

## **Family Matters Progress report**

In September 2008, a group met in the church at St Francis to discuss how to make a difference in the lives of families within St Francis and its surrounding community.

It considered and concluded on a statement of purpose :

*To re-establish family unity and Christian values to counter external threats,  
firstly at family level, concurrently within the family of the parish, with similar purpose,  
thereafter to move into the broader community from a position of strength.*

Now after three months, it is apposite to review what has been achieved, and the direction in which the programme is moving.

This will be handled under the headings of the main focus areas chosen for the programme.  
The matter of family is all encompassing and the programme is much like an iceberg. A small portion of what is going on is visible above the waterline – much is developing and will become visible as it rises to the surface.

### **Parish life**

Above the waterline

The theme of Family has been adopted in all aspects of our worship and is evident in the following:

- A Family candle with satellite “family members” burns in the church at all services. It was lit by parishioners as a symbol of their families, and will continue to do so.
- A Family Picnic with games was held after the Patronal Festival service.
- Sidespersons are encouraging parishioners to wear name tags to better identify one another.
- The theme of Family is woven into the worship.
- As a Lenten event, there will be a Passover meal, being a portrayal of the importance of a family to sit down together and eat and worship together.
- Shrove Tuesday will focus on family in its organisation and presentation with the traditional Pancake Evening.

Below the waterline

- The Parish Roll is being updated to permit a revitalised parish visiting programme to focus specifically on families in various aspects of their development.
- From this will flow a resuscitated parish visiting programme.
- Identification of specific family groupings for whom specific family oriented events can be organised.

### **Family Focus**

Originally, it had been planned that families would be invited to small dinners in the Parish Hall at which normal family like discussions would take place and particularly the issues that relate to relationships and challenges discussed. This approach was modified to focus on specific needs.

Above the waterline:

- The stresses of society indicated that a cornerstone role of the Church was to strengthen marriages. A team has been assembled who will prepare themselves to offer a “Marriage Enrichment Programme” using material developed by the Holy Trinity church in Brompton, which gave us the Alpha course. This training will take place from February 2 to March 23, whereafter it will be offered to the parish.

Below the waterline

- The Marriage Enrichment programme will be followed later by a Marriage Preparation Course also using Alpha material

### **Young Persons Focus**

This is divided into two groups – Children’s Church and the Youth group

## **Children's Church**

### **Above the waterline**

- At Advent, the advent wreath with its symbolism was explained to the Children's Church and to the Youth, and everyone made a wreath to take home. Kits were available to families in the church and a significant number of families took these home and hopefully lit them at the family dinner table.

### **Below the waterline**

- The teaching of Values and their explanation is a core issue in the Children's Church – this is to be expanded to encourage children to open dialogue around them in their homes.

## **Youth Group**

This group has had a full programme and will pay attention to the matter after Lent.

## **Communication**

The core matter identified as requiring improvement in families is communication.

### **Above the waterline**

- Inserts into the pew leaflet have appeared on several Sundays drawing attention to pertinent issues facing the parish, particularly the youth and their parents, which have drawn responses identifying future programme attention points.
- An article has appeared in the Franciscan.
- The website [www.st-francis.co.za](http://www.st-francis.co.za) now has a section devoted to Family Matters that will be regularly updated. Why not click on it and see for yourself?

### **Below the waterline**

- An Information Station is to be established at the back of the church that will offer various articles and reports on pertinent issues.
- A Family Matter booklet containing details of the programme and important sources of help in such matters as trauma counselling, substance abuse, marriage counselling is in development.
- The Archdeaconry is developing a worship guide focused on the family that will become available during Lent.
- Contact with the Bible Study groups will take place over the next three months to identify the roles they can play in the spread of the programme, starting within their own families.

The original group has changed with some offering help when needed, but limiting regular involvement, and others offering themselves for ongoing service to the programme. Of importance is that individual groups within the church have adopted the purpose of the programme and are being mindful of it as they go ahead with their work.

We are confident that 2009 will see an enlargement of the project with a strengthening of families in the tough times of this year.