

Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on “pastoral challenges to the Family in the context of evangelization”. Rome, Oct. 2014



**APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO
ON THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY
IN THE MODERN WORLD (Nov 1981)**



Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak, and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family, and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives.The Church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.

In a particular way the Church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life.



The Importance of the Christian Family

The mission statement of our church enjoins us with the responsibilities: to go into the world and to reach the world with the gospel.

Many people seem to think that the first two statements are the sum total of what we are called to do. They are wrong. Getting people to receive Christ is an essential beginning . . . it is not the end. Jesus called us to "make disciples" not just "get decisions". It's because of that clear Biblical mandate that our mission statement continues.

It would be a tragic thing to give birth to a child, hug them, kiss them, and then place them on a street corner and then walk away feeling we had done our part. And yet that is what we often do in the Christian life . . . we introduce people to Christ . . . we lead them to an experience and then we walk away. As a child needs to be involved in a family so do believers. And that family is called "the church".

A man ought to live
so that everybody
knows he is a
Christian... and most
of all, his family
ought to know.

Dwight L. Moody

Someone has said, "To *begin* our Christian life we must commit ourselves to Jesus Christ, to *grow* in our Christian life we must also commit ourselves to other Christians." That's what the church is: a group of people who are committed to each other because of Christ.

There are several reasons why it is important to be a committed part of a church family:

The great danger for family life, in the midst of any society whose idols are pleasure, comfort and independence, lies in the fact that people close their hearts and become selfish.

Pope John Paul II



We meet Christ in a special way in Corporate Worship

In the book of Revelation (1:9-20) we read the account of John's vision of Jesus. He sees Him standing among the lamp stands. The text does the interpreting for us, the lamp stands represent the churches. In a very real way Jesus is most real in the church.

In Matthew 18:20 we read these familiar words: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." Jesus is present when the believers are gathered together.

Kent Hughes writes, "It is true that one does not have to go to church to be a Christian. He does not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases if he does not, he will have a very poor relationship."

Our times of corporate worship heighten our encounter with God. That's not hard to understand. If you were a lover of Contemporary Christian music you might love to listen to CDs with your headphones. You could hear the music clearly and the lyrics more precisely. However, if you are like most people you would most like to hear the concert live and in person. Why? The music is generally not as clear. We enjoy these concerts because of the excitement and enthusiasm that is generated by the crowd. There is clapping, singing along and even a little dancing. It enhances our enjoyment to enjoy the music with others.

The same is true of our worship. Celebrating the goodness of the Lord in the company of His people makes the music richer and the teaching fuller. God is present in a unique way in the gathering of His people.

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We may speak about a place where there are no tears, no death, no fear, no night; but those are just the benefits of heaven. The beauty of heaven is seeing God."
~Max Lucado~

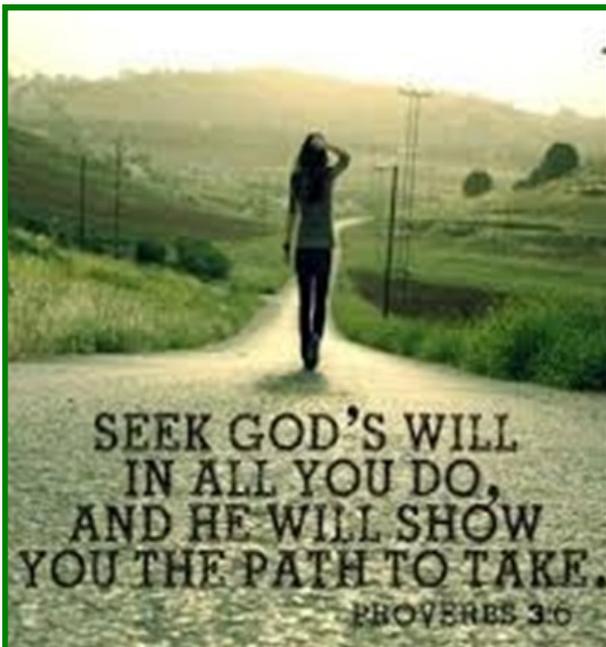
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The Church gives us the opportunity to show our love to God

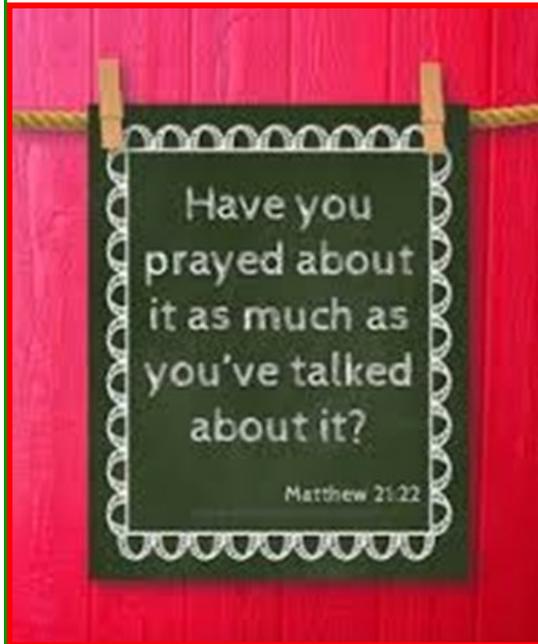
A little old man was seen every Sunday morning walking to church. He was deaf, so he could not hear a word of the sermon or the music of the choir, or the hymns sung by the congregation. A scoffer asked, "Why do you spend your Sundays in that church when you can't hear a word?" He replied, "I want my neighbors to know which side I'm on!"

Our involvement in a local church gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our love for God and it shows the world which side we're on in at least three ways: First, by our commitment to weekly worship. We give our time to the things that are most important to us. When we make our weekly meeting with God a priority in our schedule, we demonstrate the Lord's importance in our lives. When that weekly time is regularly sidestepped we also demonstrate the Lord's importance in our lives.

A pastor was once asked to define "Faithful Attendance at Worship," and this was his reply: All that I ask is that we apply the same standards of faithfulness to our church activities that we would in other areas of our life. That doesn't seem too much to ask. The church, after all, is concerned about faithfulness.



Consider these examples: If your car started one out of three times, would you consider it faithful? If the paper-boy skipped Monday and Thursdays, would they be missed? If you didn't show up at work two or three times a month, would your boss call you faithful? If your refrigerator quit a day now and then, would you excuse it and say, "Oh, well, it works most of the time." If you miss a couple of mortgage payments in a year's time, would your mortgage holder say, "Oh, well, ten out of twelve isn't bad"? If you miss worship and attend meetings only often enough to show you're interested but not often enough to get involved, are you faithful?



Our commitment to weekly worship speaks volumes to a watching world . . . and our watching God.

Secondly, we demonstrate our love for God by our

service to each other. In Matthew 25 Jesus tells the famous story of the sheep and the goats. The way he separates the sheep from the goats is separating those who showed love to Him in practical ways and those who didn't. When the people say they don't remember seeing Jesus, he responds, "you did it to me when you did it to the least of these my brothers." Our service to each other, our acts of kindness to each other are acts of kindness to the Lord Himself.

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"One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church, any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always."
~A. W. Tozer~

What can be added to the happiness of a man who is in health, out of debt, and has a clear conscience?"
~Adam Smith~

Reasons for Becoming Debt-Free

Do you think debt is dangerous? Here are some reasons why you should treat it with extreme caution.

Christians today are generally polarized into two opposite groups. One feels that the Word of God forbids any and all kinds of debt at all times (see Romans 13:8). Some of these even feel that debt is a sin. The other group assumes that debt is an acceptable and normal way of life that God often uses to meet the needs of His people. Neither of these viewpoints is totally accurate. Although debt is not a sin, it should not be a normal way of life. However, debt is a dangerous tool that must be used, if at all, with extreme caution and much prayer due to its potential for enslaving people in financial bondage (see Proverbs 22:7).

Why debt is dangerous



The following are reasons why debt needs to be treated

with extreme caution.

Debt presumes on the future.

When people commit themselves to payments over a period of time, they are presuming that there will be no pay reductions, no loss of job, and no unexpected expenses. That is an improbable assumption (see Proverbs 27:1).

Debt lowers future standards of living.

Money that is borrowed today must be repaid over time along with interest, which means that those things purchased with credit will cost more "tomorrow" than they did today. Therefore, the standard of living will have to be adjusted to compensate for the added expense.

Debt focuses on façade decisions rather than real-life decisions.

Debt encourages people to make decisions based on whether they can afford a monthly payment, rather than on whether they can afford the total cost (purchase price, operational expenses, and finance charges) of the item. Debt makes it too easy to say yes to low monthly payments while ignoring the real cost of items.

Debt leaves people at the mercy of the power of compound interest.

If consumers pay the mini-

imum monthly credit card payment on a \$1,000 debt at 19.8 percent rate of interest and never charge anything else on that account, it will take eight (8) years to pay back the \$1,000 and they will pay \$2,023 for the privilege of charging \$1,000. In some cases, items charged on nationally accepted bank credit cards can cost upwards to eight times the original purchase price of the item by the time the bill is paid off.



Debt could delay God's plan.

God said that He would provide for His people's needs. Debt allows needs to be met now, from a means other than through God's provision. Debt looks to provide instant gratification, sometimes at the expense of financial freedom, rather than waiting on God's perfect plan and His perfect timing.

Debt clouds the line that separates wants, desires, and needs.

Needs are necessary purchases such as food, clothing, shelter, medical coverage, transportation, and others. Wants involve choices about quality of goods. Discount shopping versus specialty shopping, lobster versus chicken, or a new car versus a good used car, and so on. Desires are those things that can be purchased only **after** all other obligations are met and only if there are surplus

Never spend your money before you have it.
~Thomas Jefferson~

funds available to purchase them. Debt allows desires to become wants and wants to become needs.

Debt encourages impulse buying and overspending.

The chief financial officer of a national credit card company said that consumers spend on the average of 25 to 30 percent more when they charge than if they purchase with a check or cash, and that a great majority of those extra purchases are the result of impulse buying. Unrestricted debt assumption and credit cards have allowed people to buy immediately beyond the means to repay, without sacrificing needs and necessities.

Debt stifles resourcefulness.

In a society that lives by the

premise of "I want, what I want, when I want it," the need to be resourceful—mending clothing, resoling shoes, and changing oil—in order to save money is no longer relevant. It is more convenient to purchase new or to charge services simply by "putting it on plastic," and then paying for it later, regardless of interest or finance charges.

Debt eliminates family financial planning. Rather than planning for the future and allowing for a margin of errors, overruns, and changes to dictate future financial development, debt eliminates the necessity for future planning because the course for the financial future of the family will have already been set: pay the debt that has been accumulated.

Debt teaches children that the world's method of managing money is normal.

Debt causes children to have a casual regard for using credit cards, obtaining loans and mortgages, and keeping vows to pay the bills. For this reason, we have children who have graduated from universities by borrowing for education expenses and living to the limit of their credit cards. They have never considered paying cash for transportation or anything else, and have begun adult life with so much debt that



they have to work for years just to pay for the debt accumulated during their university years.

Conclusion

The blessings of becoming debt free go far beyond the financial area. They extend to the spiritual and material realms as well. No one who is financially bound can be spiritually free. The effects of financial bondage on a marriage relationship are devastating. Currently 50 percent of all first-time marriages fail, and the primary reason for the failure is financial incompatibility. Therefore, it is to all Christians' advantage to strive to become debt free.

Adapted from: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

Contemporary Challenges to Family Unity

John A. Cuddeback

Absence often manifests the importance of presence.

I will never forget the time I tried to explain the reality of heaven to my young son Nicholas. "You will be with God forever and ever." That didn't have much purchase with him. Undaunted, I proceeded, "You will be with all the saints and angels, and all your desires will be fulfilled." This too did not have much effect. Now Nicholas was at the age where what a child says is pure: no posturing, just straight from the heart. "Gosh," he said. "All I know is: if you and Mama are there, I'll be happy."

I had set out to teach him something. But his words changed my understanding of family life. Even if not theologically precise, his response captures a fundamental truth. Human life is all about presence. Real, personal, presence. And the fundamental place of presence is the home. At the end of the day what else is a home but the place where we can *live in the*

DINNER BELL

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'
- LUKE 14:17 NIV

presence of those to whom we are closest? The need for presence is unmistakable in young children, and it does not change as we get older. Barring obvious exceptions such as abusive parents, young children are happy



when they are together with their parents. They simply want to be together with the people they love. This striking truth should give us pause for reflection. Is this desire a function of immaturity, or is it rather the fruit of a vision unclouded by the hurts and travails of growing up?

Isolation—the lack of presence—is unhappiness. No wonder so many of us, and of our children, are unhappy. Our homes, which should be great oases, bastions of presence, have become halls of absence. Who is at home? It seems most of the things that we're doing we do somewhere else: work, exercise, play ... even eat. So much of the time we're not bodily present. Normally at least we sleep at home.

And when our bodies *are* there, how truly present are we? Whatever the utility of the many technologies we now have, the fact is they tend to separate our attention from where our body is. I always found the reaction of our young children to my being on the telephone curious. As soon as I picked up the phone—this is when the only phone I had was attached to a wall—two year old Magdalena seemed to need me right away. She just had to show me that tower of blocks, or needed her shoe tied *now*. My phone conversations were punctuated by the sounds of someone pulling at my

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pant legs. I have come to realize this was not a coincidence.

My daughter perceived that I was no longer really present to her, though my body was. That didn't seem right to her, so she set about making it right the best she could. More recent technologies have only amplified the problem. In a recent radio ad a high speed internet provider proudly announced: "Now everyone in the house can be on their own device at the same time." Hmm. I suppose it's a problem if only one or two people can be technologically absent. Improved internet access will prevent other family members from being home alone; now everyone can be somewhere else at the same time.

The question is: when and where will they be somewhere together?

Household meals in common, perhaps the most obvious and consistent context for being -together, have been on the decline for years. And rather than reading aloud, singing, or story-telling, much "free time" is spent in activities in which the rest of the family does not participate, or for which they have little

understanding or interest.

Absence manifests the importance of presence. But what really teaches the importance of presence is the actual experience of it. A child especially feels the absence of her parents if her parents are usually there, present in body *and* attention. How we live—or don't live—in our homes forms our children, and ourselves, for either a life of presence, or of absence. Isolation numbs. Inasmuch as we and our children are deprived of rich, consistent face to face interaction with loved ones in the home, we are all learning to live in isolation. It is a lesson not readily unlearned.



"Computers are useless.
They can only give you answers."
~Pablo Picasso~



THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY ON INDIVIDUALS, MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Pat Fagan

Pornography is a major threat to marriages, the family, and the society at large. It is not a private choice without public consequence. Pornography alters both sexual attitudes and behavior, undermining marriage, which in turn, undermines the stability of the entire community.

The Family and Pornography

- Married men who are involved in pornography feel less satisfied with their conjugal relations and less emotionally attached to their wives.
 - Pornography use is a pathway to infidelity and divorce, and is frequently a major factor in these family disasters.
 - Couples affected by one spouse's addiction usually experience a loss of interest in sexual intercourse and good family relations.
 - Both spouses perceive pornography viewing as tantamount to infidelity.
- Pornography viewing leads to a loss of interest in good family relations.
- Pornography affects all mem-

bers of the family. Not only does it eliminate an affectionate family life, children can experience traumas related to encounters with their parents' pornographic material. A study of adolescents revealed that viewing sexually explicit internet materials significantly increased their uncertainties about sexuality, and it can lower their self-esteem and bring about feelings of loneliness and depression. Pornography devastates marriages, as husbands report to loving their spouses less due to the addiction, and the wives of these users have deep psychological wounds, with feelings of betrayal, mistrust, and anger towards their partner, sometimes requiring clinical treatment for trauma.

Pornography use and "cybersex" can often be just as damaging to family relationships as real-life infi-

delity, and this estrangement has tangible consequences: when viewing pornography becomes an addiction, 40 percent of "sex addicts" lose their spouses, 58 percent suffer considerable financial losses, and about a third lose their jobs.

The Individual and Pornography

- Pornography is addictive, and neuroscientists are beginning to map the biological substrate of this addiction.
 - Users tend to become desensitized to and bored with the type of pornography they use, seeking more perverse forms of sexual imagery.
 - Men who view pornography regularly have a higher tolerance for abnormal sexuality, including rape, sexual aggression, and sexual promiscuity.
 - Prolonged consumption of pornography by men produces notions of women as commodities or as "sex objects."
 - Pornography engenders greater sexual permissiveness, leading to a greater risk of out-of-wedlock births and STDs.
- Child-sex offenders are more likely to view pornography



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regularly or to be involved in its distribution. Pornography changes the habits of the mind, and its use can easily become habitual, leading to desensitization, boredom, distorted views of reality, and an objectification of women. A greater amount of sexual stimuli becomes necessary to arouse habitual users, leading them to pursue more deviant forms of pornography to fulfill their sexual desires, e.g., watching "depictions of group sex, sadomasochistic practices, and sexual contact with animals."

The Community and Pornography

Today's media-saturated society has made it much harder for parents to protect their children from pornography. The growth of digital media and the internet have allowed pornographers to harness technology for their own profits. Studies have shown that individuals who were convicted of the collection and distribution of internet child pornography had also com-

mitted an average of over thirteen different child sex abuses.

Conclusion

The main defenses against pornography are close family life, a good marriage and good relations between parents and children, coupled with deliberate parental monitoring of internet use. Traditionally, government has kept a tight lid on sexual traffic and businesses, but in matters of pornography, that has waned almost completely, except where child pornography is concerned. Given the massive, deleterious individual, marital, family, and social effects of pornography, it is time for citizens, communities, and government to reconsider their laissez-faire approach.

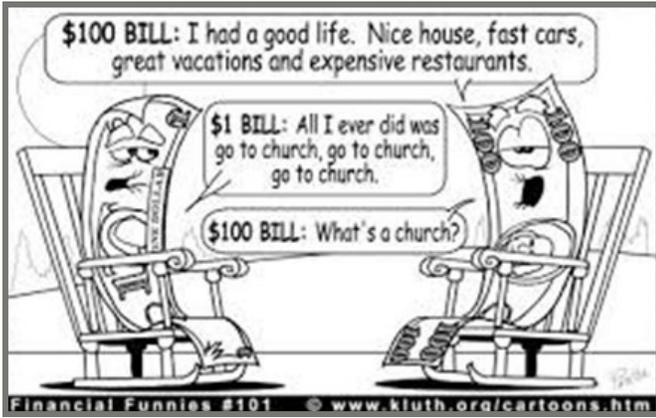
"Consuming pornography does not lead to more sex, it leads to more porn. Much like eating McDonalds everyday will accustom you to food that (although enjoyable) is essentially not food, pornography conditions the consumer to being satisfied with an impression of extreme sex rather than the real."

~Virginie Despentes~



The three primary divisions of sin, according to 1 John 2:16, are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Pornography, whether real or cartoon-based, definitely causes us to lust after flesh, and it is undeniably a lust for our eyes. They do not qualify as what the Bible says we should think about: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

Adapted from: <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110331180200AA4MANw>



**The Importance of Christian Family
(Cont'd from pp 3)**

Third, we demonstrate our love through our giving. In the book of Malachi God asks a penetrating question:

Mal. 4:8-9 *Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! 'But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' 'You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me.'*

In this passage the people are charged with robbing God. Why? Because they are not giving God a part of their income. Our donations to the church enables it the church to be sustained, ministries to be funded, needs to be met. But not only this. When we give God the first portion of our income, we prove our love to Him and "open the windows of blessing" from God.

Can you imagine what would happen if everyone ensured that an appropriate donation was given to the Church of God? Our building addition would be paid off, needed repairs would be made, hurting people would be helped, missionaries would be supported and our budgeting would be based on what "should be done" rather than on "what might we be able to do . . .if we get the money".

Our checkbook says a great deal about our values. God is honored when we honor Him in our finances. What does our checkbook say about us when we:

- pay the cable bill
- the Internet bill
- the house payment
- the car payment

buy new things for ourselves and our homes yet do not give God His due? What does it say when we pay our bills but only TIP GOD?

The church gives us the opportunity to show our love for God in a tangible way through our attendance, our service and our giving.

The Church is where we find strength for difficult times

In Hebrews 10 the author talks about the difficulty of our spiritual walk and the necessity of persevering in our faith. He gives us practical help. He points us to the church. In verses 24 and 25 he writes: *let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Do you see this? The author tells us not to give up meeting together . . .Why? Because He knows we are more susceptible to falling when we are alone.

If regular worship is a part of your life, and if you have made a commitment to a local body of believers then you know what the author of Hebrews is talking about.

We draw strength from each other. In this place we find sympathy, encouragement, accountability, wise counsel. We strengthen each other by our presence and weaken each other by our absence. In this place we understand the concept of a spiritual battle. We know we will be overwhelmed if we face the enemy alone . . so we march together. We understand that at times we stumble, so we are ready to catch each other if we fall. We celebrate the victories. We cheer each other on.

The Church is Where We Find Completeness

Paul writes in Romans 12:3,4 *Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of his one body, and each of us has different*

SOMETIMES TRIALS ARE GOD'S WAY OF TAKING OUR HANDS OFF OF THINGS THAT AREN'T SECURE AND PUTTING THEM ON THE ONLY THING THAT IS - HIMSELF.

work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. (NLT)

Paul's point is clear, we are incomplete when we are in isolation.

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We are whole when we are together. God designed the Christian community to be inter-dependent. No one can manage on their own. God has not given all His gifts and abilities to any one person. It is spread among a group. He wants us to need each other.

If any one of us does not do our job on the team, there is a breakdown on the field.

We don't all do the same jobs. But we are all important. We may not be the people in the spotlight but we matter. But our service is incomplete without the others. The only way we can win is to be part of a team . . . the church.

The Church is a Laboratory for Christian Living

The apostle John said: *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.* (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

Family life is too intimate to be preserved by the spirit of justice. It can be sustained by a spirit of love which goes beyond justice.

~Reinhold Niebuhr ~

You might be able to learn about hope and peace by yourself but you cannot learn about love in isolation. We can't learn about forgiveness, dealing with anger, becoming compassionate in solitude. We need to have people around us. The church gives us a community of people to "practice on".

".....when people stop sitting in the pew saying, 'They're not meeting my needs' and start saying, 'Whose needs can I meet?' Then needs will be met. When the servant spirit flourishes in a congregation, then they minister to each other as unto the Lord." -- *Servant*, January/February, 1989

The church is to the Christian as the battlefield is to the soldier. It's the place where all the talk turns into action.

Conclusions

I hope from these things you see the importance of being united to a Church family somewhere. If we want to grow we need the church. If we want to maintain our spiritual health, we need the church. If we want support in diffi-



cult times, we need the church. And so do the people we reach out to. We must GO to them, REACH them with the Gospel and then ASSIMILATE, integrate, them into the Christian community. If we don't, they will not survive. Our goal, remember is not to "get decisions" but to "make disciples".

In this day and age I have done many (too many) weddings of people who were currently living together. For all appearances they are man and wife. And yet I am amazed that no matter how much a couple will justify living together, there is still something special about their wedding. They say they were committed to each other before . . . but they don't take the marriage step quickly. Why? Because they know there is a difference in the level of commitment. When they were not married they could walk away if things got hard. In marriage they are committed to working together "in better and in worse".

That's the difference between attending church and belonging to a church. One is convenience, the other is a commitment. One is a game, the other is serious. One is easy to walk away from. The other is not. In one you are giving part of yourself, in the other you are committing all of yourself.

You need the church . . . and the church needs you. It's time to stop "living together" and to enter into a "commitment" of love with the people of God. It's time to become a full-fledged part of the family.

The church is not a building . . . it is a people, who have been irrevocably changed by God; who have joined together to bring honor to the one they call King. May God help our family grow and may He be honored in all that we do

Adapted from: <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/081797.html>

Take Time

- Take time to live: It is the secret of success.
- Take time to think: It is the source of power.
- Take time to play: It is the secret of youth.
- Take time to read: It is the foundation of knowledge.
- Take time for friendship: It is the source of happiness.
- Take time to laugh: It helps to lift life's load.
- Take time to dream: It hitches the soul to the stars.
- Take time for God: It is life's only lasting investment.

Writer unknown



I Know My Guide

I do not ask to see the way my feet
will have to tread;
But only that my soul may feed upon
that living bread.
'Tis better far that I shall walk by
faith close to His side-
I may not know the way I go, but
oh,
I know my Guide.

~E.S. Hall~

