounter with his fellow men. Sacraments therefore have a dialogic structure. They take place in a mutual interaction that permits the people together to achieve a spiritual breakthrough that they could not achieve in isolation. A sacrament therefore is a socially constituted or communal symbol of the presence of grace coming to fulfillment. 600

It is the communal nature of the Church as sacrament that further illustrates the family’s, as the domestic church, ability to be a sacrament. It can be a communal place of grace coming to fulfillment. The dialogical structure of sacrament is not only between the Church and Christ, or the individual member or members and Christ, but also through a societal body’s, i.e. the family, relationship with both Christ and His Church. To that end, Lumen Gentium #3’s statement that “The Church – that is, the kingdom of Christ

already present in mystery – grows visibly through the power of God in the world,”601 can also be applied to the domestic church.

The Church exists as a sacrament through its being and further actuating its sacramental reality through distinct actions in distinct times and places in history.602 The Church is an imperfect pilgrim church begun in and through Christ and guided by the Spirit to even greater holiness which will only be fully realized when this world fully passes.603 The domestic church is likewise an imperfect pilgrim church guided by the Spirit to even greater holiness so long as it recognizes itself as Church and that it is wholly dependent upon Christ for an increased sacramentality and depth of love in this world. Its dependence upon Christ makes necessary its relationship with and dependence upon the Church. This understanding is expressed by Bernard Boelen. “Each Christian family presents ‘in a unique way’ the all-encompassing reality of the same Spirit, the same Mystical Body, the same ministry of Christ, the same sacrament of the Church. Each family is the Church, but in a particular way, namely as the ‘domestic’ Church.”604 By noting the “ministry” of Christ and His Church, Boelen is certainly highlighting that the shared mission of the Church and the domestic church encompasses concrete actions in the world. The presence of Christ in the Church is inherently linked to the Church’s mission and its members’ activities in carrying that mission out.605 Those members who collectively form a domestic church live their mission out in a manner proper to their

601 LG #3.
603 LG #48.
Naming the Church a sacrament speaks directly to its identity and mission while linking the seven Sacraments to that same identity and mission.\(^{606}\)

Given the entirety of this section of the text, the central means by which the domestic church can be understood to be a specific sacramental reality is that it is a legitimate iteration of Church. However, it remains necessary to further ground the sacramentality of the domestic church in one of the seven ritual Sacraments of the Church. As has been mentioned in earlier portions of this work, there remains a lack of compelling consensus as to if that Sacrament is baptism or marriage. This discussion will now be taken up.

**Is it Baptism or Marriage that enables the domestic church to be Church?**

As it is the perspective of this work that the sacramental basis of the domestic church is that it is authentically Church, it must be resolved as to which Sacrament enables this reality. Briefly stated, baptism is what brings individual members into the Church and it is through their common baptism that families can themselves be Church. This statement is not hypothetical but is doctrine. Hence, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Baptism incorporates us *into the Church*.\(^{607}\) This perspective leads theologians such as Mitch and Kathy Finley to define the domestic church in terms of its members’ baptism. “The domestic church is a community of baptized Christians.”\(^{608}\)

The commonality of baptism and its inherent mission touches all members of the family in a categorically direct way while not all family members participate in the marriage equally or in a like manner. Specifically, the couple’s children are (if Church moral law


\(^{607}\) *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., 1994), #1267. Emphasis added. It goes without saying that the *Catechism* also discusses the domestic church under the context of Marriage. This issue has been discussed at length previously in this work and will be commented upon further below.

has been followed) not yet born when the marriage covenant is entered into by the couple and while their children will certainly have a part in their married life, it is certainly not the same way that the couple ministers their marriage to each other through their lives. Furthermore, this work will argue that marriage is not necessary for a family to be a domestic church as there are family forms that exist sans marriage that are not inherently against or outside of Catholic Moral Teaching or a canonical understanding of marriage and are capable of being a domestic church.

Additionally, the mission of the domestic church, which is shared with and born in the Church itself, to educate and evangelize within itself and to the world is rooted in baptism not marriage. Florence Caffrey Bourg comments, “It would seem much simpler and more theologically consistent to link all Christian education with the apostolic mission of evangelization, rooted in baptism.” It is the baptism of its members that brings them into the Church. When these members come together and operate as a church, they are a specific historical incarnation of the Church (a domestic church). Marriage can and should play an important role in a comprehensive theology of domestic church, but it is not its Sacramental root. The domestic church is defined in a manner that illustrates its shared mission with the Church which in turn implies its membership in that same Church. Both the members’ and family’s membership and their communal mission are rooted in baptism. Gregory Konerman connects these points by stating, “The family of baptized Christians is defined as being a miniature or small-scale Church. The family is Church.”

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609 Florence Caffrey Bourg, Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 75.
The direct reason for why it is baptism that is the sacramental cornerstone of the family’s ability to be (domestic) Church is that it is the root of ecclesial membership. It is through baptism that individuals become members of the Body of Christ, the People of God. As *Lumen Gentium* states, “The faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”\(^{611}\) The connection between being joined to the People of God, the Church, and to Christ Himself is not two separate bonds, but rather a single bond,\(^{612}\) rooted in baptism. Just as Christ came to baptize all believers in the Holy Spirit, our baptisms bring us into the common unity of the Church giving presence to and building up the Body of Christ.\(^{613}\) An individual cannot be a member of the People of God as the Church understands itself without first having been reborn in baptism. This notion applies not only to individuals; it applies to families as well. It is through their common baptism that the family members bond themselves to the Church and to Christ while also bonding the family together as unit that itself bonds with the Church in such a manner that it can *be* Church. A child is born into his or her family at their natural birth\(^{614}\) and born into the Church through their baptism. Understanding the family as a domestic church ties these events together in a concrete and inseparable manner. Or, as Hans Urs von Balthasar once commented, “for a child,

\(^{611}\) LG #31.


\(^{614}\) It goes without saying that birth is not the only means of introducing a child into a family – or forming a familial bond for that matter. Adoption and step-parentage also introduce new and legitimate parent-child bonds into a family. The point being made above is not to exclude these events from their legitimacy as the “birth” of a family, but rather to show the contrast and connection between being born into a family and being born into the Church.
his parents’ concrete love is not at first separable from God.”\textsuperscript{615} To this end, John Paul II comments in \textit{Familiaris Consortio} that “by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church.”\textsuperscript{616} It is the family’s job as a domestic church to educate its members in the faith and this mission of the domestic church is rooted in baptism, not marriage. Because of this particular understanding of baptism and its relationship to the domestic church, it is necessary to give some attention to a sacramental understanding of infant baptism.

As Gilbert Ostdiek states, “For the child, the family is the gateway into the Church.”\textsuperscript{617} The reasoning for this statement should be fairly basic and plain. An infant does not present his or her self for baptism in the manner an adult convert does. It is the child’s family that presents them to the community for inclusion in the People of God. In a sense, the baptism of an adult says as much about the relationship of the family and the Church as it does the child’s burgeoning relationship with Christ. Or as Kurt Stasiak states in his \textit{Return to Grace: A Theology for Infant Baptism}, “Because infant baptism concerns the community as much as it does the infant, the community ‘effects itself’ when baptizing an infant no less than when discerning and guiding the conversion of an adult.”\textsuperscript{618} Karl Rahner parallels these comments when he states, “So we see that when we attend a baptism something happens in our own lives too. It establishes a spacious intimacy between us and the child.”\textsuperscript{619} The baptism not only affects the child’s

\textsuperscript{616} FC #15.
relationship with Christ and the Church, it affects his or her parents’ relationship with the Church and also necessitates that the Church and the local community present reassess their view not only of the child but of that child’s family. Hence, essential to infant baptism is the faith of the parents and the communal nature of the ritual.\textsuperscript{620} The parents’ faith is the motivating factor for their child’s presentation to the community in a manner that will alter the manner of relationship between the individual members of the family and the community so that they are no longer seen as individual members, but as a communal unit, a domestic church.

However, the family’s faith alone is not sufficient cause for infant baptism. That faith must be coupled with an ongoing catechesis of the child. The community (Church) and the family’s continued catechesis – both of itself and of their child - is what enables the possibility of a child who has yet to reach the age of reason to become a member of the Church. Citing Stasiak again (here with reference to the documents of Vatican II):

\begin{quote}
But that infant baptism also required catechesis (first, of parents) and that it clearly was directed toward the eventual adult commitment of the infant or child was evident throughout the postconciliar literature. Emphasizing that an infant was baptized in the faith of the domestic and ecclesial church, many authors appealed to the expectation that the grace of faith conferred and symbolized by the celebration of the sacrament would be realized \textit{in fact} as the child received guidance in and through those domestic and ecclesial environments.\textsuperscript{621}
\end{quote}

The infant’s baptism is thus seen in some manner as an ongoing event that is undertaken not only by the child, but also by his or her family (the domestic church) and the community that supports him or her and his or her family (the Church). Baptism is a long

term commitment on behalf of the Church and the parents and godparents of the child.\(^ {622}\) 

“This means that the baptism is not an automatic act, but that the parents and godparents of the child, together with the Church, pledge themselves to form the child in faith and its confession.”\(^ {623}\) The Code of Canon Law states that there must be “founded hope” that the child will be brought up in the Catholic faith for the ritual to be licit.\(^ {624}\) The Church has acknowledged the role of the parent(s) in the religious formation of their child as a function of that child’s baptism as well as their own. This theology of the role of parents in future religious education of their baptized children correlates directly with the reintroduction of domestic church into the Church’s understanding of the family.\(^ {625}\)

The parent child relationship takes on a radically different tone through the course of the child’s baptism and their continued education in the domestic church. Von Balthasar presents this point in the following manner, “Parents do not claim God’s place in the life of their children but, having adopted them into the domestic Church through baptism, they offer their children – as they claim for themselves – their vocation as Christian parents.”\(^ {626}\) The aspect of parenting that is specifically Christian is educating children in the faith through the parents’ words and deeds. This educational process does not replace Christ or the Church; it is rather enhanced and amplified by the resources of the Church and the continued catechesis of the parents. Bernard Haring expressed the

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\(^ {624}\) Canon 868, 2.

\(^ {625}\) The first use of the term in the conciliar documents, *LG* #11 (which is discussed in detail in chapter 1 of this work) asks the parents to perform two tasks, 1) preach the faith to their children and 2) encourage their child to accept the vocation proper to their gifts. Both of these tasks are also being asked of the parents and godparents when they stand for a child at his or her Baptism.

fact that baptism should be an expression of all the faithful that part of their vocation is to be an effective community of faith for those who are reborn into that community.\textsuperscript{627} It is our birth into the community of the Church in baptism that is also our baptism into a particular domestic church that is responsible for ongoing religious formation. Ongoing religious formation is necessary for adult converts, but is substantially more understandable in the case of infant baptism. This formative process is rooted in the domestic church. This position is summarized by Florence Caffrey Bourg:

> We can reappropriate the premise that the faith infants need to receive baptismal grace is provided by the church. This occurs especially through domestic church members, who request the child’s baptism and pledge to make their home a place of ongoing religious formation. The process is similar for adult converts; often a relationship with a domestic church, such as a Christian spouse and in-laws, makes this faith possible.\textsuperscript{628}

We come into our families through birth or adoption and we become reborn by Christ’s adoption of us in our baptism.

If baptism is to be considered the ritual Sacrament basis for the family as a domestic church (as it is what grants membership and ability to be Church), some attention has to be paid as to why this basis is not instead marriage. The reasoning behind the Magisterium and theologians’ reasoning that essentially leads to an understanding of marriage as the foundation of the domestic church is that the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church} defines the family as “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children.”\textsuperscript{629} Hence, the basis of the disagreement is the definition of the family as much as it is the Sacramental grounding of the domestic church. Accepting

any variation of this definition of family may lead to an acceptance of a non-marital basis for the domestic church. People such as Daniel Hauser state this idea in the following manner. “Of course this ‘new’ approach to marriage and family includes a new definition of the family that no longer places marriage at the center of the family and promotes an understanding of human sexuality quite different from traditional Christian understanding of human sexuality and marriage.” The question then becomes if any derivation from this definition of family is bowing to what Hauser calls “the relativism and individualism of contemporary society” or is it simply an expansion of the definition that does not contradict the proper place of sacramental marriage.

Fundamentally, if there can be found a legitimate form of family that is capable of being a domestic church in which there exists no married couple, marriage cannot be the basis of the domestic church.

In part this difficulty arises out the Biblical text used in Lumen Gentium #11 for the basis of the teaching of the family as a domestic church. The text states that Ephesians 5:32 is the basis for understanding that a married couple (and therefore the family generated by it) can be Church. Christ’s love for the Church is analogous to the love spouses show each other. This text is cited in subsequent Magisterial teachings and the works of several theologians as being the basic Biblical text that grounds the

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630 Daniel Hauser, *Marriage and Christian Life* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), 1. Hauser goes as far as to state that “The other forms of human associations now called families would have been unrecognizable in the past.” One can only question his feelings on previous understandings of family that were based on household or that for many centuries included the slaves that a family owned. I doubt that these forms would be recognizable today either.


632 Ephesians 5:32 reads “This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.” This passage is written in the context of “wives and husbands,” or more explicitly, within the context of marriage.

633 This reference is explicit in *Lumen Gentium* and several points in *Familiaris Consortio*. Subsequent citations generally reference those passages more so than Ephesians 5 itself.
theological understanding of the family as a domestic church. If this were the only scriptural passage that is used as a basis for the teaching of the domestic church, the view of marriage as the root may be something that may not be able to be overruled. However, there are two points that must be raised here as being in contention with this understanding. First, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does cite this passage in its analysis of the Christian Family, but it also references several other texts.\(^{634}\) Additionally, there appears to be no reason why the type of love referenced in Ephesians 5 (the analogous love that Christ shows the Church and one spouse shows the other) cannot also be understood as analogous to the love a parent shows a child. If this understanding of the text is valid, there is the ability to understand families not rooted in marriage as being capable of embodying the mystery of Church presented in Ephesians 5.

Giving further attention to *Lumen Gentium* #11, which is the seed text for the development of the theology of the domestic church, leads to even further openness to the family’s Christian Mission being rooted in something other than marriage. The text reads, “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.”\(^{635}\) Although found within a discussion of marriage, the duties of teaching the faith and encouraging proper vocation to children are jobs that necessary regardless of the marital status of the parent(s). These duties are necessitated by the parent(s)’ baptism. This perspective is evidenced in the passage in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

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\(^{634}\) These texts deal with conversions of already formed families to Christianity. Because of that divergence of focus, the passages will be subsequently addressed in this work later in this chapter. The point of fact here is simply that Ephesians 5 is not the only Biblical text used to ground the domestic church.

\(^{635}\) *LG* #11.
that holds up the title of family as a domestic church. It concludes by stating that

“Families resulting from a mixed marriage also have the duty of proclaiming Christ to the children in the fullness of the consequences of a common Baptism; they have moreover the difficult task of becoming builders of unity.”  

Although there is still certainly a marriage being referenced in the passage, Paul VI literally roots the family’s call to evangelize in their common baptism.

From a practical perspective, the Church’s message of how the family can be a domestic church will not be able to live up to its own expectations if it is rooted solely in sacramental marriage. To wit, “Since God's plan for marriage and the family touches men and women in the concreteness of their daily existence in specific social and cultural situations, the Church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving.”

The Church itself has acknowledged that its teachings must be conversant with the reality in which families find themselves. The requirement of baptism for membership in the life of the Church is much more culturally and socially viable than requiring marriage for considering a group of Christians a family. This idea is not at all to state that in marriage a new domestic church is/can be formed. It is to say that if common baptism is the root of the domestic church, the teaching is far more open and relational to the common experience of people of faith today.

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637 FC #4.
638 What is being advocated here is not simply that all groupings of Baptized individuals that label themselves a family are capable of being a domestic church. There are/will be constraints imposed on exactly how open the definition of family relative to the domestic church can be. Those boundaries will be drawn later in this work. However, at this point, it is necessary to point out that basing the domestic church on Baptism as opposed to Marriage is because that is the Sacrament enabling membership of individuals and allowing groups of Christians to be Church.
Furthermore, baptism is the foundation of marriage and is the “preparatory phase of the sacramentality of marriage.”\textsuperscript{639} There is no Christian marriage that is not rooted in relationship with God that has already been established in baptism. Scott Walker Hahn posits this point by stating that “As birth is a precondition of family life, so baptism is the precondition of the other sacraments.”\textsuperscript{640} The ability of the family to be a domestic church is rooted in its membership and ability to be Church. Those realities are made manifest in the baptism of the individual members of the family and their communal living out of their baptismal calling. Families can be born of marriage, but this is not the only means available for family formation that is capable of living up to the requirements of being a Church in miniature. However, if the domestic church is to truly be Church, there must be means other than the membership found in baptism that allows to the continual reformation necessitated by the Church’s role as a pilgrim church. In essence, membership necessitates participation. The participation required is Sacramental participation which is found in the Eucharist.

A brief caveat on the sacramentality of non-Canonically accepted marriages: What is not at issue for this work is if it is possible for a sacramental bond to be formed in a civil, non-Christian, or other form of marriage not validated by the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church. To state that these marriages are not capable in some way of revealing some facet of God’s love because the Roman Church has not accepted or in some manner “certified” the union would be to posit that the Church dictates God’s capabilities. That position is theologically invalid. The institution of a grace filled bond

\textsuperscript{640} Scott Walker Hahn, Swear to God: The Promise and Power of Sacraments (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 43.
is a possibility in any marriage. However, the distinction being drawn in this work is that there remains a necessity of adherence to Canonical teaching in order to bond the married couple to the Church itself such that the married couple (at the time of their marriage, regardless if they are parents at that point) and the family that grows out of that marriage are capable of being a domestic church. The overriding point here remains that a family cannot incarnate that particular Church unless its members are also members of that same Church.

*Familiaris Consortio* points out that “The Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist.”641 The greatest expression of Church membership is participation in its central understanding for its existence, the Eucharist. For the family to be understood as a domestic church, its members must collectively participate in the Eucharist in the manner befitting their collective nature and their individual abilities. Participation in the mass, and specifically the Eucharist, is the “summit toward which all activity of the Church is directed.”642 Hence, the domestic church is Church because it is a specific iteration of Church as defined by its membership through baptism and its participation in the Church that culminates in the Eucharist. Again using transitive logic, Earnest Falardeau pronounces that “The Eucharist makes the Church and the family is the domestic Church; and so the Eucharist makes the domestic Church, the family. The Eucharist makes the family.”643 Additionally, the domestic church is sent forth in its familial mission through its common

641 *FC* #57.
baptism and the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{644} Part of the domestic church’s job as a Church and as baptized Christians means that they need to participate in the Church’s crowning glory, the Eucharist. It is through the Eucharist that their ecclesial commissioning is magnified and emphasized. To be a domestic church, a family is called in baptism and sent forth by the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{645}

As a conclusion to this portion of the text, it must be asserted that it is baptism that brings individuals, and collectively families, into the Church and allows them to be Church in the world. While marriage has its proper place within the natural order of human relationships and the relationship between a married couple and the Church, it is not what enables families, as collective entities, to be a domestic church. This statement does not mean that marriage is superfluous to the sacramental character of the domestic church. All families that are domestic churches are necessarily based in the common baptism of its members while not all domestic churches are necessarily founded or exist within the context of marriage. From a sociological perspective, Georg Simmel states that the stable point of family life, that is, the necessary building block that must be present for there to be an entity that we comfortably define as a family, is not a marriage at all. The central building block is the mother-child relationship that is essentially the same across cultures and times while the relationship between spouses “is capable of infinite modifications.”\textsuperscript{646} Using this logic, it is the parent – child relationship that is at

\textsuperscript{644} This statement is not to say that Marriage does not entail its own commissioning for a specific mission. This statement is to say that the mission to which Married spouses are called is indeed particular to Marriage and those/that calling does not add specifically to the mission of the domestic church found in Baptism and the Eucharist.


\textsuperscript{646} Georg Simmel, "On the Sociology of the Family," Theory, Culture & Society 15, no. 3-4 (1998), 288. Further, Simmel posits that the shift in most cultures toward marriage was based primarily on economic
root of the family. While procreation and education of children is certainly an incumbent responsibility of spouses in marriage, the education and evangelization of all, including a parent’s child, is founded in baptism. Furthermore, as will be discussed in greater depth throughout the remainder of this chapter, there exist valid family forms (meaning that they are capable of being a domestic church) in which the parent–child relationship exists but a marriage does not. Of course, there also exist families in which there is a marriage and no children. These families are also capable of being domestic churches. The position of this work is that either the parent-child or spousal relationship is capable of being the foundation of a domestic church. The discipleship collectively required of all members of the domestic church is necessary regardless of the marital status of the parent(s). As Haring says, “The sacraments require true discipleship whereby one makes visible to the world the life-giving love of Christ.” In part, it is the parent(s)’ job to make that life-giving love known to his/her/their child or children and the family unit’s job to make that love known in the world. Florence Caffrey Bourg brings all these points together in the following manner:

It [a theological understanding of the primacy of baptism in establishing the domestic church] affirms baptism as the root of every Christian vocation to holiness. It can appeal to any Christian denomination, and especially to interchurch families whose members participate in more than one Christian tradition. Reflection on domestic church as founded upon shared baptism can be extended to incorporate families wherein one spouse is already Christian and the other spouse or children are exploring Christianity or formally preparing for baptism, a process that can take several years. This approach can speak to Christian couples whose ‘irregular’ marriages are regarded canonically as ‘invalid’ but whose shared, valid baptism is not called into question by

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interests and basic protection. The question that arises from his analysis is if the relationship in question can be reduced to a “parent-child” relationship or if Simmel honestly believed there to be a distinct nature to the mother-child relationship that is not present in the father-child relationship. If this were to be considered an exclusionary definition, Simmel would be stating that single-parent families headed by women were indeed families while those headed by men were not families at all.

Catholicism. This approach better accommodates bonds of family members (such as siblings) not related by marriage. It creates a door for welcoming ordained and other unmarried adults – who are not sealed off from family life – into reflections on domestic church. It acknowledges that just as the role of ‘child’ is our first entrance into family at a human level, the one permanent and universal role among humans, baptism, which makes us a ‘child of God,’ is the first, permanent, and universal experience shared by Christians. For all these reasons, baptism as the sacramental foundation of domestic churches deserves more attention in the theological and magisterial literature.  

The domestic church can be a Sacrament because it can be Church in and to the world. It can accomplish this by means of the common baptism of the family’s members.

Having established that baptism is the primary sacramental entry point for the family to be a domestic church and therefore Church, there remains the need to establish that it is not only through baptism (as a basis or specifically through the baptism of a child) that the family’s being a domestic church is initiated. While baptism may be the culmination of a personal or familial conversion event, it may be an event that greatly predates a return to active church membership but does grant the ability to return. Conversion as a basis for founding and continuance of the domestic church will be the next issue to be addressed.

**Conversion in the founding and continuance of the domestic church**

Many Christians do not live out their baptismal call – as an individual or as a part of a family. Even among fervent members of the Church, there is often little conscious connection between the sacrament through which their lives in Christ began and the living of the Christian life after baptism. (Of course, the same can be said of many married couples who do not see their marriage as a religious vocation.) Of course, many more remain who have never been a member of the Church. If considered on a

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continuum, one end of the scale would be a non-participatory, non-baptized person while
a fully participatory (in the ecclesial and social sense of participating) baptized individual
is at the other end. Any person or family who is not completely and perfectly
participating in the life of the Church is in need of at least continuing if not beginning
conversion. Conversion, both of individuals and of families, is a necessary reality for the
family to be and to continue to be a domestic church.

Anne Hession defines conversion and its relationship to Catholic identity and the
Church in the following way:

We can respond to the divine call, by accepting God’s presence in faith, by
hoping in God’s promises, and by making love of God and neighbor the
touchstone of our lives. This is conversion. We move away from egotism,
consciously from the self to God, and remain open to hearing a call that comes
from beyond ourselves. We no longer search for our identity in terms of fulfilling
our wishes, needs and desires and are willing to relinquish the illusion that we can
overcome the brokenness we experience in ourselves and in the world by our own
power. Catholic identity is accepting the mandate to participate in a love story:
the story of God’s salvation of the world.650

Using her understanding, this document will approach the necessary conversion of (and
in some cases “into”) the domestic church in a manner that focuses on participation in
and self-acknowledgment of being Church. The goal is not that the family converts as it
were to some idealized form of family or that they lead a perfect life as a church. The
movement is to be understood as being from non or less participatory to more
participatory and toward a deeper understanding of the family’s life to be an exhibition of
the Church and Christ’s love for the world. While this text chooses to use the term
“conversion” to elaborate on this notion, Florence Caffrey Bourg presents the notion that
there is a specific theological lexicon used to illustrate the distance between the ideals

650 Anne Hession, “Catholic Identity: ‘Love That Powerful Leaves Its Own Mark’,” in Exploring Theology:
Making Sense of the Catholic Tradition, ed. Anne Hession and Patricia Kieran (Dublin: Veritas
Publications, 2007), 266.
and the reality of the domestic church. These terms include “conversion, growth, progressive integration, education, and maturation” and the closing of the gap is “regarded as a family project that lasts a long time, if not a lifetime.”\textsuperscript{651} To that end, this process is understood as essential to the character of the domestic church and must be ongoing for the family to continue in its ability to be Church.

The reality of family conversion can be traced back to the Biblical texts themselves. The early Church presented in Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul mention several instances of entire families coming to know the Risen Christ collectively.\textsuperscript{652} As the Bible recounts collective conversions, today we can state that a domestic church can be initiated by families in their return to or initiation into the faith and Church practices. However, even in that time, there was a general understanding that the conversion event and subsequent baptism did not make the family a perfect entity.

“None of the epistle writers had any doubts about the sinfulness of Christians even after baptism, but they all believed that the community contained the means for overcoming sin.”\textsuperscript{653} The means to their salvation was to be found in their continued participation within the Church. The Church, rooted in Christ, was and is the family’s means to salvation.

It must also be noted that family conversion as presented in the Christian Scriptures is noted as being (along with Ephesians 5) the Scriptural root for the current theology of domestic church. As the Catechism states, “From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers ‘together with all

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{651} Florence Caffrey Bourg, \textit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 57
\bibitem{652} See specifically Acts 11:14, 16:14-15, 16:29-34, 18:7-8, 1 Cor. 1:12-16, etc.
\bibitem{653} Joseph Martos, \textit{Doors to the Sacred} (Garden City: Image Books, 1982), 314.
\end{thebibliography}
[their] household.’ When they were converted, they desired that ‘their whole household’ should be saved.”

Although “the family” at this time was a unit inclusive of more than simply a kinship unit, the collection of peoples that are considered the family by today’s standards were certainly to be found within the “family” or “household” as described in these Biblical accounts. The salience of the fact that these families would not generally have been nuclear families as understood today will be discussed later in this work. What is at issue here is that these families were families before they were Christian families. The change was not in the family’s form; the change was in the family’s self-understanding and therefore their religious and ethical practices. There was a process of discernment concerning the entire family that ultimately led to conversion to a life in Christ and His Church. Frank Rogers says the following concerning discernment: “Discernment is the intentional practice by which a community or an individual seeks, recognizes, and intentionally takes part in the activity of God in concrete situations.”

Family conversion brings the unit into the Church and initiates the process of becoming a domestic church. This tradition is in accord with Church teaching and is rooted in the Scriptures.

In the sense of a family’s life cycle, Penny Edgell has made a point of illustrating that the two events most likely to return people back to the Church (if they are to return) are in the course of their own marriage or at the time of the birth of a child. From a more theological perspective, what it is that brings lost sheep back into the ecclesial fold

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is a sense of longing for something more or a need for a more developed or spiritual understanding of life. Louis-Marie Chauvet gives voice to this search by relating it to the Emmaus Road account in the Gospel of Luke. After establishing that grace is not an object, Chauvet begins to give access to the need for searching in the absence of Christ in the sacramentality of life. “The believer is not condemned to search without end. Where can the believer find the ‘object’ [grace]? In the Church. Not as an ‘object’: it is the other encountered in concrete charity, who occupies the space left vacant by Christ.”

We are made to search for the graced experience of salvation. We find it in the Church, or, specific to this work, in the family – the domestic church. In some instances this search begins with baptism and at other times it begins in marriage. Of course, it must also be conceded that these events may simply be starting points for the search or that it is an entirely subjective or family experience that begins this search. However, when it is acknowledged that this search is a reality, grace can be encountered in the family. While this search for grace in the Church is ultimately asymptotic in its nature, the search will to whatever degree is proper to the specific family lead to a conversion of action and of family life.

The notion of a search for grace that leads to conclusion is mirrored in the documents of Vatican II in that they not only moved away from sacramental legalism, but acknowledged that “Church experience” was “sacramental experience”.

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658 Louis-Marie Chauvet, Du Symbolique Au Symbole (Paris: Cerf, 1979) as translated and included in Timothy M. Brunk, Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 74. In this passage Chauvet is comparing the experience of Christ made present in the Eucharist to the encounter with Christ as encountered in other members of the Church. I find this assessment particularly revelatory in relation to finding and experiencing Christ in the mundane daily life of the family. One issue many have with acknowledging their family is/as a church is that they do not recognize Christ’s presence in their midst. Much like the Emmaus account, awareness is the key to acknowledgment.

continuing conversion experience of the family is not something that comes about in a particular event, no matter if that event is sacramental or otherwise. Bernard Haring commented that “Christian life, if it is truly to be Christian, is a joyous ‘yes’ to the whole law of Christ, an ever-renewed commitment to an unfinished task.” Therefore, as has been established, baptism formally begins an individual’s life in the Church – and common baptism is the formal beginning of a family’s collective relationship with the Church – the continued conversion of the individual and the family must progress throughout its life. Ideally, this process continues in a linear manner from the time of baptism onward. Yet, it is far more common that individuals and families do not continue their conversion directly closer to Christ and the Church at all times. As has been mentioned numerous times in this work, the two primary opportunities that may bring an individual or a family back to a process of ongoing conversion are marriage and the birth of a child. At the time of this recommitment to conversion and religious participation, there is no guarantee that the family will exist in the nuclear form currently accepted by the Magisterium. The issue of form will be addressed below, but at this point it is necessary to acknowledge that the domestic church is in a constant process of deeper conversion leading to a visible gathering of its members in mutual love that confesses their faith in Christ and publicly celebrates what He has done for them by being active members in the Church and in their community. Because of this reality, John

660 Ibid., 67.
661 Penny Edgell, Religion and Family in a Changing Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). This is brought to light particularly in Chapter 3, but evidence of these findings is found throughout the text. It must be noted that these opportunities are being less taken advantage of than in times past. Also, even when a couple does seek out a Church Wedding or takes the time and effort to have their child Baptized, they are less likely to undertake that event as a first step towards conversion and recommitment to participating in the Church.
662 Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 68. He addresses these comments to the Church as a whole in its model of being a sacrament. There is no doubt that if the domestic church is
Paul II wrote in *Familiaris Consortio* that “an essential and permanent part of the Christian family’s sanctifying role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all Christians, who do not always remain faithful to the ‘newness’ of the baptism that constitutes them ‘saints.’”663 It is not inexcusable that the family is, for a time, not perfectly faithful to their baptismal calling; but for that family to be a domestic church it must continually be working in a process of conversion towards their communal calling to be Church.

Bernard Haring echoes that ongoing baptismal conversion must be rooted in love if it is to be valid.

A person who does not live in God’s grace, who consciously puts off his conversion to him, does not and cannot live authentically according to his vocation in Christ even if, by the standards of the written laws, his deeds are blameless. His life bears witness only to laws and discrete values but not to Christ; he cannot be effectively and truthfully a sign of life in Christ. When redeemed love does not reside and work in us, everything bears the stamp of futility.664

These words also apply to families that are on their path to being domestic churches. Their works as a family in the world and in the Church must be founded upon the love Christ has shown them and that they continue to show Him through their interactions with others. The sacrament of baptism is a continual calling to deepen our love for God, the Church, and each other. While the “event” of conversion can be brought upon by the experience of the Sacrament, it can also brought on by some more “basic” sacramental experience such as the birth of a child or an experience of authentic Christian love.

Lawrence Mick comments that “While we can learn much about God or a sacrament in

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663 *FC* #58.
theory before the experience, there are dimensions of reality that can only be grasped after the experience. In that regard, after they truly experience Christ’s love, families are set on a journey towards being better able to exhibit that love as a collective unit, a domestic church. Being able to better express this love is the means of conversion necessary for the family to become and remain a domestic church.

In a practical sense, conversion may ultimately be a religious experience, but it is further deepened and sustained through the family’s active participation in the Church’s both religious and non-religious programming. In a theological sense, families return to the Church because they are accepting or returning to their baptismal calling. That return may be precipitated by a family’s using the Church as a social support more than as a spiritual source. An indirect acceptance of the Church’s message may lead to the family directly accepting their call to be a domestic church ultimately leading to their being a church in the world. By meeting the family’s practical and spiritual needs, the Church can be a source motivating families toward conversion. The path and course of conversion necessitates the family understand itself as a domestic church. This understanding is founded upon a daily choice by members and the familial unit that they are going to continue to deepen their love for each other, the Church, and Christ in a manner that will enable them to be a church to themselves and for others. As Gerald Foley notes, “Being a family is more a way of thinking about life than a birth or marriage assignment to a group of people, more a choice of how life will be than just a place we live.” Domestic churches are churches because they choose to be. All of the above is summarized in Familiaris Consortio #9:

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What is needed is a continuous, permanent conversion which, while requiring an interior detachment from every evil and an adherence to good in its fullness, is brought about concretely in steps which lead us ever forward. Thus a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of His definitive and absolute love in the entire personal and social life of man. Therefore an educational growth process is necessary, in order that individual believers, families and peoples, even civilization itself, by beginning from what they have already received of the mystery of Christ, may patiently be led forward, arriving at a richer understanding and a fuller integration of this mystery in their lives.667

Living the Mission

Because the process of the family becoming a domestic church continues onward throughout its life, the mission of the domestic church is fulfilled every day and in all places. A family does not accomplish being a domestic church; it must work at satisfying its duties as an ongoing vocation. Being a domestic church is not accomplished all-at-once, it is a sacramental manner of living. As Bernard Haring writes, “The People of God truly become a sacrament, the visible and effective presence of the Paschal Mystery, when in their concrete environment their lives witness to the mystery of the Incarnation…The Church’s visibility and sacramentality depend on its members who participate in the daily effort to bring reconciliation, peace, freedom, nonviolence, brotherhood, humane progress to the City of God.”668 For the domestic church to show itself as a particular manifestation of Church that is part of the world, it must participate in the life of the Church and in the world at large. Its actions must be historically tangible if it is to be church for its members and church in the world.669 To that end, the family, so that it may be a sacramental reality (domestic church), must live its mission which is rooted in baptism and shared with the Church (yet is specific to the family).

667 FC #9.
The mission of the baptized in some ways mirrors the mission of the Church. Within a parish, the baptized are called to catechizing (both the young and adults), caring for members of the parish, and engaging in tasks that will generate capital that can keep the parish running. However, the baptized are also called to operate in the world as emissaries of the Church, and their particular parish in the world. In this sense, the mission of the Church is the mission of baptized individuals is the mission of the domestic church. The domestic church has a distinct calling because it is a communal calling. All members of the family form the singular domestic church. Furthermore, while all Christians are called to evangelize in a manner befitting their abilities, the call to evangelize is set apart in the domestic church because of its means (as a family) and one of its foci (the children in the family). The family is the bedrock of a continuance of faith and participation from generation to generation. Again quoting Haring, “The family is the place where religion and life is either integrated or condemned to hopeless separation.” The Church can spread its message and mission, but if that word is frustrated within the family, it faces a nearly insurmountable threat. This portion of the text will analyze the ethical obligations placed on the domestic church because it is a sacramental reality and some of its basic duties.

For subjective experiences of sacraments to be authentic there must be a positive development of character in the person engaged with the Sacred in the ritual or event leading to eventual ethical action. In calling the domestic church a sacramental reality, it is implied that there are ongoing ethical obligations inherent in the family’s nature. The experience of God in a sacramental event obliges the person experiencing the event to be

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better. This understanding can be found in the work of both Karl Rahner and Bernard Haring and is later amplified by the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Having previously argued that the domestic church is a sacramental reality, this dissertation will assert that the domestic church is subject to ethical obligations that are both communal and ongoing.

Rahner presents the ethical obligation of sacramental experiences as being rooted in the obligations basic to being Christian that are undertaken in baptism. Post-baptism, each successive interaction between God and humanity, which by definition implies its sacramentality, is a “re-commissioning” of the original Christian mission given in baptism. This understanding leads Timothy Brunk to contend that “for Rahner, ethical obligations, including openness to suffering, flow from the participation in the sacramental life of the Church, and, further, that the morally good acts which constitute fulfillment of these obligations (and love of neighbor chief among them) are graced events themselves and have a quasi-sacramental structure, which the Christian is called upon to name as such and celebrate the public liturgy of Church.” While Rahner stresses the notion of paying forward the sacramental experience in moral activity, Haring centers the ethical obligation imbued by sacramental experience as the proper response to God’s action and that this response is the basis for all moral action. “Just as man’s part in the celebration of the sacraments consists primarily of a humble acceptance of and grateful response to the action of God, so in the whole of Christian morality, every obligation is inherent in the gift that springs from it.”

673 Ibid., 22.
Louis-Marie Chauvet takes both of these perspectives and synthesizes them into a coherent whole based upon a specific understanding of the obligation the receiver is yoked with through their acceptance of a gift. His understanding of the sacrament as a gift implies the obligation of ethical behavior.\(^{675}\) To quote him:

> Every gift received obligates. This is true of any present: as soon as the offered object – anything whose commercial or utilitarian value does not constitute its essence as gift – is received as a present, it obligates the recipient to the return-gift of an expression of gratitude. As a true sacramentum of mutual [covenant] of gratitude, the present is a visible word; in fact, it is precisely because it is a word that it is present. For every word “received” as such imposes obligation. To refuse to answer the person who is speaking is to refuse to receive this word as gift, to break the [covenant] by short-circuiting the communication.\(^{676}\)

Further:

> There is “reception” (of the gift) only by the obligatory implication of a return gift. In other words, the return-gift is the mark of reception. As the polite locution, “I am obliged to you” indicates, every gift creates an obligation. If there is not a minimum of gratitude, B does not receive the gift offered by A, B seizes the value object.\(^{677}\)

The gift Chauvet is discussing in the above is God’s grace which is totally and completely beyond value and is not an object that can be grasped. The only means of actually accepting the gift of grace is through a “return gift” of ethical behavior in the world. If the return gift, the gratitude of reception, is not given, then the gift, of grace has

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\(^{675}\) Chauvet derives this idea in a theological manner from the sociological work of Marcel Mauss and George Duby. For a more in depth rendering of the progression of the thought from Mauss and Duby see Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 75-79.

\(^{676}\) Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeline Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 264. The translation used in the above quotation replaces “alliance” from the original translation with “covenant”. Timothy Brunk is responsible for this translation and it can be found in Timothy M. Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 78. This dissertation agrees with Brunk that covenant is a more applicable term when considering the theological point being made.

never been accepted by the receiver in the first place.\textsuperscript{678} The acknowledgment of acceptance of grace in a sacramental encounter with God is ultimately an obligation to present the return gift of ethical behavior to others within and outside of the community.

The above understandings of the ethical obligation imbued upon the receiver of a Sacrament are presented in a manner consistent with understanding the receiver to be an individual. The domestic church can and must be understood in this context as a specific and singular receiver of the gift of grace as well. Additionally, because the domestic church is a specific and actual incarnation of Church in the world, its reception of the gift of grace is not an act specific event. Rather, its acceptance is an ongoing acceptance and acknowledgment of that gift coupled with an ongoing living out of its ethical obligations. While Rahner is specifically attaching the Christian moral obligation of individuals to their baptismal commissioning, it can be deduced that being born into a Christian family through baptism carries with it that obligation that is “re-commissioned” in each sacramental celebration and the domestic church’s ongoing sacramental character.\textsuperscript{679} If the family recognizes itself as a sacramental reality and, in Haring’s terms, humbly accepts God’s offer of grace as a communal body, it is obligated to act morally in the world. In accord with Chauvet’s approach, if the domestic church does not offer the minimum of gratitude or engage in the return-gift, it has never received the gift of grace and is not actually a domestic church at all. The ongoing reception of the gift of grace and continuous carrying out of ethical obligations is the living out of the domestic

\textsuperscript{678} Ibid.122-7.
\textsuperscript{679} Rahner’s assertion that the basis of Christian moral obligation is found in Baptism only furthers the argument made in this chapter that it is Baptism that brings a family into the Church and grants it the ability to be a domestic church. If the domestic church’s ethical obligations spring from its nature as church and its common Baptism, it can be held as even further evidence that the Seven Sacrament root of the domestic church is not Marriage.
church’s relationship with Christ and His Church. Gerald Foley expresses that a true Sacrament is an expression of a living relationship with God, not an event or completion of some ritualistic rubric. Because the domestic church exists as a sacrament, it is always under its obligation to exist in the world as a moral force and to whatever extent it is possible, be a conduit of the gift of grace as a lifestyle and not simply in a series of unconnected actions.

If the domestic church is obligated to live a certain way because it is a sacrament, what is to be encompassed in that manner of life? Several different sources provide complementary listings of components of the family’s sacramental mission. Apostolicam Actuositatem #11 which has been discussed at length in the second chapter of this work provides an extensive listing of expectations placed upon the family. A portion of that passage follows.

This mission - to be the first and vital cell of society - the family has received from God. It will fulfill this mission if it appears as the domestic sanctuary of the Church by reason of the mutual affection of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common, if the whole family makes itself a part of the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need. Among the various activities of the family apostolate may be enumerated the following: the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to strangers, assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the benefits of an expanding economy.

At all times and places but particularly in areas where the first seeds of the Gospel are being sown, or where the Church is just beginning, or is involved in some serious difficulty, Christian families can give effective testimony to Christ before the world by remaining faithful to the Gospel and by providing a model of Christian marriage through their whole way of life.

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681 AA #11.
John Paul II distilled these requirements (and others required of the family in the documents of Vatican II) in *Familiaris Consortio* #17 to four tasks: form a community of persons, serve life, participate in the development of society, and share in the mission of the Church. This work has summarized the ethical obligations of being a domestic church in the third chapter of this work under four broad subheadings: build up the Kingdom here on earth, function as a church (including making the home more “church like”), and educate and evangelize within itself and outwardly to the world. While examples of Magisterial teachings are above, one particular example of a lay theologian’s description of the mission of the domestic church is by Lisa Sowle Cahill in her *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. (1) Christian family relationships are structured on Christian ideals of reciprocity and spirituality; (2) Christian families seek to serve others in the society by transforming the society; and (3) Christian families struggle together despite their many differences. While all concerned stress the domestic church’s necessity of being a church and the religious aspects that entails, the Magisterium emphasize passing the faith on through the education of children and a proper understanding of marital relationships while sources outside of the Magisterium are far more likely to stress the social justice aspects of how the family is to interact with the world outside of the Church. This work will stress three pillars of lifestyle obligation that the family must live up to in order to be an authentic domestic church: education/evangelization, promotion of social justice, and participation in the life of the Church.

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682 *FC* #17.
684 See chapter 1 of this work for the writings of the Magisterium on the domestic church and chapter 2 of this work for the writing of various theologians.
Education and evangelization are considered a single calling because specifically religious education is, by its nature, evangelical. Furthermore, education that is not specifically religious but carried out within or by a domestic church is still religious in nature in that it is being conducted by an entity that acknowledges that there is no point in its life that escapes its being a church. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore illustrates this argument by stressing the fact that Christian teaching is sacramental. “Christian teaching needs to be envisioned as sacramental, and with the purpose of mediating God, and with approaches that mediate God’s grace and God’s call to the human community for the sake of human sanctification and creation’s well-being.” In understanding the family as a church, the family’s education of its own children and its educational or evangelical interactions with the world should be guided by being an attempt to mediate God’s grace. With regards to the education of children within the family, it must be acknowledged that all actions that parents take are in some way educational for their children. Children model their own behavior on what they see, and, presumably, they will see their parent’s actions more than they see any other person’s. Children will understand their family to be a church and participate in that church to the extent that their parents and other older family members show them is necessary. To maintain the family as a domestic church, parents must make their family a community of worship based on faith, hope, and love. In order to grow their community in this manner, parents and other guardians must teach these virtues to their children. Children also have virtuous obligations to care

for (and in an educational and evangelical sense “teach”) their parents.\textsuperscript{688} There is no doubt that parents also learn and deepen their faith through the deeds of their children.

The family educates and evangelizes to the world at large through their Christian actions and interactions among themselves and with others. Simply by existing and living as a Christian family, the domestic church leads and educates through its example. Beyond leading by example, direct actions undertaken by the domestic church that promote and work towards social justice are evangelical as they are based on the family’s understanding of its own relationship with God. In this sense, the social justice calling of the domestic church is in some ways a form of its commission to educate and evangelize. Clark Cochran and David Carroll make this connection directly. “Indeed, in the Catholic family, children must learn practices of resistance to ideological, economic, and cultural forces of consumerism, greed, radical individualism, patriarchy, and moral permissiveness. The distinctiveness of the Catholic family is a sacramentality connecting it to the church and other social institutions.”\textsuperscript{689} Children who are taught to do things such as resisting the ideological and cultural forces of greed or moral permissiveness will grow into adults (and in many cases will work as children and adolescents) who strive for social justice and directly impact the world in a manner that furthers social justice for all people.

Richard R. Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer promote three specific things the Church can do to help families reconcile themselves with globalization and the postmodern context of the world: “(1) prepare its members to add their voices to public


\textsuperscript{689} Clark E. Cochran and David Carroll, Catholics, Politics, and Public Policy: Beyond Left and Right (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 75-6.
debate over the kinds of social, educational, economic, and political supports postmodern families need; (2) reach out to families in civil society, providing them with the kinds of supports that no longer seem readily available from schools, neighborhoods, and civic associations; and, (3) give special attention to families in their teaching ministries including support of religious education in the home.”

As the family can itself be a church, it is capable and called to undertake these same focuses of attention. The family can use the Church as a source of strength and resources in its attempts of accomplishing these tasks. Domestic churches can reach out to other families and institutions in furtherance of these obligations. The interaction between the Church and domestic churches and the domestic churches and the world illustrates the connection between the Christian family’s mission of the promotion of social justice and its need to participate in the life of the Church.

Participating in the life of the Church is essential to a family being a domestic church and is what can exclude some families from being considered a domestic church. There are certainly families that educate and evangelize among themselves and to others in a Christian manner while at the same time working for social justice who do not participate in the Church. These families cannot be considered the smallest ecclesial unit of a Church in which they do not participate because they are not sharing in its sacramentality.

Avery Dulles says as much in his description of the Church as sacrament. “Since sacramentality by its nature calls for active participation, only those

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691 This statement does not preclude that God can be operative in the life of families that do not participate in the Church. There can certainly exist families that are graced but not participants in (or even members of) the Church. However, a family cannot be a specific manifestation of Church if they do not participate in it. Domestic church is an ecclesial designation as much as it is a sacramental, ethical, or social title.
who belong to the Church, and actively help to constitute it as a sign, share fully in its reality as a sacrament.”  

A family cannot evangelize and proclaim the Kingdom that the Church believes itself to be the seed of if that family does not participate in the Church.  

The duty to proclaim the Kingdom is clearly a mission shared by both the domestic and Universal Church.  Essentially, because “domestic church” is also an ecclesial term, a family must lead its life in a manner that makes themselves able to participate in the life of the Church so that it can be an actual manifestation of that Church.

Even beyond theological reasoning, there are practical reasons why the family needs to participate in the Church in order to become or maintain its ability to be a domestic church.  Participating by fulfilling the most basic requirement of membership in the Church, attending Mass, can have a significant effect on families in the likelihood that they will carry out their duties to educate/evangelize and work for social justice.

CARA’s study of marriage in the Catholic Church found that “Frequency of Mass attendance is a strong indicator of the general importance of Catholicism in a person’s life and of his or her level of commitment to living out the faith.”  This trend also carries into participation in non-Mass Church events.  “Non-Mass Church events” encompasses social programming, educational opportunities, and social justice activities that are still based in the Church.  Clearly, Mass attendance would also positively affect the frequency that families participate in these types of activities overall, not just when

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693 *LG* #5 reads “The Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing the precepts of charity, humility, and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and beginning of that kingdom.”
http://cara.georgetown.edu/MarriageSum.pdf.

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these types of programs are at or run by their local parish or the Institutional Church. Furthermore, the understanding here is of actual participation and not simply membership. As noted previously in this work, two-in-three people claim membership in a church while only one-in-four regularly attends services. Membership is important, but if it not realized as participation, it will not lead to a family leading a lifestyle that would enable them to be a domestic church. Leading a lifestyle that embodies the mission of the domestic church without active participation in the Church is impossible.

These three pillars, education/evangelization, social justice, and participation in the Church, must be brought together in a manner that all are continually being carried out as a lifestyle for the family to be a domestic church. There can be no separation between education/evangelization or the social and religious activities. If the family is to be a domestic church, it is a domestic church at all times. *Gaudium et Spes* makes this claim explicit when it states, “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.” Florence Caffrey Bourg has argued that it is a failure of religious formation that individuals and families sometimes lack the ability to perceive God in their daily lives apart from through explicitly religious activities. In that sense, it is the job of religious educators and the Church itself to teach families that they are called to be domestic churches meaning that there is no time in their lives when this call can be ignored. The family’s religious identity of being a domestic church is not its only identity; but it is an identity that applies in all situations and in the whole of life. The intimacy experienced among family

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696 GS #43.
members and between the family and the world is inseparable from the intimacy the family experiences in their communal relationship with God. Being a domestic church is how the family lives out its relationship with God. There is no time, place, or activity that excuses the family from that relationship.

The completeness of the prevalence of relationship of the family with Christ and His Church means that all education is religious education (hence, evangelization), all promotion of social justice is actually participation in the life of the Church, and participating in the life of the Church encompasses all activities of the family. The family is the place where individuals learn how to be citizens of the world as well as members of the Church. The social justice and religious education missions of the domestic church cannot be severed from a family’s duty to raise its children as productive members of society. Thomas Groome asserts that the role of the domestic church is to be a witness in the world. The totality of this call is the best way that the family can evangelize to those outside of it.

Family as witness requires that the whole life of the home be suffused with the values and perspectives of Christian faith. The members must constantly review the family’s ethos and atmosphere, lifestyle and priorities, relationships and gender roles, language patterns and conversations, work and recreation – every aspect – to monitor how well it reflects the convictions and commitments of Christian faith. Good governance requires that everything about a Christian family bear witness to its faith; that is how it educates most effectively in Christian identity.

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The intermingling of the ethical obligations placed upon the domestic church leads to a lifestyle that affects all of the family’s life.

In *Follow the Way of Love*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes that “As Christian families, you not only belong to the Church, but your daily life is a true expression of the Church.” As Church (a sacramental entity), the family is obligated to act in an ethical manner. These ethical actions are required at all times, during explicitly religious times and during the mundane activities of family life. Yet, the ethical lifestyle that the family is called to is not something that is lived out perfectly. Again quoting the USCCB, “No domestic church does all this perfectly. But neither does any parish or diocesan church. All members of the Church struggle daily to become more faithful disciples of Christ.” Just as living as a family has its moments of extreme stress and difficulty, so too does attempting to be a “good” Christian. In this process, the domestic church again shares common reality with the Roman Church; both have a continual calling that is not always fulfilled. However, provided that the family understands that it is also undertaking an ongoing conversion experience as well, it can be sustained as a domestic church. While there will be moments and times of moral and familial failings, the family is called to live the lifestyle of the sacramental reality called domestic church.

One additional aspect of the domestic church’s lifestyle that needs to be briefly discussed is the role of the local and Universal Church in supporting and sustaining the family in their attempts to lead that lifestyle. Penny Edgell points out that the local church can be a central pillar of support for both traditional and non-traditional families.

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702 Ibid.
and can help correct their trajectory when families are formed in non-ideal circumstances or encounter difficulties in the family’s maintenance. However, the local church must also have the means at their disposal (including an honest moral assessment) in order to offer these families the services and support they require. Edgell continues, “Churches that do not adapt will lose members, and failure to adapt results from the same kinds of things that cause a failure of rationality in organizations more generally. These mostly center on blocks to effective communication of market demand or effective decision making in response to it.”

While the Magisterium has primarily responded to this need by further developing its exclusionary definition of the “Christian family” and expressing compassion for those who cannot live up to its form requirements, local parishes and dioceses have to struggle with conformity to the Church’s teachings and the reality of the families that they minister to. It behooves the Church to find a means of encouraging family participation in local church life as it is necessary for the family to be a domestic church. Participation is beneficial to the families that do participate, and it will aid in building up and sustaining the Church itself. The domestic church’s obligation to live its mission can be further empowered by the Universal Church.

**Family Forms and the Domestic Church**

Up until this point in this chapter, the domestic church has been analyzed in terms of its sacramentality founded in its ability to be a specific embodiment of Church, the foundation of that sacramentality being rooted in common baptism, and the ongoing conversion to a lifestyle, shared with the Church, focusing on education/evangelization,

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704 Ibid. 35.
705 The USCCB directly acknowledges this difficulty. They state “We acknowledge that official structures sometimes make it difficult to have dialogue with families and to create a partnership with you.” [United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message to Families* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994).]
social justice, and participation in the life of the Church. What remains to be addressed is which family forms are capable of embodying that sacramentality and living that lifestyle. The difficulty presented in this determination is that the Magisterium’s definition of a “Christian family” in terms of its form does not mesh completely with either the theological definition of and expectations placed upon the domestic church or with emerging and growing segments of families in demographic terms.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the family as “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children.” This definition does not appear to leave much room for any family forms other than the most basic nuclear form of married parents in their first and only marriage raising a child or children who are biologically their own. Donald Miller’s research into how the Magisterium has defined the form and duty of the “Christian family” operates hand-in-hand with this definition. “The family should be: (1) rooted in marriage; (2) in a positive direct relationship and reciprocal relationship with society and the Church; and (3) a dynamic image of God’s inner and external relational life.” He also presupposes that the term family implies that there are children involved. Points two and three of his analysis speak to lifestyle and, though worded differently, are agreed to by the definition of the domestic church operative in this analysis. By stating that the family should be rooted in marriage and presupposes children, there are few if any options left other than to contend that the Magisterium teaches that non-nuclear family forms are not families at all.

By implying that only a nuclear family can be a Christian family, the Magisterium has seemingly excluded all other family forms. Norbert Mette points out that this

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definition creates problems on several levels: 1) By only acknowledging one legitimate family form, the Church is proposing that the nuclear family is and always has been the proper expression of family. Yet, “family” has been expressed in many differing forms throughout history.708 “Fundamentally, the model based on natural law asserts nothing less than a specific form of the family, of the kind that has developed in the course of modernity, above all in Europe and North America709 is acceptable. 2) Accepting only the nuclear family form denies the dynamic nature of the family and reduces it to a static reality. 3) This teaching regards the nuclear family as pre-ordained by God (which can be proof texted using various scriptural passages such as the 4th Commandment) leaving little room for adaptation. 4) It roots the family exclusively in marriage leaving the family as a secondary hanger-on to a theology of marriage therefore denying a theologically rich understanding of the family.710 It is not simply that Mette and other authors feel that a solely nuclear family understanding of domestic church is an inaccurate expression of the reality of families today, it is that only accepting nuclear families as domestic churches is historically problematic and, in a sense, anti-family. Overemphasis on sexual ethics and its relationship to marriage and basic human behavior has minimized the attention paid by the Church to other important aspects of Christian families, particularly the theology of domestic church.711 While sexual ethics and means of formation will always remain defining characteristics of families in general and domestic churches specifically, disproportionate concern with means of family formation

708 See Rosemary Radford Ruether, Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000) for an in depth discussion of how the family’s transformation has evolved over time with the aid of socioeconomic as well as religious factors.
710 Ibid. 77-8.
711 Donald Miller, Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christfideles Laici (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), xiii.
while minimizing current relationships and familial lifestyle relegates any theology of domestic church to simply being a secondary concern of either right sexual relationships or a theology of marriage. Unless there is a balance between idealizing a particular form and the fact that families exist in right relationships with both Christ and His Church today while also subsisting in a myriad of forms, a theology of domestic church will be exclusionary as opposed to being welcoming.

However, there remains the fact that domestic church is an ecclesial designation as well. The term defines not just a relationship between the family and God, but also between the family and the Church. As discussed earlier in this chapter, when Lumen Gentium proclaims that the Church is a sacramental reality, it is stating that the Roman Catholic Church, established by Christ and maintained by apostolic succession, is the “Church” in question. Therefore, there has to be some limitation in stating which family forms and lifestyles are capable of being actual manifestations of that particular church. Again, there must be a balance between defining the domestic church (in terms of form) as solely the nuclear family and any form and lifestyle that subjective families and individuals deem viable. This point is not to argue statements such as found in Follow the Way of Love when the USCCB state, “Wherever a family exists and love still moves through its members, grace is present. Nothing—not even divorce or death—can place limits upon God's gracious love.” This work is certainly not attempting to argue that God’s offer of gracious love (or a person or family’s acceptance of that offer) is limited by theological presuppositions or family form. That being said, for the family to be a domestic church, a manifestation of the Roman Catholic Church, there must be some

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712 LG #1.
level of accord between the family’s ongoing lifestyle and the Moral Teachings of the Church. This portion of the chapter will seek to establish that balance.

The opening portion of the previous chapter of this work goes to great lengths to point out current family demographics and correlates and contrasts them with previous data. It would be appropriate to represent some of the most important information already stated. Since 1970 the percentage of households composed of married couples with or without children has fallen twenty percent from seventy-one to fifty-one. While two-thirds (66.7%) of children under the age of eighteen currently live with two married parents, only three-in-five (59.9%) live with their biological parents who are also married. Over a quarter (26.3%) of children under the age of eighteen live with a single parent and two percent live only with their grandparent(s). Using only the number of children under the age of eighteen who are not living with married parents who are also their biological parents, there remains at least over forty percent (40.1%) of families with children under the age of eighteen who do not meet the Magisterium’s definition of the nuclear family capable of being a domestic church.

\[^{714}\text{As with previous demographic studies in this work, divorce will not be covered with any depth. While the number of divorces is somewhat possible to track, figuring exactly the proportion of currently married couples composed of one or more previously divorced persons is far more difficult to pin down. Beyond statistical difficulties, it is quite clear in Catholic Teaching that there is no recognition of divorce after a sacramental Marriage has taken place. Therefore, a divorced individual who begins dating or remarries without first being granted an annulment is committing adultery and therefore is not leading a lifestyle compatible with having their family be considered a domestic church. Furthermore, an individual who is has been civilly divorced, not sought an annulment, and is continuing to raise their child or children alone while not breaking their marital vows has not broken any concrete rules of the Church. Beyond all of this, an inclusion of divorce in this analysis will stretch the parameters involved far beyond the scope of this study.}\]


There are issues beyond the marital status of parents who are raising children related to family formation and maintenance. There is the growth of multi-generational families sharing a household and blended families created by a single parent marrying someone who is not their child’s biological parent are growing segments of all families that are not necessarily created out of divorce or any other illicit (as per Catholic Teaching) means. One in eleven children currently resides in their grandparent(s)’ home or have at least one grandparent residing in their parent(s)’ home.717 A 2005 survey commissioned by Religion and Ethics Newsweekly found that it is as common for a child to be living with a grandparent as it is for them to be living with a step-parent and it is twice as likely that a child is living with a grandparent than that the child was brought into the family through adoption. That same analysis reflects that children living in a “non-traditional” household are twice as likely to have a grandparent present in the home.718 Furthermore, technology and ease of travel has made extended and multi-generational families more likely to interact more regularly and with greater intimacy.

With regards to step-parenting, at least one-third of all children will spend at least some time in a stepfamily before they reach adulthood.719 While the most common means of introducing a step-parent into a family is remarriage after a divorce, there remain a significant number of families in which a single parent later marries without having

718 Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly Frequency Questionnaire," ed. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. October 2005, 13/12/09 http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week908/ReligionAndFamily_Questionnaire.pdf, 3. The exact results discussed above are as follows: (If children are present in the home) Is this child yours by birth, yours by adoption, a step-child, a grandchild, or unrelated to you? [Numbers reflect percentage] 1 total, 2 traditional, 3 non-traditional] Yours by birth (88, 92, 79), Yours by adoption (3, 4, 3), A step-child (6, 7, 4), A grandchild (6, 4, 11), Unrelated (2, 1, 4), Other family member (2, 1, 5), Other (2, 0, 8).
previously been married. These family forms are growing and viable while at the same time not conflicting with the moral teachings of the Magisterium.

Given the growth in diversity of families as defined by their form, the reality of life is that nuclear families are far less common and far less likely to be considered standard by the general public. Research has begun to show that “only one-third of Americans define a family in the most traditional sense as a ‘mother, father, and children,’ or ‘a husband, wife, and children.’” Not only is the definition of “family” provided by the Magisterium out of step with the average American, it would eliminate two-in-five families with children from being able to be considered a domestic church. If definitionally excluded from the theological reality of the domestic church, a family will have little motivation to grow in their understanding of their family being a church. Some change must be undertaken to the definition of the “Christian family” if it is to truly embody the theology of domestic church and lead families to greater participation in the life of the Church. The Church has the duty to teach families that they can be churches themselves so that they might accept the grace offered them by God.

Penny Edgell repeatedly points out that the greatest opportunity for an increase in religiosity is when individuals become married and when individuals or couples become parents. Attendance at services is more likely to see an increase when discussing married couples versus singles or single parents while parenthood, especially among single-parents, is most likely to be the cause of a rise in participation in organized

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congregational activities that are not explicitly religious services. Teaching that diverse family forms are capable of being churches themselves should have a positive effect on participation. Certainly teaching that only nuclear families can fill this role discourages many other families from taking advantage of the services that a congregation can provide. With regards to single-parent families, Gerald Foley pronounces that the Church can be a source of support in the face of the derision encountered in the world at large. “Single-parent families need to feel the church recognizes their needs and values their presence, especially after facing people’s judgment and insensitivity.” In this sense, the relationship between family participation and Church support rooted in a broader understanding of a theology of domestic church is symbiotic but the prime mover in the relationship will be theological openness on the part of the Church.

Practically speaking, families will participate in the Church and its activities in direct relation to the support they receive and the programs offered by the Church. By expanding the definition of family outward, programming will shift in proportion to the changes to support that definition. When it was a more common occurrence that “family” meant “nuclear family” in which marriage precedes children and rates of religious participation were higher, it was far more natural to associate family life changes with religious rituals and participation. As those instances have become less common, there has, to a degree, been a disassociation between family life events and religious participation. Again quoting Edgell, “The ‘natural’ and automatic link between

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721 The chart developed to show religious participation by family type can be found in Penny Edgell, *Religion and Family in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 47. That chart is also reproduced in this work in the previous chapter of this work.

religion and family formation is not so automatic today, but rather depends on how people interpret the meaning of religious involvement and its relevance to their own lives.\textsuperscript{723} Through opening the definition of family capable of being labeled a domestic church, the Church has an opportunity to reconnect family events, religion, and religious participation.

Participation in the life of the Church will also have practical benefits for the family. According to Douglas Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William H. Meredith, “There are five ways that religion may be advantageous to family life: (a) by enhancing the family’s social support network, (b) by sponsoring family activities and recreation, (c) indoctrination in supportive family teachings and values, (d) by providing family social and welfare services, and (e) by encouraging families to seek divine assistance with personal and family problems.”\textsuperscript{724} In essence, the practical benefits granted to the family through a life in the Church will directly lead to theological underpinnings of a theology of domestic church. By being in the Church, the family will begin to acknowledge that they remain a church throughout their life and truly be able to be a domestic church.

Contrary to what may have been implied by attempting to define the domestic church primarily through its sacramentality and its lifestyle, there has to be some objective understanding of what family forms can and cannot be considered domestic churches. Joseph Atkinson is right to point out that if there are no objective parameters relating to family forms that can be domestic churches then the term itself may become


\textsuperscript{724} Douglas A. Abbott, Margaret Berry, and William H. Meredith, "Religious Belief and Practice: A Potential Asset in Helping Families," \textit{Family Relations} 39, no. 4 (October 1990), 443.
removed from the salvific order of creation. Specifically, requirements on family form are necessitated by the ecclesial nature of the domestic church. A family cannot maintain a form that is out of line with Church Moral Teaching and still be a manifestation of that Church. Here again, what becomes central is lifestyle and not specific ethical or unethical actions. Furthermore, unethical or sinful actions that lead to family formation (sex outside of wedlock resulting in pregnancy) may lead to family forms that are inherently contra Church Teaching (an unmarried cohabiting couple raising their child) or forms that are not contradicting Church Teaching through their existence (a single-parent and his or her child residing with that child’s grandparent(s)). It is clear that it would be worse if a family formed through less than ideal circumstances were not to begin to attempt ongoing conversion to the life of a domestic church. To use a specific example, a single-parent is as duty bound to educate their child or children in the faith as a married couple is; the education/evangelization of one’s offspring is one of the most basic objective requirements of the theology of domestic church. The Pontifical Council for the family acknowledges this exact idea when discussing the ability of single-parents to educate their children on chastity. “But God sustains single parents with special love and calls them to take on this task [formation of chastity] with the same generosity and sensitivity with which they love and care for their children in other areas of family life.” Irregular formation does not excuse future family lifestyle.

In Familiaris Consortio, John Paul II clearly distinguishes the nuclear family’s capability of being a domestic church from those families who find themselves in

725 Joseph C. Atkinson, "Family As Domestic Church: Development, Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation," Theological Studies 66 (2005). Atkinson’s full quotation on this point is found in chapter 3 of this work.
“difficult” or “irregular” situations who seemingly cannot be considered domestic churches. He further makes the argument that those difficult or irregular families should attempt to change their form or circumstances so that they will be more like the nuclear family. The Church and her teachings are to be a guide “so that they [those families that find themselves in irregular of difficult situations] can all come closer to that model of a family which the Creator intended from ‘the beginning’ and which Christ has renewed with His redeeming grace.” What is left out of the presentation in *Familiaris Consortio* is that those families labeled as irregular are actually becoming more and more regular. The argument that will be made here is not that the Church has to alter its pronouncements on specific sexual activities or lifestyles. However, it will be argued that those families originating in non-ideal, difficult, or irregular situations are not therefore excluded from the possibility of being a domestic church. So long as the family undergoes an ongoing conversion to the lifestyle necessary to be a domestic church, they can transcend their previous moral failings. Furthermore, there is a need to accept that the nuclear family is seldom an entity on its own in the world. Many families live as a church across generations and there must be more attention paid to the role of extended families and multiple generations play in how families participate in the life of the Church and live out their particular relationship with God. This idea is exemplified in *Follow the Way of Love* when the Bishops state:

> Children who care for parents stricken with Alzheimer's disease, parents who stand by their adult children even when they seem to reject the family's values, a grandparent who helps to raise the children when parents are unable, a single parent who goes to great lengths to raise and nurture the children without the benefit of the other parent: all these are living faithful lives. They enflesh the

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727 *FC* #65.
words of Ruth, who refused to forsake her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, and instead vowed, "wherever you go I will go" (Ru 1:16).\textsuperscript{728}

Family form certainly plays a role in a family’s ability to be a domestic church, but the number of acceptable forms definitely goes beyond the sole form of an idealized understanding of the nuclear family.

Sinful action does not preclude future acceptance of God’s offer of grace. Accepting grace is a necessary step on the path to conversion and salvation for individuals, for the Church, and for domestic churches. The path to salvation that the life of the domestic church provides is not internally enabled. It is enabled through Christ and His Church. Ray Noll states this fact in saying that “The happy truth is that the Christian community, even if it is crippled and sinful, goes on being a sign as long as it does not see its salvation in itself, but in Jesus Christ. To be effective the church does not depend on its own perfection, but on its own reception of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{729} To deny that any family form is incapable of accepting the constant offer of grace is to either deny that God’s offer is both gracious and perpetual or that families are not capable of conversion and acceptance of that offer of grace. Neither of these positions is theologically valid. However, accepting that all family forms are capable of being graced does not mean that all family forms are capable of being domestic churches because not all family forms are compatible with Roman Catholic Moral Teaching.

Instead of simply asking which family forms are capable of being domestic churches, perhaps it would be more beneficial to find an example of family that is adequately Christian in the character to be a model for families that aspire to be domestic

churches. Luis Alessio and Hector Munoz propose the following. “Where should a Christian family direct itself to find out whether its ‘form’ is Christian? Without any doubt at all, it should go to the Family of Jesus.” They reason goes beyond the fact that the family of Jesus was the introduction of the Word into the world; they stress the manner in which that family responded to God’s call in terms of the actions they were shown to take in the Gospel texts. Mary accepts her calling humbly and continues to deepen and explore her relationship with God. Joseph, guided by the Spirit accepts Mary’s condition and fulfills his role of husband and earthly father of Jesus. Essentially, the Sacred Family of Jesus lived out its faith in the whole of their life.

Refocusing the argument of modeling the domestic church on the family of Jesus in terms of formation and form may also help to shed light on which forms of family are capable of being a church in miniature. While Alessio and Munoz are right to point out that in the Jewish tradition of the time engagement was equivalent to marriage, the current Roman Catholic understanding of marriage would not concede the point. Hence, it can be argued that Mary conceived her child as a single parent. Although Joseph knows that the child Mary is carrying is not biologically his, he continues with her on their path to marriage and raises her child as his own. Common language would label Joseph as a step-parent and the family as a blended family in which one of the parents is raising a child who is not their own. According to the Gospel of Luke, upon hearing

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733 However, there is one monumental difference between Mary becoming pregnant outside the bonds of marriage and any other person in human history becoming pregnant outside of marriage: Mary did not engage in any activity that would be labeled sinful by the Church in becoming pregnant. The argument presented above does not question this fact or rely on it in any way. All that is being argued is family forms are capable of being domestic churches with regard to Church Teaching.
from the angel Gabriel that not only will she bear a child, but her relative Elizabeth is also with child, Mary sets out to visit her kinswoman and they evangelize to each other.\textsuperscript{734} While the exact relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is not revealed in the Scriptures, their relationship certainly reveals the role of extended and multi-generational families in religious formation as well as in daily life. A blended family who see their religious life incorporated into their relationships with at least some of their relatives does not fit the definition of the nuclear family that the Church sets out as the model for the domestic church. Yet, it is unquestioned that the family of Jesus was a church in miniature. Therefore, the conclusion must be that there are family forms outside of the nuclear family that are capable of being a domestic church.

Having shown evidence that family forms beyond the nuclear family are capable of being domestic churches, specific family forms can be further explored as to their viability. According to Donald Miller, following his reflection on Church Teaching and his analysis of the family, the minimum form of any family is either a married couple or a parent and child. Without the bond of marriage, birth, or formal adoption, there is not a family present regardless of the level of commitment found between any two or more persons.\textsuperscript{735} It is unnecessary to argue that a nuclear family composed of a Christian married couple and their children are capable of living the mission of the domestic church. A married couple that has yet to reproduce can still educate/evangelize younger generations through their interactions with nieces, nephews, and other children as well as ministering to one-another. In this regard it is certainly possible that a Christian married couple with no children can be a domestic church as they are capable of fulfilling the

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\textsuperscript{734} Luke 1:26-56.

\textsuperscript{735} Donald Miller, \textit{Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II Through Christifideles Laici} (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 216.
\end{footnotesize}
duties of the domestic church while leading a lifestyle that is in accord with Church Moral Teaching. Single-parents and their child or children are also possible domestic churches. While the act and circumstances leading to single parenthood is almost never ideal, a parent and his or her child is certainly a family and entirely capable of participating in the life of the Church in a manner consistent with being a domestic church. Were a single-parent to get married resulting in a blended family including a step-parent, it can remain or become a domestic church. Of course, all of these family forms listed as possible domestic churches are done so with the understanding that none of the parties involved are divorced. Any and all sexual relationships after divorce are considered by the Church to be instances of adultery. This line of thought would also include that civil divorce coupled with an annulment would enable a later formation or reformation of a family capable of leading a lifestyle characterizing a domestic church. However, further exploration of the validity of divorce, the process of annulments, or the moral character of relationships post either manner of dissolution of a previous relationship is beyond the scope of this analysis. At this point, it can be summarized that, in terms of parent-child families, married couples and their children, married couples without children, single-parents and their children, and single-parents who later marry creating a blended family can all be possible forms for domestic churches provided that they are not preceded by a divorce (unless coupled with an annulment) and are otherwise leading a Christian lifestyle compatible with a theology of domestic church.

In addition to the family forms discussed above, more attention needs to be paid to the role of extended and multi-generational families and their ability to be a church.

Membership in a family requires not only an objective definition from outside of a

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family, but also a functional definition that the subjective family accepts for itself. This aspect of defining families is just as important in defining domestic churches as it is in a sociological understanding of the family. Sydney Callahan states that “Human kinship bonds are the crucible for developing responsible duties and the unique human sense of moral obligation to others.” The family is that body that helps an individual form their sense of ethics and morality in the same way that the domestic church’s ethical obligation is rooted in its sacramentality. Within a domestic church, religious, secular, and familial moral obligations are indistinguishable. Hence, any member of the extended clan of the family can be considered a part of its domestic church provided that he, she, or they are related to the smaller familial unit (parent and child, married couple, etc.) and they are participants in the family’s life as a specific historical manifestation of Church.

The preceding argument does not simply rely on household of residence, but residency certainly can play a role. Given that one in eleven children under the age of eighteen is currently residing in the same household as at least one of their grandparents, there can be little doubt of the role of grandparents in the religious education of the children they live with. Furthermore, given the technological and travel advances that have taken place in society, even distance is no longer a barrier in a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family member participating in the life of a family as it continuously converts toward being a better and more fruitful church. When an uncle stands for his nephew at his baptism, when the extended family attends Mass together at a holiday or otherwise, when a grandmother reads Bible stories to her granddaughter, the domestic

church is growing in its right relationship with Christ and His Church. Understanding the family as a domestic church does not mean that the family has to be defined solely through either an understanding of marriage or through a parent-child dyad. There is no doubt that those family forms are capable of being a domestic church. However, conceiving of the family in multi-generational or extended terms in its embodiment of a domestic church is not only adequate, in many instances, it may be more appropriate to a specific family.

In his *Models of Church*, Avery Dulles says the following with regards to the Church as Sacrament. “Wherever the grace of Christ is present, it is in search of a visible form that adequately expresses what it is. In this perspective the Church may be defined as the association of men that palpably bears witness to the true nature and meaning of God’s gift in Jesus Christ.”

The argument presented here is that if the family is a church, there is more than a single nuclear manner of expressing that it is indeed a graced community that visibly gives presence to the Church. Dulles goes on in that same section of his text to state that “In the last analysis, no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between the hesitant member and the sympathetic inquirer. A judicial approach to the question of membership would be out of keeping with the sacramental ecclesiology.”

This inquiry accepts that statement as being as applicable to the domestic church as it is to the Roman Church so long as what is also carried forward is that even hesitant members of the domestic church are also members and participants in both the Church and the family’s relationship with it. Provided that all members of the family seeking to be a domestic church are leading a lifestyle that is in line with Church Teaching and

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740 Ibid., 72-3.
would allow them to participate in the Church by accepting and partaking in the Church’s most central ritual, the Eucharist, a family may be considered a church in miniature. Then that kinship network can be considered a domestic church. Collectively working together as families to educate/evangelize, promote social justice, and participate in the life of the Church is what defines the domestic church.

Form does not eliminate the ability for any family to accept God’s offer of grace; but it may be a limiting factor in that family being able to be a specific instance of the Roman Catholic Church. Mitch and Kathy Finley have the following to say with regards to sing-parents. “As church, the single-parent family can cultivate prayer and family rituals, can know forgiveness and reconciliation, can cultivate a life of service, participate in a parish community, and proclaim the gospel effectively…The main prerequisite is the decision to live the life of a single-parent family according to the spirit of the gospel.”

In that same vein, blended families, multi-generation and extended families, and nuclear families possess an equal ability to be domestic churches. To be clear, family form can still be understood as a judiciously applied criterion as to what family forms can and cannot constitute domestic churches. However, the circle of demarcation has a much greater radius than has been previously argued by the Magisterium and by other conservative authors. Yet, there is still a line in the sand. The line is not due to stating that God cannot play a role in any family’s life and is therefore not truly exclusionary on a sacramental basis. But, in another manner, it is both a sacramental, and even more so, an ecclesial border. Those individuals and families who are not capable of being members of the Church in the sense that Lumen Gentium #1 understands the Church as Sacrament are not capable of collectively forming a family that can share in that specific

Church’s sacramentality. This manner of separation still respects the fact that there are family forms that are inherently against Church Teaching while still welcoming (back) to the Church many families who have felt disenfranchised or excluded by the definition of family heretofore proclaimed by the Magisterium. The primary defining characteristic of the domestic church is that it is authentically a manifestation of the Roman Catholic Church, Christian in nature and leads a life that is in keeping the spirit and teaching of both the Bible and the Church. Rosemary Radford Ruether summarizes these points in the following way:

The Christian family and its values are not the same as the natural family with its often exaggerated values of family security and advancement; nor is the Christian family the same as the family of modern liberal individualism, where commitments are decided and defined by individual choice. Understanding the family as domestic church requires understanding “church” properly. The primary values defining the Christian family are the same values that define the “new family in Christ”: other-concern and compassionate love that overlooks socially normative boundaries and is willing to sacrifice to meet the needs of others. These values are more important in defining Christian families than is particular family structure. This does not mean that all structures are equally valid, since some more than others – especially long-term fidelity to mates and children – will serve human growth and happiness and contribute to a more humane society. But it does mean that structure alone is not the key criterion of Christian identity, and it opens up the possibility that even “nontraditional” families may exhibit the most important Christian family values, and for that reason be authentic domestic churches.\textsuperscript{742}

\textsuperscript{742} Rosemary Radford Ruether, \textit{Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 134. It must be noted that in this particular text, Ruether is arguing for the validity of more family forms than are considered acceptable in this work. Specifically, she is arguing for the ability of same-sex couples among others to be able to be domestic churches. The arguments presented in this work are not arguing for or against that supposition. What is accepted in the above is that those families that are not by their nature contrary to Church Teaching are capable of being domestic churches. While the cited passage above speaks to this argument, this work has not chosen to undertake the question of if a family composed of a same-sex couple and their own or their adopted children can be a domestic church as the arrangement is clearly against Roman Catholic Moral Theory. An acceptance of this form would be a clear change of the teaching of the Magisterium and therefore has been left as a tabled issue in the same manner that remarriage after divorce without an annulment has been pushed aside due to the clear teaching of the Church.
Stated most plainly, the family is Christian when it lives that way\textsuperscript{743} and a family is Catholic when it participates in the life of that institution. Both living the spirit of Gospel\textsuperscript{744} and sharing the Church’s mission enable the family to embark on a path of continuous conversion towards being a domestic church. These goals cannot be achieved without God’s unceasing support and aid.\textsuperscript{745} When Avery Dulles states that the Church must be “a visible expression of his [Christ’s] invisible grace triumphing over human sin and alienation,”\textsuperscript{746} he could very easily been speaking about the domestic church as well.

If the domestic church is going to be able to truly meet its calling, it is also going to require support from both its parish and the Hierarchical Church in both theological and practical terms. If these supports and understanding are put into place, there may well be more families that understand their mission to educate/evangelize, promote social justice, and participate in the life of the Church enables them to be a church for themselves and for the world, a domestic church.

\textbf{Conclusion}

As a means of summation for this chapter, it must be reiterated that the family can be a domestic church manifesting the Church itself which is in nature a Sacrament. Hence, the domestic church is a sacramental reality. Thomas Rausch presents this link as both a practical and theological point when he states that “It is the larger Church that makes explicit God’s presence sacramentally in the world – and we might add – in family life. The attitudes toward the sacramental life of the Church are formed in the home,

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\textsuperscript{743} Michael Lawler and Gail Risch, "Covenant Generativity: Toward a Theology of Christian Family," \textit{Horizons} 26, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 17.
\textsuperscript{745} \textit{FC} \#59.
\textsuperscript{746} Avery Dulles, \textit{Models of the Church} (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 134.
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often indelibly.” The family’s most unambiguous (though certainly not solitary) means to a communal experience of God is found in the Church. Family members come to know about the Church within and through their family. The relationship between the family and the Church establishes the former’s sacramentality and the latter’s dependence on the family for its ability to engage the world. The domestic church is not only sacramental for its members, it is a sacrament in the world helping to bring about a more loving community and world.  

The domestic church can be a sacramental reality because it is a concrete expression of the Church. The family as a whole and its members individually become members of the Church through their baptism. When the baptized find themselves living as a family, that family has little choice but to participate in the life of the Church and to live out their baptismal mission as a collective unit, a church in miniature. Therefore, it is baptism that is the ritualistic basis for the family’s ability to be a domestic church. In order to further distinguish why baptism is the formational sacrament of the family rather than marriage, it must be interjected that baptism must precede the family’s ability to be a domestic church while marriage may precede that ability, but not necessarily so. As discussed at length in this work and mentioned by the USCCB in *Follow the Way of Love* and many other writers, a single-parent and his or her child or children can be a domestic church. In this instance, there is a domestic church present, but not a marriage. This argument does not remove the preference that the normal family lifecycle be established as marriage preceding reproduction, but it does acknowledge that many families have not

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748 Barbara Deveney Redmond, “The Domestic Church: Primary Agent of Moral Development” (Ph. D. diss., The Graduate School of Arts & Sciences / Institute of Religious Education & Pastoral Ministry, Boston College, 1998), 256.
begun in that fashion yet have later emerged as domestic churches. The preference for marriage to precede reproduction does not exclude other realities nor does it ignore the reality that many families, like the Church itself, are earthly and imperfect yet strive to be better.

The striving of the family to be a domestic church involves an ongoing conversion toward being a more Christlike reality as a church and in the world. The family’s internal relationships must reflect their relationship to the Church. In addition, the domestic church must worship publicly through its actions in the community. The family does not exist outside of its context of being a family. The family most experiences and attempts to accomplish its Christian mission within the context of being a family more often (and possibly more so) than they do within the setting of the Universal or local church.\footnote{Florence Caffrey Bourg, 	extit{Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 42.} A domestic church is at all times both a family and an actual church. Because of this, there is a direct and symbiotic relationship between the mission of the Church and the family.\footnote{Gerald Foley, 	extit{Family Centered Church: A New Parish Model} (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 131-2.} The domestic church leads a lifestyle that lives out its mission in a manner particular to its being a family. It has a mandate to educate/evangelize and to promote social justice in the community and for the world. These goals are accomplished through both direct action and by simply living as a Christian family in a society that is often hostile to that reality.\footnote{Julie Hanlon Rubio goes so far as to call the social mandate of the family “perhaps the greatest strength of Catholic Social Teaching on the family.” [Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Does Family Conflict With Community?" 	extit{Theological Studies} 58, no. 4 (December 1997), 601.]}

There is no more accessible way to show Christ’s love and Christ’s love for the Church, than through a family living as a domestic church and celebrating that love among its members and with...
their community. Although composed of frail and fractured members, the domestic church, like the Church itself, must lead a lifestyle that exemplifies its calling. This calling necessitates that the domestic church participate in the life of the Church and the betterment of society.

All families are called to be domestic churches regardless of their composition. The distinction between which families can be considered possible domestic churches and those that are not capable of living up to this calling is a question of ecclesiology as much as it is a question of ethical practice. What is not at question is God’s ability to be active in the life of any family completely regardless of its form. To say otherwise would be to attempt to limit God’s pervasive offer of grace or the human capacity to accept that offer. However, that does not mean that all graced communities that call themselves a family are capable of embodying the reality of a specific church, in this instance the Roman Catholic Church. Membership is in many ways a two-way street. An individual or group may believe and even act as if they are members of a particular body, but unless that body in turn recognizes their membership, they are not truly a part of that body. So long as there is no manner of living as a family that precludes the family from fully participating in the life of the Church, the form is sufficient to be called a domestic church. In those instances, it will be to the ethical lifestyle of that domestic church that will sustain its ability to actualize Christ’s presence in the world in like manner to the Church itself.

In Familiaris Consortio John Paul II implores the Christian family to “become what you are.” Gregory Konerman notes “That exhortation seems pertinent, since it would appear that many Christian families today have failed to fully comprehend, and

thus have failed to utilize, the awesome fact that they are sacrament, that they are Church.” Konerman’s ideas are certainly correct and have been evidenced in the analysis presented above. The family can be a sacrament in the same manner that the Church is a sacrament making those institutions of like purpose. What is left out of the “what you are” – “you are a church” presentation is that the family’s ability to be a domestic church rests in its ongoing conversion toward a way of living their life where their “religious life” is indistinguishable from the life in general. This way of living is also an ecclesial calling to be a manifestation of a particular Church, and that many families accept this understanding and lead this life in a non-nuclear family form. What families “are” is not limited to nuclear form in society and is not limited to nuclear form via Church Teaching. Families are diverse in their compositions and outlooks on life. The Church must accept as possible domestic churches all forms that do not lead familial lifestyles contra to its moral teachings in order to have the greatest theological and practical weight behind its promulgations. A family that is “in a committed relationship of love with God and one another” is capable of being a graced community. Provided that family lives as a Catholic Family, they are capable of being a domestic church. Once this reality is accepted by families, the Church can begin to reassess its practical relationship with families, especially those families that are non-nuclear in their form.

The works of the Magisterium, the Bishops, and various Pontiffs, have all affirmed that the family has a special and specific role in being a Church in the world.

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755 This idea is apparent in the documents discussed in Chapter 1 of this work and also those documents dealing with the family that are not included here. Specifically, the Synod of Bishops over thirty years ago commented that “In a special way the family is called to carry out this divine plan. It is, as it were, the first cell of the church, helping its members to become agents of the history of salvation and living signs of
Yet, demographic and sociological trends have shown that the manner in which this special calling has been theologically presented and discussed is overly exclusionary and does not accurately reflect what the family is and who is participating in the Church. While the Church needs families to sustain itself, the family, as a domestic church, needs the Church to sustain itself. Marie Ramos Gonzalez implores the Church to “Let us hope we shall greet the millennium with a big welcome for Christian families, stressing our need to help them, in any way we can, to hear the call, instead of wasting our energies broadcasting rules.”\textsuperscript{756} Therein lays the difficulty between the practical nature of a theology of domestic church and the theological nature of that same teaching. How can the Church be welcoming to families if it does not accept all families capable of living as domestic churches as families? Anthony Gittins suggests a shift from an extensive (“a family is ______”) to an intensive means of defining “family”.

Then perhaps we could first specify common characteristics such as adequate structure; the support, protection, dignity, and fulfillment of members; the intention of stability and endurance; and the relation to the wider world. And with these – and others, including some that are theologically generated – perhaps we could identify this, that, these, or those domestic arrangements, as different from each other, evidently not perfect, and perhaps not equally attractive as some, and yet all recognizable as ‘Goodenough families.’\textsuperscript{757}

What is being proposed in this work is not a complete shift from an extensive definition of family (and therefore the domestic church) that the Church currently espouses to an entirely intensive definition. The current extensive definition of the Christian family can be found in the \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}. “A man and a


woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family.” This definition leaves out numerous family forms capable of being domestic churches as detailed throughout this chapter and has a limiting effect on how the Church overall and parishes specifically will schedule family programming. A fully intensive definition would be based only on the lifestyle that the family leads and may sway too far into disregard for Catholic Moral Teachings. There must be a balance between an intensive and extensive definition with the intensive definition based on lifestyle, action, and participation taking precedence but constrained, not by a solitary extensive definition of the family as only a nuclear family, but rather by an extensive definition that the family form not be inherently against Church Teaching as it lives not in the manner it was formed. The Church must truly convince itself that the family is its most basic cell and then direct their attention to fit this knowledge. Failure to do so will simply lead to the laity turning a deaf ear to the “official” church. Or, as Bernard Boelen states, “The Church cannot become an integral part of the Christian family’s self-understanding, unless the domestic church becomes an integral part of the Church’s self-understanding.” The Church must be more open to those forms of family that can be domestic churches, theologically address the concerns of these families, and schedule programming in accord with those shifts. Families must fully embrace the notion that they are churches at all times. Being a domestic church means that there is no line of demarcation between the family’s religious life and its secular activities. These changes

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in perspective will allow the theology of the family as a domestic church to blossom in a way that will benefit both families and the Church.
Conclusion

Summary of Research and Argument

The overarching goal of this work was to illustrate that defining the domestic church primarily based on its adherence to an idealized nuclear form does not account for emerging family forms that are not considered morally wrong by the Roman Church as dictated by their form. Furthermore, there is a practical sociological need for these families and the Church to engage in a reciprocal relationship of support. Only applying the understanding of the domestic church to nuclear families leaves far too many Catholic (by definition and practice) families searching for a theological understanding of their situation beneficial to both the Church and themselves. Due to demographic shifts among families, using nuclear form as the distinguishing characteristic of the domestic church is quite problematic when attempting to address the spiritual and practical needs of real families. In order to address the disconnection between the idealized expectations of the Church and the actual life of many families, this work has sought to reconcile some number of families within a theology of domestic church without contradicting Church Teaching. The theological understanding of the domestic church generated in this process had to be based upon the teachings of the Church while using other theological premises and models to bridge the divide.

The writings on the domestic church that grew out of the proceedings of Vatican II remain foundational but lack the necessary depth for the term to be applied with any real conviction. These documents⁷⁶¹ speak to the manner in which married couples should relate to their children and to the world, but they are scant in discussing the family

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⁷⁶¹ Here, the reference to documents refers specifically to those passages discussed in Chapter 1 of this work. Namely: *LG* #11, *AA* #11, and *GS* #48.
as a topic that can be considered as distinct from marriage. However, these writings are the basis for an understanding that the family is no longer to be considered subject to the Church and in fact can be a specific embodiment of that same Church. *Familiaris Consortio* takes the theology of domestic church put forward in Vatican II and expands upon it. John Paul II stresses the shared mission of the Church and the domestic church in *Familiaris Consortio* in a manner that unites the calling of both to evangelize, especially to younger generations and to the world. However, this work also lays the groundwork for accepting only nuclear families as domestic churches. By referring to families who are “irregular” or find themselves in “difficult” situations, the document can be read in an exclusionary way. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* introduces the notion of family conversions as related in the Scriptures as a basis for the current theology of domestic church. This citation leads to the point that in those instances, families were formed before they were domestic churches; churches are not founded in family formation, they are formed through conversion and leading a Christian lifestyle. However, it is also in the *Catechism* that the nuclear family model is most clearly held up as the only form of family that can be a domestic church. “A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family.” Therefore, even within the context of the *Catechism* itself, there remains tension as to the acceptability of family forms. Clearly those families who converted to Christianity as a unit in the Biblical accounts would not have defined themselves (nor should they be defined today) in nuclear terms. Even the Biblical example provided does not live up to the teaching espoused in the following paragraphs. John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* is not as much a

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762 See *FC* §§77-85
theological treatise as it is a means of stressing the importance of the vitality of families in the Church and in the world. This work tightly links love and education within the context of the domestic church while stressing that the Church is good news for all families.

The only local document assessed in this work was the USCCB’s *Follow the Way of Love* which was written to coincide with John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* in 1994, the Year of the Family. The Bishops retain a more pastoral tone in their writing. Although relatively brief in length, the document is striking in its inclusion of non-nuclear family forms, its proposals for family action, and its compassionate understanding of the current state of the family in the United States. This document is by far the most inclusionary of all the works generated by Church Leadership assessed in this dissertation. It also serves as somewhat of an alternative to the idealized writings of the Magisterium. The writings on the domestic church put forward by the Church itself either stress the proper formation and idealized form or compassionate understanding of human failings and the need for the family and the Church to support each other (sometimes this tension is evidenced within the context of a single work). The Church does not provide adequate explanation of all aspects of the theology it generated.

Due to the lack of specifics in some aspects of the theology of domestic church as put forward by the Church’s Hierarchy, theologians have taken it upon themselves to flesh out the meaning of the ecclesial designation “domestic church.” As detailed in chapter 2 of this dissertation, there is a fundamental difference in perspective between conformist/conservative theologians who simplify the lack of specifics by adhering to the nuclear norm commonly espoused by the Magisterium and more progressive/liberal
interpreters who would seemingly allow any kin group that defines itself as a family to define itself as a domestic church. While there is general consensus on several points, there remain some issues that have not been settled due to divergence of perspective. There is agreement that the family as a domestic church can be considered a legitimate path to salvation and that path runs through if not alongside the path of the Roman Church. All members of the Church are called to share in its mission and the family has a call that it is specific to its communal form. The domestic church’s duties apply both within the family and in how the family relates as a unit to the world around it. The domestic church is called to evangelize (often taking the form of education) in all its actions. The fundamental difference between the two theological perspective laid out in chapter 2 of this dissertation is found in if the writer in question posits that the family is capable of being a domestic church without its membership centering on sacramental marriage (meaning that the sacramental root of the domestic church is baptism) or if marriage is the starting point for a domestic church. The more conservative of these approaches shuts too many families out of the possibility of being designated domestic churches while the more liberal approach seems to ignore all other theological and ethical statements generated by the Church.

Demographically, the understanding that it is “normal” for the family to take a nuclear form is no longer true. Only half of all adults (50.5%) are currently married and living with their spouse\(^\text{764}\) and only three-in-five children (59.9%) under the age of

eighteen are living with their biological parents who are also married. The trends involved with these values are that marriage rates are receding and it is becoming increasingly less common for a child to reside with and be raised by his or her own parents who are also married. There are also increases in the number of children residing with members of their extended family. Due to increased longevity, economic shifts, increased instances of single-parenthood, and numerous other factors, family demographics are in a state of flux. Because of these shifts, it is far more difficult to define a normative family experience with specific reference to that family’s form. Sociologists are becoming more accepting of this reality and have begun to assess their understanding of the family in light of these changes. Myriad family forms are capable of producing successful families provided that they are given support and the family’s economic situation is capable of sustaining itself. Religion is still capable of being a factor in a family’s life but the influence of religion waxes and wanes in direct proportion to how or what the family perceives the religion can do to for them. Exclusionary theological teachings will lead to families removing themselves from the sphere of influence generated by the religion. Penny Edgell summarizes the point this way: “The messages that local religious institutions send are powerful because they shape the way that religious institutions include or exclude people based on their family situations. And they are powerful because of the cultural influence that religious institutions have on the larger society and the way religious discourse can shape broader public conceptions of

what kind of families are morally legitimate.\textsuperscript{766} Religion can retain (or in the perspective of some, gain back) its ability to influence and guide the family only if the family subscribes to its teachings and gains some benefit from participating in the life of that religion.

As a means of bringing all the previous research together, chapter 4 of this dissertation establishes an understanding of the domestic church that is at once faithful to Roman Catholic Doctrine while encompassing more families than simply those that take a nuclear form. The doorway is opened by settling that the domestic church can be considered “in nature of sacrament”\textsuperscript{767} analogous to the Roman Catholic Church’s self-understanding. Through this understanding, baptism is given priority to marriage in grounding the family as a domestic church because it is baptism that brings membership while marriage re-establishes the manner of relationship between spouses and between spouses and the church. As members communally express that they are a collective iteration of the Church (a domestic church), they are participating in the life of the Church as a family should. Using this distinction as the basis for acceptable family forms, other forms beyond the nuclear family are viable for consideration as domestic churches. While retaining that married couples without children and nuclear families can be domestic church, single-parent families, blended families, and multi-generation or extended families can be accepted as domestic churches provided that they are leading a lifestyle that is in accordance with Catholic Moral Teaching. This understanding does not remove the preference for a “traditional” family lifecycle of baptism – marriage – procreation, but it does account for demographic shifts while retaining familial morality.

\textsuperscript{767} LG #1.
The family’s lifestyle must reflect their relationship to the Church. In addition, the domestic church must worship publicly through its actions in the community. A domestic church is at all times both a family and an actual church. Because of this, there is a direct and symbiotic relationship between the mission of the Church and the family. The domestic church therefore must lead a lifestyle that lives out its mission to educate/evangelize, promote social justice, and participate in the life of the Church in a manner particular to its being a family. It has a mandate to educate/evangelize and to promote social justice in the community and for the world. This calling necessitates that the domestic church participate in the life of the Church and the betterment of society.

All families are called to be domestic churches regardless of their composition. The distinction between which families can be considered possible domestic churches and those that are not capable of living up to this calling is a question of ecclesiology as much as it is a question of ethical practice. What is not at question is God’s ability to be active in the life of any family completely regardless of its form. To say otherwise would be dictate God’s capabilities. However, that does not mean that all graced communities that call themselves a family are capable of embodying the reality of a specific church, in this instance the Roman Catholic Church. A family cannot be the smallest unit of the Roman Catholic Church without leading a participatory lifestyle that adheres to that same Church’s teachings.

However, families are diverse in their compositions and outlooks on life. The Church must accept as possible domestic churches all forms that do not lead familial lifestyles contra to its moral teachings in order to have the greatest theological and

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practical weight behind its promulgations. A family that is “in a committed relationship of love with God and one another”\textsuperscript{769} is capable of being a graced community. Provided that family lives as a Catholic Family, they are capable of being a domestic church. Once this reality is accepted by families, the Church can begin to reassess its practical relationship with families, especially those families that are non-nuclear in their form. The perspective generated in this dissertation remains faithful to prior works on the domestic church while seeking to maximize its practical viability for both the Church and the families that compose it.

**Areas for Further Discussion**

**Families Still Excluded based on Lifestyle or Form**

One possible area of further study dealing with the domestic church would be to somehow address those families that have not been included as possible domestic churches based on their form or lifestyle. Many writers have already attempted to essentially state that any kinship network is capable of being a domestic church regardless of its form or its family lifestyle’s accordance with Church Moral Teaching.\textsuperscript{770} As has been related here, there is little doubt that grace can be operative in any situation. However, to state that a family can give historical presence to a particular Church whose moral exhortations it is living contra too will require far more development than has been provided up to this point (if this can be done at all). The reason for this is that the basis for disagreement is not sacramental in nature; rather, the problem is both ecclesial and ethical in its nature. Logically expressing how a divorced and remarried Catholic or a same-sex couple with their adopted children can be a manifestation of the Roman

\textsuperscript{769} Gerald Foley, *Family Centered Church: A New Parish Model* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 23.

\textsuperscript{770} See chapter 2 of this work for the specific stances of considered authors.
Catholic Church would entail a deconstruction of particular moral teachings while retaining the understanding of the family as a possible domestic church. Demographics and a sociological understanding of the family necessitates that some attention be paid to these families. The Church’s mission of being Christ in the world necessitates that it also address these families. However, in doing so, authors must remain faithful to (or find a theological loophole through) Church Teachings in order for the domestic church to retain its ecclesial character.

Families Still Excluded based on Religious Affiliation

The theology of the family as a domestic church is an explicitly Roman Catholic understanding. Because of that fact, the application of the term to some families is left unsettled due to their not having a commingling of faiths. While a family composed entirely of participatory Catholics certainly fits the understanding of the domestic church presented by the Magisterium as well as here, what can be said about families whose membership is composed of both Catholics and non-Catholics? From an interfaith perspective, Ernest Falardeau has written on families that share the Eucharist together as being domestic churches without relying heavily on their Catholicism.771 Perhaps further study is warranted along sacramental and ecclesial lines as to if legitimate participation in (through the Eucharist or otherwise) in any Christian Church is sufficient to allow the family to be an instance of the Roman Catholic Church. One difficulty readily apparent in such a pursuit would be the general difference in understanding between Catholics and Protestants as to how they perceive their relationship to God. Lisa Sowle Cahill makes

the point that while Catholics see their relationship be God being mediated by the Church, Protestants generally view the family’s relationship with God to be primarily found in the parents’ personal relationship with God. If the perspective taken is that the Church plays no substantial role in the relationship between family and God, what would be the point in establishing the family as a church in miniature?

A second issue of religious intermingling and the domestic church is families composed of members of various religions. Were a practicing Catholic to marry a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, etc. and raise their child as a practicing Catholic, is that family capable of being labeled a domestic church? Do all individuals that are a part of the family have to be fully participatory members of the Church for that family to be considered a domestic church? While this question can be addressed to all families, it is particularly profound when used to address families that are leading a lifestyle that is in line with Church Teaching while one or more members of that same family are not Christian. Given the rates of religious intermarriage (to say nothing of families where one parent and the children regularly attend religious service while the other parent is non-participatory in any religion) these issues will have to be addressed for a theology of domestic church to be fully integrated into the actualities of all members of the Church.

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