

# Everybody's Welcome?

Helping your church to become more friendly  
for all kinds of families



by Karen Holford and Paul Godfrey  
with Stephen Hanvey

Originally developed by Churches Together For Families.  
Revised for the Catholic community by  
the Everybody's Welcome Working Group  
January 2006  
Links updated 2013



## Contents

Foreword.....	5
Introduction .....	7
Building a Family Friendly Church .....	7
What are We Aiming Towards? .....	8
Ideas for How to Cope if Your Parish is Small .....	9
Evaluating the Current Situation.....	10
Ideas for Becoming More Family-Friendly .....	12
Ideas for Meeting Spiritual Needs.....	12
Ideas for Meeting Emotional and Relational Needs .....	12
Ideas for Meeting People’s Physical Needs .....	13
Ideas for Meeting People’s Social Needs .....	13
Ideas for Supporting Relationships Between People.....	13
Ideas for Involving People of All Ages in the Mass.....	14
Ways in Which a Parish Could Care for its Church Leaders and Their Families .....	14
Improvements to Create a Building that is Safe and Accessible to Everyone .....	15
Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children .....	15
Meeting the Needs of Men and Women, Mothers and Fathers .....	15
Meeting the Local Community Needs .....	16
Ways Forward.....	17
Use Existing Groups/Activities to Gather Views.....	17
Form One-off Groups for the Purpose of Gathering Views.....	17
Dare to Ask the Community Around You .....	17
Planning the Way Ahead.....	18
Finding More Support .....	18
Appendix 1: Questionnaires for Gathering Information .....	19
A: Questionnaire for Members of the Congregation .....	19
B: Ten Ways to Think About How Family Sensitive We Are .....	20
C: Questionnaire for the Community .....	21
D: How Family Friendly is Your Parish .....	22
Appendix 2: Interactive Ways of Gathering Information .....	24
Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Adults .....	24
Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Young People .....	24
Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Children .....	24
Interactive Ways to Draw Views from All-age Groups.....	25
Appendix 3: Case Studies for Discussion Groups .....	27
Appendix 4: Worksheets for Young People .....	29
Appendix 5: Additional Resources – Church Guidelines.....	30
Appendix 6: Additional Resources – Contact Details .....	31



## Foreword

---

In 2004 the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales launched a major programme of listening to the needs of families in our church. You may remember this, and indeed, you may have taken part in it. At the end the Bishops published an interesting report of what we heard called *Not Easy but Full of Meaning*.

First of all we heard that most of all families needed, by way of support, that their parish should be family friendly. In response to this we are launching a programme in 2006 called “Everybody’s Welcome.”

In the report, families talked about how important the parish was to them. It was a community in which they wanted to feel known, accepted and loved for who they are. They wanted to experience their parish as a place where they could find friendship, and to experience their parish as a wider family to whom they could turn in times of joy and sorrow. They would love their parish to be a place where their values are shared and reinforced, and a place where they find spiritual nourishment. They also expressed a desire for practical help, including information and skills to help them become better family people.

Sadly we heard from families who did not experience any of these things in their parish communities. Some felt quite isolated and alone. Sometimes this was because they felt their lives did not match up to the ideal of Catholic family life. Sometimes it was because they came to Mass each Sunday and left without anyone talking to them. Sometimes they felt guilty because their busy lives left them unable to contribute to the life of the parish family. Sometimes it was because they saw no sign that the parish cared about the rest of their life outside of Sunday Mass.

A great deal of work has been done already on these issues in so many parishes across the country, and in our programme “Everybody’s Welcome” we aim to share the ways that have been discovered and tried out - ways of being sensitive to family needs, ways of being welcoming, ways of being family friendly. A great deal of work has also been done within other Christian communities. This particular resource was originally developed by Churches Together for Families to help churches think about ways of becoming more family-friendly. We are very grateful to Churches Together for Families for encouraging us to use it and for allowing us to make some changes that reflect our own Catholic community and beliefs. (The original version, should you wish to explore possibilities for ecumenical collaboration, remains freely available on the CTF website: [www.churchesandfamilies.org.uk](http://www.churchesandfamilies.org.uk))



Rt Rev John Hine  
Chair of the Bishops’ Committee for Marriage and Family Life

In April 2005 the Bishops of England and Wales agreed a plan of collaborative action to meet the needs identified in the report *Not Easy But Full of Meaning: Catholic Family Life in 2004*.

These needs have been summarised as follows:

#### **Welcoming, family-friendly parishes**

- to offer understanding, friendship and support to all
- to be a source of help in times of need
- to help everyone in the parish feel that they belong there
- to encourage and celebrate all family life whether married, widowed, single, divorced, separated, with children or without

*“The challenge is to build highly loving supportive communities within our parishes for all of us, including our families.”*

#### **Marital and family spirituality**

- to share the holiness of the home as a place of life, love, service, teaching, fellowship, witness and prayer
- to celebrate the presence of God as love in all loving family relationships

*“A broader understanding of marital and family spirituality among both clergy and laity will be fundamental to the success of any future work by the church in support of family life.”*

#### **Helping parents and grandparents to pass on faith in God**

- to provide them with more support, tools and resources
- to respect the role of the family and to see where they fit into the roles of school and parish
- to provide comfort and healing where necessary

*“Parents expressed a need for more help in raising their children in the Faith, both in terms of deepening their own understanding and being able to integrate it into the life of the home.”*

These three strategies together form the response of the Bishops to Listening 2004. This is called Celebrating Family: Blessed, Broken, Living Love. The Celebrating Family initiative will be launched in three stages

Everybody’s Welcome (2006)

Home is a Holy Place (2007)

Passing on the Faith (2008)

Further information is available from the Marriage & Family Life Project Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX. Email: Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk

## Introduction

---

Families today seem to come in more shapes and sizes than ever before. There are:

- Single people who have never married
- Single people who have been divorced, and possibly share the care of their children
- Couples without children
- Widows and widowers of all ages
- Lone-parent families
- Two-parent families
- Families with one or more disabled children or adults
- Extended families
- Adoptive families
- Friends living together
- Foster families
- Blended families
- Families with many children
- Families from different cultural backgrounds
- Mixed-faith or inter-church families
- Carers and their elderly or disabled relatives

And probably many more. Any church wanting to reach out into its community, and become friendly to families of all kinds, faces an exciting challenge. The purpose of this pack is to help your church explore the broad definition of 'family-friendly', take a few more steps along the road in that direction, and make some changes that will impact not only your current congregation, but also the community in which you worship.

Family-friendly is more than being child-friendly. It is about creating a church where everybody feels welcome and comfortable, and knows that their individual needs have been considered, and met wherever possible. The first task for you to do is to gather the views of as many adults and children in your church community as possible. Listening to people's stories, and creating an environment where open discussion can take place, is a vital key to becoming a family-friendly church. A brief discussion of this material, with a group of church leaders, will not give you the broad perspective that you need. You will probably miss the views of those who may be on the fringes of your church, or who may feel that they are too busy to fill out a questionnaire, or who may be uncomfortable with written material. A variety of approaches will be the most effective, and some of the results may be quite surprising.

## Building a Family Friendly Church

---

This is not intended to be a full-blown course on how to be a family-friendly church, containing every detail from A-Z, and qualifying you for a government charter in family-friendliness. This is more of an appetiser, an introductory resource to share with your church, and to reflect upon together. Some ideas you may adopt quickly, others may take a little longer, and some may not be appropriate for your church at all. But, as you explore the needs and hopes of your church, keep in mind that there are some basic essentials that legally cannot be bypassed or overlooked, such as child protection policies, disability access, induction loops for those with hearing difficulties, and basic health and safety guidelines. If you need some help with these aspects, then look for more information in the resource section.

- Firstly, look through the whole package, and discuss it with your church leadership.
- Evaluate what you are already doing using the Questionnaire entitled 'What is our church doing here and now to be family-friendly?'

- Discuss the case studies as a group, and write down what you have learnt from them, which may help you on your way towards becoming the kind of church you would really like to be.
- Before you gather information from your church or local community, you need to consider whether you are in fact seriously committed to helping your church become more family-friendly. There is no point in continuing along the family-friendly route, unless you are sure that you want to make some changes, and implement new projects. Once you start asking other people for their views and ideas, they will expect you to make some positive changes. The route towards increasing your family-friendliness, and the changes you may have to make, will be different for each church, and there may be some interesting discoveries to be made along the way.
- When you are ready, gather all the information you can from as many sources as possible, and use the information to help you grow your church into a community where everybody truly feels welcome.

## What are We Aiming Towards?

---

- Encouraging all members of the congregation to have a positive attitude towards each other, especially across generations and cultures.
- Having an awareness of current child protection policies which within the Catholic community is a collective responsibility. All members must recognise, acknowledge, value and adhere to the policies and procedures that are in place to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults during any activity that takes place within a church context.
- Being aware of the spiritual, emotional, physical and social needs of its members, and others in contact with the church community, and seeking to fill these needs where it is appropriate.
- Providing a dynamic, multi-sensory, inspiring, and creative children's programme.
- Acknowledging that all relationships can benefit from learning and developing relationship skills, and providing opportunities for learning, such as programmes, talks, videos and workshops for parents, couples, teens, singles, divorced and separated Catholics, those growing older, the bereaved etc.
- Having a named person on whom people can call when they have a family crisis or a practical need of some sort. The aim of this is to relieve the immediate stress on families and individuals when emergencies arise.
- Actively involving adults, and children of all ages, both in the Mass and other liturgies on a regular basis.
- Sharing out responsibilities so that no one family or person is over-burdened with church-related tasks.
- Taking care of its clergy and other church leaders, and their families, by protecting their need for family time, too.
- Having a building that is safe and accessible to everyone (ramps, toilets, access, protective railings, etc).
- Being aware of the special needs of larger families, whether two-parent or "blended", with children across a broad age range.
- Being aware of the needs of both men and fathers, and women and mothers, addressing these in a variety of ways. (Men's groups, women's groups, sports, work-teams, networking, etc.).
- Reaching out to other families in the local community, using an on-going project.



## Ideas for How to Cope if Your Parish is Small

---

If, like many churches, you have a very small congregation, don't feel overwhelmed. There are still some things you may be able to do by listening to the stories of the people in your parish.

- What would they like to do?
- What things are practical?

Maybe you only have one family attending. What would make it easier for them to come, or to bring along their friends? Find out how the regular members could be involved in the service in different ways. Perhaps you could have a clearly labelled bright box near the door of the church, with some interactive Bible story books, crayons, Bible story work sheets, soft Noah's Ark toy, etc, so that any visiting children can dip into the box and borrow things during the service.

One church keeps a folder for each of the children at church. It is a bright ring binder with a pocket for pencils and crayons, etc. Each week one of the members would find a worksheet from a photocopyable resource, or the internet, that was on the theme of the church service. The children also wrote notes and questions to the church leader, who wrote back a few lines each week.

One church let the children help in the service by involving them in the offertory procession and giving out hymnbooks. Sometimes the children would bring their instruments to church to play for the service.

Another church had a grandparent scheme, where older members were given a 'grandchild' in the congregation. Friendships formed between the generations, as they listened to each other, valued each other and gave each other gifts, etc.

A small church could still find a small community project that they could manage within their resources, such as a coffee morning, or a monthly soup run, in rotation with other churches. In one Suffolk village there were five small churches that formed their own Churches Together network. They realised that they couldn't all run all the different programmes they would like, so they shared the programmes between them, and pooled manpower and resources, to make use of the different skills within the churches. Between them they managed to run a well-rounded programme, with something for everyone, from Carer and Toddler Groups, playgroups, aerobics, Holiday Bible Clubs, and four midweek clubs to cover ages 7-21+, as well as Senior Citizens' groups, and village social events. Another small church wanted to run a Holiday Bible Club, but didn't have enough people to staff it, so they invited a team of students from a Bible College to run it for them, providing accommodation for the week, and local outings.

Before you start any project, listen to everyone's views, concerns and hopes. Research all you can about the project, and don't rush into it. It's better to take your time and make sure it works well, so that your small congregation doesn't become too stretched, or disappointed. Then evaluate the project, remembering that even though numbers may be small the first time, next time more people will know about it or those who came may bring their friends along. It's better to do one programme well, than try to do too much. So don't be overwhelmed by this package. Explore the material with your church leaders and members and find fresh ways to apply it to your unique situation.

## Evaluating the Current Situation

---

Take some time to think of the positive things your church is doing in your community, and write them down. A church is family-friendly when it is aware of a wide range of people's needs, and explores ways to meet those needs.

1. We meet people's spiritual needs by:
  
2. We meet people's emotional needs by:
  
3. We meet people's physical needs by:
  
4. We meet people's social needs by:
  
5. The positive elements in our children's programme are:
  
6. We host the following programmes to support relationships between people:
  
7. We have the following named person, or team of people, for anyone to call on in an emergency.
  
8. Our positive attitudes towards the diversity of people, including those of minority groups in our community, are evident by our...:
  
9. The ways we actively try to involve different people of all ages in the church service are by:
  
10. The ways we share out church responsibilities, so that no one family or person is overburdened with church-related tasks, are by:
  
11. The ways that we show our care for our church leaders, and their families, are by:

12. The improvements we have made towards creating a building that is safe and accessible to everyone are:
13. We have a current child protection policy, and we have clear guidelines to protect all children on any church activity.
- Yes
  - No
14. We provide a children's liturgy as an alternative for children who have not yet made their First Holy Communion:
- Every week
  - Once a month
  - Occasionally
  - Never
15. We have the following strategies for involving whole families spiritually at critical points such as baptism, the sacrament of reconciliation, first Holy Communion and confirmation:
16. The ways we show that we affirm the needs of men and fathers are by:
17. The ways we show that we affirm the needs of women and mothers are by:
18. The ways we are reaching out into the community and helping to meet local needs are by:
19. If our church could change or improve three things I would like them to be:
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

## Ideas for Becoming More Family-Friendly

---

These ideas are just a few of the things a parish could do. There are countless ways you can impact your church and community. Each church and community has different needs. The most important thing to do is to listen to the people, and hear them express their own needs. Perhaps you could discuss one or two of these ideas with your church group to see if they could meet some of the needs in your church and community. You will notice that some ideas meet needs in several categories. Keep in mind your parish responses to Listening 2004 when you look through these ideas.

## Ideas for Meeting Spiritual Needs

---

- Prayer meetings
- Meetings for parents at Baptism, first Reconciliation, first Holy Communion and Confirmation
- Holy Communion for the housebound
- House groups or basic Christian communities
- Welcoming ministry and other outreach initiatives
- Highlighting and celebrating the holiness in daily life
- Small study groups
- Visitor/mission/seeker services
- Prayer partners
- Prayer breakfasts
- Parish retreats
- Family retreats
- Rosary groups
- Adoration, Benediction and other non-eucharistic opportunities for worship
- Hospital and housebound visiting

## Ideas for Meeting Emotional and Relational Needs

---

- Relationship education e.g. parenting or marriage preparation (see Appendix 4)
- Counselling services
- Support groups
- Family Groups
- Home visits
- Parent/Carer and Toddler groups

- Befriending programmes, etc.
- Hospital/housebound visiting
- Coffee mornings
- Bereavement support for both adults and children (see Appendix 4)

## Ideas for Meeting People's Physical Needs

---

- Soup kitchen
- Homeless shelter
- Lunch Clubs
- Emergency food and clothing stores
- Aerobics and fitness sessions
- Health clinics, etc.

## Ideas for Meeting People's Social Needs

---

- After-Mass coffee
- Home visits
- Lunch clubs
- Youth clubs
- Carer and toddler club
- Coffee mornings
- Picnics
- Outings
- Harvest supper
- Over-sixties clubs
- Garden parties
- Drop-in centre
- Grandparent Groups
- Family Groups

## Ideas for Supporting Relationships Between People

---

- Marriage preparation programmes
- Parenting groups

- Programmes of sacramental initiation
- Marriage enrichment events
- Singles' events
- Teen relationship meetings
- Young adult groups
- Pregnancy support
- Divorce care groups
- Retirement workshops, etc
- Support of families with a member in prison
- Child Contact Centres
- Family Groups
- Grandparent Groups

## Ideas for Involving People of All Ages in the Mass

---

- Children's choir
- Engage young children's attention by encouraging them to use their bodies e.g. by signing hymns, copying gestures etc.
- Offering a deliberate blessing to those of all ages unable to receive Holy Communion
- Altar server teams
- Young readers teams
- Youth band
- A mixed-age liturgy committee
- Different aged welcomers in the car park and at the door
- Various groups within the church taking a special responsibility for a part of the Mass
- A family writing a bidding prayer to read out together
- Bidding prayers that reflect the lives of the whole community
- A teen group dramatising the scripture reading

## Ways in Which a Parish Could Care for its Church Leaders and Their Families

---

- Protecting clergy and parish lay leaders' need for family time or time to visit their families

- Honouring their day-off
- Helping provide times for relaxation, such as retreats, holidays and days out
- Inviting them for meals
- Supporting their ministry financially and practically, etc
- Remembering to say thank you

## Improvements to Create a Building that is Safe and Accessible to Everyone

---

- Ramps
- Designated car-park spaces
- Toilets suitable for disabled people
- Stair-lifts
- Induction loops
- Protective railings
- Buggy park
- Nappy changing station, etc
- The creation of 'soft' areas within the main worship space to which parents can take fractious children without leaving the main body of the church.

## Meeting the Needs of Families with Young Children

---

- A child protection policy (essential - see resource section)
- At least one Mass at which the atmosphere is welcoming to parents with very small children.
- Nappy changing facilities, supplies, and bottle warming equipment
- An engaging children's programme and children's liturgy

## Meeting the Needs of Men and Women, Mothers and Fathers

---

- Men's groups
- Women's groups
- Prayer breakfasts
- Sports
- Work-teams

- Networking
- Retirement planning workshops
- Dads and Lads group etc
- Car maintenance classes
- Computer classes
- Free babysitting network

## Meeting the Local Community Needs

---

- Parent/Carer and Toddler Groups
- Lone parent support groups
- Over sixties club
- Youth clubs
- After school clubs
- SVP
- Legion of Mary or other lay groups
- Lunch clubs
- Sports events
- Jumble sales
- Leisure classes
- Parenting groups
- Finding ways to improve local facilities and the environment
- Playgroups etc
- Contact with parish school(s)
- International evenings
- Themed evenings hosted by members of different cultural communities



## Ways Forward

---

It's best to begin by gathering views and perceptions as widely as possible across your congregation and even beyond. You will probably start by using the checklist or questionnaire with a leadership group of some kind. But you, as the leadership team, will benefit tremendously from listening to all the age groups in the rest of the church (and those around its fringe). As a church, you will also need to hear from those in your local community. Appendix 1 suggests some methods, and possible activities, to achieve this gathering of views.

## Use Existing Groups/Activities to Gather Views

---

The best way for you to gather views will depend upon your individual group or parish community, but you are likely to get the clearest picture by including evidence from all areas of your church's life. So, be creative, and take the time to explore ways to gather information from those groups who could easily be missed out if questionnaires were, for example, only handed out at the beginning of a specific church service.

- Congregations at different Masses and other services. You probably won't want to take over part or all of a service to gather views interactively, so a questionnaire is probably the best way. See the appendix for one to use or adapt. The exception may be where you already have an informal service (perhaps all-age) where one of the other methods suggested might work well either during or immediately after the service.
- House groups. These lend themselves easily to informal, interactive view gathering and are often a feature of parish life during Lent or Advent. Again, the appendix gives several suggested methods. Fellowship groups can also be an ideal basis for forming all-age ad hoc groups that can include those on the fringes of your church as well.
- Age, gender or interest groups. The appendix includes suggested methods for adult, youth, and children's groups. How many such groups meet regularly already in your parish?
- A church weekend or day away. If your programme includes such a thing, this can be an ideal opportunity to include one or more of the ideas from the appendix. The whole theme of the day or weekend could be formed around understanding what it means to be a family.

## Form One-off Groups for the Purpose of Gathering Views

---

If you limit yourself to collecting information from your existing church groups, then you risk not hearing from those on the fringes of the church, such as those who only attend Sunday Mass, or those who are reluctant to fill in a questionnaire. A wider cross-section can be heard if special ad hoc groups are formed. These are most likely to be successful if they are based around existing groups such as house-groups. The regular group members can invite family and friends, and group leaders can be given a list of people to invite personally who don't regularly attend a group. Such personal invitations can generate a high level of involvement. It is also the case that setting up all-age groups for this purpose could not only be a way of gathering views, but it could also be a way to start building the mutual listening and relating which is at the heart of being a family-friendly church.

## Dare to Ask the Community Around You

---

Consider the best way of hearing from non-church people. Some kind of "clinic", especially if it can be held in a neutral venue, such as the local library, may be beneficial. Questionnaires can be useful, if they have been carefully thought through, but often a personal approach is better. You can ask people what they feel to be the major needs of the community, and what, if anything, they would like to see the church doing for the community. Visiting individuals, or

groups, on their own ground, with the purpose of exploring their needs, is much less threatening to do, and it can start to break down barriers. Of course, this open-ended questioning may generate ideas quite outside the area of family-friendliness! You might prefer to ask more specifically about the major needs of families and what the church could do. But, even then, we need to be open to hear what people want to say rather than what we expect them to say.

A south London church is recorded as having asked such a question to their community. They consistently received the unexpected answer that the major problem was litter! Understandably, they were reluctant to see this as a key area for Christian effort! But, when they eventually decided to see these answers as guidance, and to act on the specific request, it led to a great deal of fruitful interaction between the church and its local community. Being friendly to families in our communities may mean doing what they want us to do, rather than what we want to do! For example, the best place for a parenting course for men may be in a pub rather than a church hall!

## Planning the Way Ahead

---

This is not a manual on managing change in a church. But here are a few pointers.

- It is unlikely that you will be able to move ahead on several areas at once. As a leadership team, reflect on all the information you have collected, and then identify one or two priorities.
- Set out your goals in these areas with a time-scale, and plan the steps towards those goals.
- Remember that such objectives need to be achievable and measurable, so that you can know whether or not you've got there.
- Identify the communication needs. Who will be consulted about your goals? Who will take responsibility for sharing them with the target group (perhaps the whole parish) and for listening to their concerns? How will these goals be communicated most effectively?
- Evaluate. And then plan for the next steps forward.

When you go to the Appendices remember that you won't want to use all of these resources. Every parish is different and so every parish must decide which resources, if any, are most appropriate for them and which might need to be further adapted to local situations.

## Finding More Support

---

Everybody's Welcome is part of a national strategy to support marriage and family life in response to the findings of Listening 2004. Many dioceses have local marriage and family life ministry coordinators who can offer you additional support, advice and possibly opportunities to meet up with others in your area who are also getting involved in this work.

Whatever you decide to do your local coordinator will be encouraged to hear from you and learn from your experiences. You can find contact details of your local coordinator at [www.familias-ew.org.uk](http://www.familias-ew.org.uk) or at [www.catholicfamily.org.uk](http://www.catholicfamily.org.uk)

If you can't find someone locally to support you then please contact:  
Marriage and Family Life Project Office, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX. Email: [Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk](mailto:Elizabeth.Davies@cbcew.org.uk)



## ***B: Ten Ways to Think About How Family Sensitive We Are***

(Courtesy of Dr H. Richard McCord, formerly Executive Director of the USCCB Department for Laity, Family, Women and Youth)

- (1) Do we know who our families are? Do we have accurate information? Do we use means such as focus groups to discover their strengths, situations, and needs?
- (2) Do we say explicitly and consistently that we value the holiness present in all families ("church of the home") and that our work builds upon their strength and holiness?
- (3) Do we involve families in planning and evaluating parish practice? Do we try to have a full range of families represented in our leadership roles?
- (4) Do we create materials and offer ideas to families about what they can do at home or in neighbourhood clusters, rather than always expecting them to come to the parish church or school?
- (5) When families do come together in the parish do we make it as convenient as possible - with flexible scheduling, childcare, eldercare, etc.?
- (6) Are we aware of the influence of family of origin on a person as we try to promote growth and change?
- (7) Are we sensitive to the pressures placed on families today (time, mobility, economy, jobs, relationships, etc.) in order to help them deal with those burdens, or so that we don't impose additional ones?
- (8) Do we ask who never comes to parish events and why?
- (9) Do we encourage couples and families to get involved in parish ministries as a family unit, whenever possible, rather than as individuals?
- (10) Do we promote like-to-like ministries of couples, family groups, and associations who assist and support families in carrying out their responsibilities?

## *C: Questionnaire for the Community*

Our church is keen to find out from those who live in its local community whether there are any ways in which we could help you, especially with some of the challenges that you face in your family – whether it's young children, elderly parents or anything in between.

We'd love to hear from as many people as possible, so, if you are able to return this form with your ideas, we'll be very grateful.

- What, in your view, are the most important needs in this community?
- Which of these needs are not being met by anyone at the moment, as far as you know?
- Are there ways in which you would like some help in your family life that is not available to you at the moment?
- To help us understand the needs of this area, if you're willing, please give a brief description of who is 'family' for you.

Here is a list of some things which some churches are able to provide for their communities, please tick whichever columns apply, and add any others you feel would be helpful.

Activity	Wouldn't help	Would help	Would help me
----------	---------------	------------	---------------

Carer and toddler group

Parenting group

Help with shopping

Help around the house

Pregnancy advice centre

Contact centre for parents and children

Family budgeting advice centre

After school club

## ***D: How Family Friendly is Your Parish***

*(Courtesy of Redemptorist Publications)*

We all share responsibility for our parish so here are some questions for us all to consider. We cannot answer every need, but we can all answer some of them. It is not expected that every parish should offer all that is listed here. However, the important point behind all of these suggestions is the need to create a parish community where Christian parents and their partners feel that they belong and where they feel part of the family, whether they are passing through or staying for many years. Is your parish the kind of environment in which Christian parents and their partners can operate successfully? Are they given space to develop as Christians themselves, and how much help do they get as they introduce their faith to their children? Not all of these suggestions are specifically religious, but they all help build a genuine community in which families can feel comfortable and valued.

- What is there for young, expectant parents in your parish?
- Is there a pre-baptismal gathering where they can get to know other expectant parents?
- What kind of preparation do you provide?
- Do non-Christian partners feel welcome?
- Does your parish supply each new arrival with a white garment?
- What chance do new parents have to meet other new parents?
- Do you have a parent and toddler group for all families connected to the parish?
- Do you have a clothes exchange for young families?
- Do you have a second-hand baby equipment service?
- Do you have a toy library?
- Do you operate a baby-sitting service?
- Is there some liturgy in your parish at which young families can feel at home?
- Does your church have easily accessible lavatory facilities?
- Does your church have a room available for baby feeding?
- What support is there for children who do not attend Christian schools?
- Is your sacramental preparation programme sensitive to partners and families in difficult or unusual domestic situations or does it assume that all the children are living with two parents in a traditional setting?
- Is there any support for children after school for working parents?
- What is available for young people in your parish?
- How do you help parents of school aged children? Are there any courses, workshops or groups for single parents, or separated and divorced parents? Is there help for

parents on teaching the faith, anything on reconciliation, any support for parents of teenagers?

- Is there any help for non-Christian partners at First Holy Communion or Confirmation times?
- Are the parents in your parish helped to feel that they are acceptable as they are and not because of what they do? Do you help them believe in themselves?
- Do you know your deanery Special Needs contact?
- Is there a parent of a child or family member with special needs on your marriage and family life team?
- Is there an established shared care programme whereby parents of special needs children can have a regular break on a weekly or monthly basis?
- Does your liturgy reflect your community, musically? In its active participants? In special celebrations? Are the customs of ethnic groups acknowledged and given time and space?
- What is the state of your hymn books, service sheets, missals, etc.? Do they make it easy to follow services? Are they clear enough for elderly people?
- Is there wheelchair access to your church? Is there any facility for deaf people to hear services?
- Does everybody know who is responsible in the parish for the protection of children and vulnerable adults?
- How do people know what is going on in your parish, and if there is anything going on?
- What facilities do you have for welcoming newcomers?
- Do you have a regular marriage and family life newsletter? Can everyone access it?
- Do you have a parish magazine? This can be a good link particularly for housebound and elderly parishioners.
- Do you have a parish directory with an opportunity for sharing skills, experiences and information?
- Do you have a supply of books, pamphlets, information available on problem areas?
- Is there a prayer group/centre in your parish?

## Appendix 2: Interactive Ways of Gathering Information

---

### *Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Adults*

- Form small groups, and ask people to describe their families, and see whether there are similarities/differences. For example, you might find that there are two or three sub-groups within each group (e.g. those with pre-school children, those who live alone, those caring for an elderly relative...etc.). Divide into the sub-groups, and imaginatively try to understand the needs of another sub-group, and list ways the church could help. Return to the original groups and let each sub-group comment on the ideas that have been drawn up for their help. Make a list of the ideas that might be helpful, and then display the list for all the groups to see.
- Ask people to pair up and talk about their experience of family life as a child. Then move on to ask them to compare their experiences with those of families today (theirs or others that they know). Draw up a list of contrasts, good and bad. Get opinions about the needs of modern families, as they have emerged from the conversations, and brainstorm about the different ways in which the church could offer support.

### *Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Young People*

- Get in plenty of pizza and coke and listen to the young people!
- Give everyone a large sheet of paper and a marker pen. Ask them to draw a chart of their family (no names, just labels e.g. brother, step-dad, auntie, dog etc) Collect them up and display them all on the wall or floor where everyone can see them. Chat about what you notice about the family charts, the similarities and differences etc. Are there times when family life is difficult, or really good? Does church help? Could it? You might be able to arrange the charts and add others to show how your church functions at the moment, or how it could be, e.g. a family of families.
- Sometimes young people do not want to talk about their own family but prefer to talk about families in TV soap programmes such as 'The Simpsons' or 'Eastenders' because it is less personal. Video a couple of clips from current programmes showing family life and use them to promote discussion. For example, in 2004 the Diocese of Clifton asked young people to think of a fictional family on TV and say if they were a happy family and if so why.
- Display the sentence: This church is like a family. Brainstorm things that are good about that (e.g. it feels like home), and things that are bad (e.g. the priest's like my dad; he never washes up the coffee cups afterwards.) All sorts of issues around the young people's own families and church life may emerge.
- You could use the same sentence as above, but brainstorm all the ways in which the statement is true, and all the ways it isn't. The sheet "I have a dream..." could be used to record desires for change.

### *Interactive Ways to Draw Views from Children*

- Children will probably not yet have started to reflect on their family life and we need to be careful not to make them feel bad about their families especially as they may have no power in making decisions about how those families are. The best situation for talking about family life is a small group or one-to-one where lots of trust has been developed and where the child sets the agenda by talking about what they want to talk about. A teaching session on families can helpfully open up the subject for children who need or want to talk about their families.



- Run a “My Family” painting competition. Create a collage of the results. Older competitors could be asked to write a description to go with it. Have an attractive prize. This or something similar could be done in conjunction with a local school or newspaper and could yield interesting patterns and opinions.
- Talk a little about how the church is a family where all ages matter, and explain that the church leaders want to know how all the different parts of the family feel about things. Use the sheets “Something I would like...” and/or “I have a dream...” for them to write or draw their ideas.
- If a church event for all ages is being planned, ask the children for ideas of things to do, games to play, food to eat, etc (rather than leaving it all to the adults to plan). Reflect afterwards on how the event was different from what might otherwise have been done, and whether that affected its success.

### *Interactive Ways to Draw Views from All-age Groups*

- Nearly all the above could be used with mixed age groups. Make sure that all ages groups have a voice, and are heard by the others. Most adults will be much more used to making sure that they have their say than most children are, so it will probably be the children who need to be encouraged and enabled! It can be helpful to establish a convention within the groups that a small item, such as a pencil, is passed around from person to person. Only the person holding the object has the right to speak and be heard.
- Split into age strata (for a few minutes), e.g. under 10, 11-15, 16-20 or whatever fits your group. Give each group a large sheet of paper with their age group written on the top. The papers are passed (as in a game of consequences) to each group in turn, who then describe the kind of church that they think would most appeal to the given age group. (Start at the bottom so that when the paper is passed to the next group it can be folded over to hide what has already been written.) When all the groups have finished this activity, return the papers to the organiser so that they can be read out and displayed.
- In some settings a similar activity could be done after dividing up the main group into subgroups of those who are married, single people, parents, children or whatever matches the experiences of those present. This needs to be done with care and sensitivity, and some people will obviously fit into more than one category. If this is the case, let them choose which group they would like to be in, or allocate them to the smaller of the groups into which they could fit.
- In mixed-age small groups try to build the tallest tower of boxes (provided!). Catch: each box must have an idea written on it describing a way in which the church could be more like a family, or a way in which the church could help families.
- Use an open forum to gather views. You will need plenty of post-it notes, pens and/or flip chart paper. Write the questions you want to ask on separate sheets of flip chart paper and display these at intervals around the room –perhaps were you have coffee after Mass. Give each participant a number of post it notes and a pen. Invite them to wander the room, read the questions, write their views on the post it notes, and stick the notes up on the appropriate flip chart paper. They can also read others responses as they go round the room and this should spark some interesting conversations! Leave the forum open for a couple of weeks or more to allow for fullest participation, though the longer this is done the more chance there is of the post it notes becoming unstuck. Arrange opening and closing rituals if desired. Use the pulpit or the parish bulletin to share the main points of what has been learned. Invite responses from

pastors, parishioners and parish volunteers by timetabling a period of reflection at parish meetings.

## Appendix 3: Case Studies for Discussion Groups

---

Consider the following case studies in small groups. Perhaps some of these questions will help to stimulate conversation:

1. In what ways might the individuals and whole families described experience church? What might their perceptions be of their local church?
2. How might these families, including individual children and adults, be helped to feel welcome and comfortable members of the worshipping community? How might they be encouraged or enabled to attend Mass together?
3. What practical innovations might our church make to enable the families described find church life and Sunday Mass more friendly and relevant to their current situations?
4. What support might these families need in addition to church services and current church activities?
5. How could we show them that we care about the personal challenges they are facing?
6. Think of the families on the fringes of our church, and those in our local community. What difference might it make to them if our church became more family-friendly?
7. When this family walks through our church-doors, what might they need practically, relationally and spirituality, to help them feel welcome?
8. What might their hopes be for belonging to a church community? What might they offer to the community and what might they receive?
9. What can the local priest and church community do to help 'bear the burdens' of this family, rather than add to them?

NB: All these case studies are based on real life stories shared in response to the Listening 2004 initiative.

### 1. Bill and Madeleine Gilmartin

Bill and Madeleine Gilmartin appreciate that their experience of family life is not necessarily typical – they have a stable home, are married, they own their own home and are fairly comfortable. They describe their family life as being “at the centre of our individual and collective existence.” They cannot see that this would be different were they living now or at another time. They see many distractions and harmful influences in today’s society but also many positive aspects of living during this time and they accept the challenge of passing on their own values to their children.

### 2. Sue and Kevin Streatham

Sue and Kevin Streatham have been married for 9 years and are the parents of three children ages 9, 8 and 6. They experience enormous financial pressures. “Money is an issue, and we both have to work to sustain a minimum living standard for the family. Working means that you cannot be there for the children when they might need you. Schools put an extra burden on the children with the constant treadmill of exams and assessments. Do they really need that? Working shifts means my husband and I see little of each other and our motivation dries up at 11 p.m. at night when I come home.”

### 3. Michael Moloney

Michael Moloney’s wife left him and their three children shortly after their youngest child started school 18 months ago. Michael was surprised and devastated and still feels both pain and shame about his situation. He loves his wife and still hopes for her return. When she comes to see the children once a month he makes a great effort to repair their relationship, even though he knows she is with someone else. Michael lives in a two-bedroom flat and has had great difficulty maintaining his job since having to care for his three children alone. Financial pressures and long working hours make life difficult for him. There is little time to spend with the children who often fight with each other. Getting to church on time is a weekly nightmare and when he does get there he feels that he is treated as a leper. There is no way for him to meet other Catholic families, as people at church generally do not talk and rush away at the end of Mass.

#### **4. Paula and Graham Somerfield**

Paula and Graham Somerfield have been married for nearly 40 years. They have had their share of severe illness and struggle but have always been active in the church and especially in the Marriage Encounter movement. They are distressed by the lack of encouragement for marriage that they experience in the church. "In our parish, there is a culture that marriage is a private affair," says Graham. "Married couples are expected to be self sufficient in terms of their relationship." Paula and Graham have raised their concerns with their parish priest during a parish mission two years since. Nevertheless they feel as if their views sank into a 'black hole' and they long for the opportunity to be drawn into a closer and more tangible relationship with the Church.

#### **5. Catherine and James Wardell**

Catherine and James Wardell have been married for over 40 years. Sadly the years have seen them grow apart. Catherine identifies her growing incompatibility with her spouse as her major difficulty at home: "We have grown to be very different from when we married." With a disabled child to care for Catherine receives tremendous strength from the Holy Spirit and tries to "be Eucharist" for all she meets. Sadly she finds little community life in her parish and sees home-based groups as the way ahead for the church.

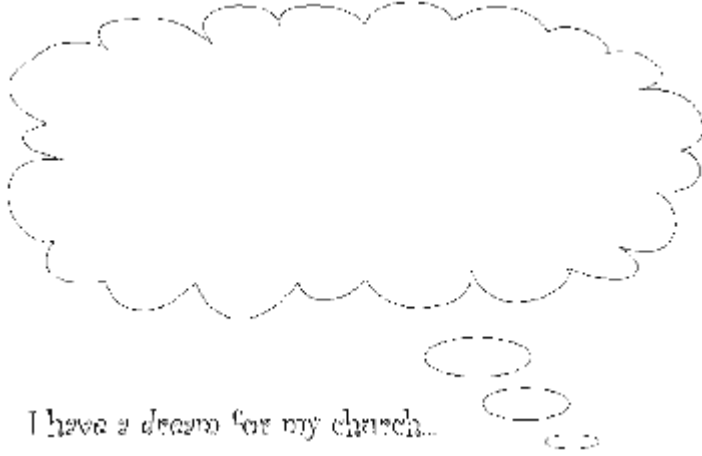
#### **6. Jeremy and Hannah Jacobs**

Jeremy and Hannah Jacobs discovered some years ago that their son was gay. Jeremy was very distressed and tried to talk to a fellow parishioner about his concern. Sadly he quickly realised from the extremely hostile and disparaging reaction he got that this was not a good idea. The parish priest reacted in a similarly prejudiced way. Hannah chose to cope with the situation by refusing to talk about it or even acknowledge it. Jeremy feels angry, frustrated and totally rejected by the church. He loves his son but he now knows to follow his wife's example and keep quiet. There seems nothing else for him to do.

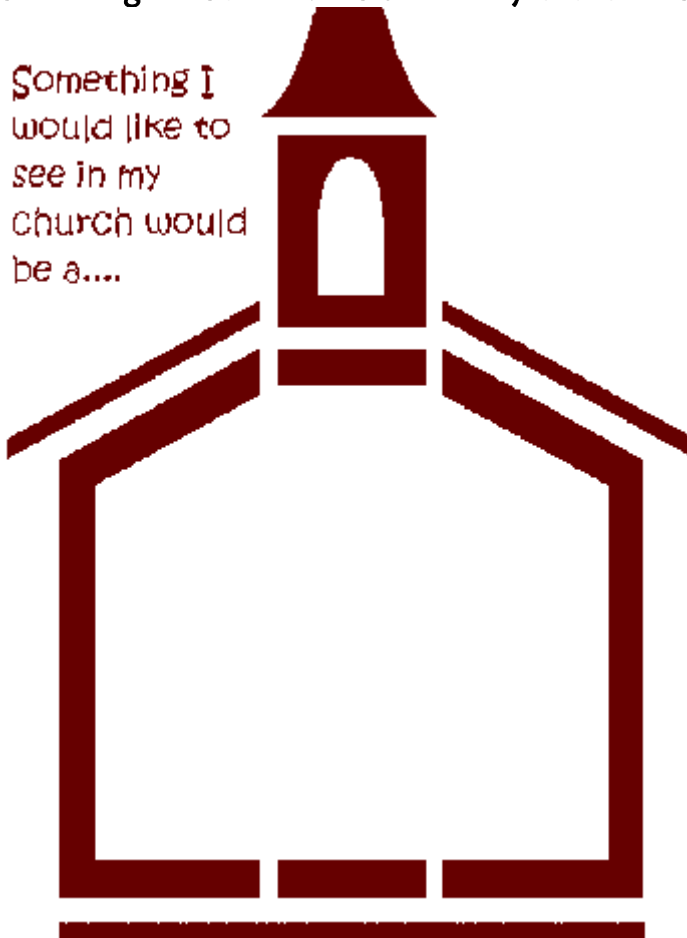
## Appendix 4: Worksheets for Young People

---

I have a dream for my church. .



Something I would like to see in my church would be a . .



## Appendix 5: Additional Resources – Church Guidelines

---

### Masses with Children

*Extracted from the Directory for Masses with Children. Congregation for Divine Worship 1973.*

In the upbringing of children in the Church a special difficulty arises from the fact that liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, cannot fully exercise their inherent pedagogical force upon children. Although the vernacular may now be used at Mass, still the words and signs have not been sufficiently adapted to the capacity of children. In fact, even in daily life children do not always understand all their experiences with adults but rather may find them boring. It cannot therefore be expected of the liturgy that everything must always be intelligible to them.

Nonetheless there is a fear of spiritual harm if over the years children repeatedly experience in the Church things that are barely comprehensible; for recent psychological study has established how profoundly children are formed by the religious experience of infancy and early childhood, because of the special religious receptivity proper to those years. The Church follows its Master, who “put his arms around the little children. . . and blessed them” (Mark 10:16). It cannot leave children in the condition described.

In many places parish Masses are celebrated, especially on Sundays and feast days, at which a good many children take part along with the large number of adults. At these Masses the witness of adult believers can have a great effect upon the children. Adults can in turn benefit spiritually from experiencing the part that the children have within the Christian community. The Christian spirit of the family is greatly fostered when children take part in these Masses together with their parents and other family members. In Masses of this kind it is necessary to take great care that the children present do not feel neglected because of their inability to participate or to understand what happens and what is proclaimed in the celebration. Some account should be taken of their presence: for example, by speaking to them directly in the brief comments (as at the beginning and the end of Mass) and at some point in the homily. Sometimes, moreover, if the place itself and the nature of the individuals permit, it possibly will be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy of the word, including a homily, with the children in a separate, but not too distant, location. Then, before the eucharistic liturgy begins, the children are led to the place where the adults have meanwhile celebrated their own liturgy of the word. In these Masses it may also be very helpful to give some tasks to the children. They may, for example, bring forward the gifts or sing one or other of the hymns of the Mass.

(# 2-3, 16-18)

## Appendix 6: Additional Resources – Contact Details

---

### **Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS)**

The CSAS has been established to be responsible for driving and supporting improvements in practice. Its primary role is one of co-ordination, advice and support in respect of the wider job of safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults. Further information, general advice and information concerning resources and training opportunities is available by contacting the Safeguarding Co-ordinator within each diocese. Additional help can be obtained from the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service (CSAS), Queensway House, 57 Livery Street, Birmingham B3 1HA Tel: 0121 237 3740 Fax: 0121 237 3741.

### **Association of Interchurch Families**

The Association of Interchurch Families offers a support network for families where the partners belong to different Christian denominations, particularly marriages between a Roman Catholic and a Christian of another denomination.

Contact: Association of Interchurch Families, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH

Website: [www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk](http://www.interchurchfamilies.org.uk)

Email: [info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk](mailto:info@interchurchfamilies.org.uk)

### **Association of Separated and Divorced Catholics**

The ASDC offers spiritual and practical support through self-help groups; most dioceses have a local coordinator. Services include a starter pack for anyone interested in forming a group, a bi-monthly newsletter New Vision, and a national helpline. Contact: c/o Cathedral House, 250 Chapel St, Salford, M3 5LL Website: [www.asdcengland.org.uk](http://www.asdcengland.org.uk)

### **Beginning Experience**

Beginning Experience offers weekend residential programmes to those who have lost a partner through death, desertion, separation or divorce, to help them come to terms with their grief so that they can begin again. The weekend is led by trained volunteers who have themselves experienced such a loss and is primarily only for those who are ready to move forward. The US website includes contact information and dates for the UK. Website:

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

### **Care For the Family**

Care for the Family aims to promote strong family life and to help those hurting because of family breakdown. They describe the heart of their work as “to come alongside people in the good times and in the tough times - bringing hope, compassion and some practical, down-to-earth help and encouragement.” Care for the Family produce a wide range of resources, books, packs and newsletters which can be accessed from their website. Contact: Care for the Family, PO Box 488, Cardiff CF15 7YY Website: [www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)

### **Catholic Grandparents Association**

The mission of the Catholic Grandparents Association is to help grandparents pass on the faith and to keep prayer at the centre of family life. It does this through regular pilgrimages and through establishing parish-based branches of the CGA. For further information contact Clara Donnelly, Administrator. Email: [cc.donn@talktalk.net](mailto:cc.donn@talktalk.net) Website:

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

### **FAMILIAS**

FAMILIAS is the professional association for diocesan coordinators of marriage and family life ministries in the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Through the ministry of its members FAMILIAS aims to support, nourish and sustain families whatever their circumstances. FAMILIAS shares good practice and makes resources more widely available; connects and cares for coordinators by providing peer support, ongoing training and formation; advocates for families and Family Life Ministry by collaborating with others and bringing concerns to the attention of the Committee for Marriage and Family Life. Website: [www.familias-ew.org.uk](http://www.familias-ew.org.uk)

### **Family Caring Trust**

For over a decade, the Trust's resources have been the most popular parenting materials in Britain and Ireland - almost half a million parents have experienced at least one of the courses. Their resources for parents, couples and teenagers include an optional spiritual component and they also offer complete kits and training materials for leaders/facilitators. Contact: Family Caring, 44 Rathfriland Road, Newry, Co. Down, BT34 1LD Website: [www.familycaring.co.uk](http://www.familycaring.co.uk) Email: [office@familycaring.co.uk](mailto:office@familycaring.co.uk) Tel: 028 302 64174 Fax: 028 302 69077

### **Marriage Care**

Marriage Care is a charity operating across England and Wales. Its purpose is to help people prepare for, achieve and sustain successful marriages and to support them should their marriages break down. Marriage Care has a number of centres across England and Wales which offer marriage preparation, counselling and education. Contact: Bishops Park House, 25-29 Fulham High Street, London SW6 3JH Website: [www.marriagecare.org.uk](http://www.marriagecare.org.uk) Tel: 020 7371 1341

### **Rainbows for all God's Children**

Rainbows' mission is to provide training and programmes for establishing peer support groups for children, adolescents and adults who are grieving a death, separation, desertion, divorce or other painful loss in their family. These services are offered through accredited sites, usually schools but sometimes other community organisations. Contact: Rainbows Resource Centre. Unit 7, Hightown Enterprise Park, York St, Luton LU2 0HA Website: [www.rainbowsgb.org](http://www.rainbowsgb.org)

### **Retrouvaille**

Retrouvaille (pronounced retrovi) was established in Quebec, Canada in the 1970's. It was originally a French experience (Retrouvaille is the French word for "Rediscovery") and was specifically designed to offer a peer ministry to those who are experiencing pain, separation and divorce in their marriage. It is firmly rooted in the teachings and theology of the Church, although weekends are open to couples of other religious denominations (and none). Contact: Kathy & Clive Jones Website: [www.retrouvaille.org.uk](http://www.retrouvaille.org.uk)

### **Teams of Our Lady**

Teams consist of Christian married couples. Members provide support and encouragement for each other on their spiritual journeys and in their daily lives. The team is an extended family; and it is this combination of friendship & support with the spiritual that is at the heart of Teams ethos. Website: [www.teamsfourlady.org.uk](http://www.teamsfourlady.org.uk)

### **Union of Catholic Mothers and Union of Catholic Mothers Wales**

The UCM aims to follow the full Christian ideal of marriage and family life. Membership is open to all Catholic women, married or single, to non-Catholic wives of Catholic husbands and may be extended to women in sympathy with its aims and objects, which include helping Catholic married women to appreciate the Sacramental character, responsibilities and permanence of marriage and to assist them to bring up their children as practising Catholics and public-spiritual citizens. Website: [www.theucm.org.uk](http://www.theucm.org.uk)

### **Worldwide Marriage Encounter**

Worldwide Marriage Encounter is a movement within the Catholic Church, which began in the late 1960's, with the intention of giving married couples, priests and religious the opportunity to take responsibility for what is happening in their lives. Over 5 million couples in almost 100 countries have experienced a weekend. A Marriage Encounter Weekend offers couples the opportunity to refocus on the values that are really important to them and to live more joyful and purposeful lives. Website: [www.wwme.org.uk](http://www.wwme.org.uk)



## Help Us To Evaluate Everybody's Welcome

---

Please help us to evaluate the usefulness of this pack by completing and returning this form:

Has your parish used all or part of *Everybody's Welcome: Helping Your Parish to Become More Friendly for all Kinds of Families*?

Yes/No

If yes, please tick the sections that your parish has used

- Introduction
- Building a Family Friendly Church
- What Are We Aiming Towards?
- A Small Parish?
- Evaluating the Current Situation
- Creative Ideas
- Ways Forward
- Questionnaires
- Interactive Ideas
- Case Studies
- Worksheets
- Church Guidelines
- Contact Details

If no, can you tell us why not?

**Name:**

**Position of responsibility:**

**Parish:**

**Diocese:**

Further comments:

**Please post to Celebrating Family Project Office, CBCEW, 39 Eccleston Square London SW1V 1BX or email to: [everybodyswelcome@celebratingfamily.org.uk](mailto:everybodyswelcome@celebratingfamily.org.uk)**