

Report on the World Meeting of Families, 2022

This past June, Melissa and Ronnie Lunn and Michelynne and Simon Gomez participated in the World Meeting of Families in Rome with the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and 2000 other international delegates. This gathering consisted of listening to people from all over the world and their experience with the many issues surrounding families and the church. These are a few of our key takeaways from that week.

We are all struggling with the same things

From how to reach divorced and separated persons, how to make unmarried couples feel comfortable and loved, how to care for the elderly and infirm, how social media impacts our youth in particular, we discovered we are all struggling with the same things. Across the globe, we all have the same challenges that we are trying to address in our homes, communities and dioceses.

Small groups and intentional accompaniment

Every day, testimonies and witnesses poured in from people who were struggling or on the fringes of the Faith. Time and time again, the transformation of lives came down to the same critical moment in the story: “A small group of people who met in their homes.” For so many, finding connection and belonging within relationships helped their faith develop, gave opportunities for to experience worship, and formed authentic friendships from the support that was offered to them. They had found people they could be honest and vulnerable with, that would be there to journey with them through the different stages of their lives. These witnesses included people from various age groups, backgrounds and experiences. For example, one couple shared that on the brink of divorce, a small group of people gathered around them to support them, no matter what the outcome. They were able to reconcile their relationship and save their marriage because they felt the transforming love of Jesus through that group of people. Another family were recent refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine, and were received with open arms by another Catholic family. One woman shared that after her husband left her, she found the support she needed to carry on from a ministry dedicated specifically to women in similar situations.

Small groups solve many outreach issues

Some testimonies revealed that relationships and small group support helped to reach people outside the church. A young couple shared that when they began to have children, they were nervous to get them baptized because they were not married and had been away from the church for a long time. They anticipated judgment, proselytization, and ultimately that it would be a damaging experience for them. Yet they experienced that pivotal moment: “A small group of people who met in their homes.” They were received, welcomed and loved by the community right where they were, and formed lifelong friendships with other couples in the church. Currently, they are in preparing for marriage and their family is now active in their faith.

The domestic church is its own unique church

Families around the world struggle with how to practically live the faith at home and pass it on effectively to future generations. Often we assume Catholic practices and traditions at home that are difficult for smaller children to attend to, or hard for teenagers to understand their relevance. Greg and Lisa Popcak highlighted that the domestic church is not just a carbon copy or clone of the ministerial church. The Popcaks clearly defined a Liturgy of the Domestic Church - primordial and given by God; a liturgy, not a program. They felt it a common, universal and adaptable framework for various cultures and family charisms to live out their familial call. The Popcaks have designed online trainings with the goal of helping family life ministries to plant and support domestic churches. They challenged dioceses to rethink the structure and delivery of their family offices and ministries with this goal in mind. As we were all parents of children of varying ages, we were very inspired by this talk and felt it empowered us to really “live” our faith at home. Simple tasks and responsibilities, undertaken in relationship and presence with family, can be transformed into a catechetical and spiritual practice for the domestic church, not just a soulless necessity of maintenance. The domestic church is the church in the world, every day of the week. Every baptized family member has a priestly role within it. Many aspects that the ministerial church has taken on are actually meant for the work of the domestic church. We need to reclaim and rediscover this. We thought, if more people could hear this, they would feel empowered too.

Resources for families

A number of helpful resources for families were shared in testimonies as well, most notably:

Goodlovefoundation.org : Today’s sexual education must be an affective one that integrates affection and self donation that can build a communion of persons. Parents need support and accompaniment in guiding, teaching and modeling this to their children. Goodlovefoundation.org was developed as a directory of sexual affective education programs to help parents and educators, as well as a resource for dioceses, parishes and pastoral initiatives.

chemin-neuf.ca/en : Chemin Neuf community (specifically the CANA mission) has developed as an offering of online tools to reach couples and children in their daily lives within their homes. These online courses, retreats and videos are focused on couples increasing dialogue with God and developing unity within their relationship. They are widely varied in terms of age range, interest and topics, and are easily accessible to use within the domestic church.

The overall experience

As participants at the World Meeting of Families, the repeated theme of accompaniment was a filter through which everything seemed to flow. We could even sense it in the heart of the Holy Father, as he asked participants to continue to “walk with the other” throughout the many stages of life, along the road with Christ. The main hymn composed for the entirety of the week consisted of a chorus with the lyrics: “We believe in love, we believe in life, we will walk with

you.” It seemed to be so fitting and encompassed such a variety of different life stories and experiences that were shared. What a fantastic week to be together and remember how important it is that we take this journey with others, and to share struggles and joys of family life with other families from around the world.