

Making Room for Love

Inspiration for Married Christians

Based on a text prepared by the Schoenstatt Family Movement, Germany

About this publication

This is a novena for couples by couples. According to an ancient tradition, Christians meet for nine days to pray for a definite intention. The NINE recalls the liturgical time of nine days [NOVENA] between Christ's Ascension and the feast of Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles relate that after Christ's final return to his Father, the first Christians gathered in the Upper Room with Mary to pray (Acts 1,6-2,36). This experience at the start of the Church has remained a model for communal prayer until today.

The smallest community in the Church, a married couple and their family, can take up this experience. Since they know that other couples are also meeting to pray for their most personal needs, their love for each other grows to embrace others, and these daily incentives unite them with others praying in the same spirit.

INTRODUCTION

Family life is something we have all experienced in some way. Ideally it is in the family where we experience love in all its forms - the love of man and wife, of parents and children, of children for one another and the love of friendship, which is out-reaching love. The family is then the refuge of all that is human and Christian.

However, today the family is in a state of siege. Not only is the marriage relationship called into question and replaced with other 'models', social and economic structures militate against family life. The media seldom report on happy, normal marriages and families, they highlight the sensational and aberrant forms. As a result our society is becoming far less human.

These observations show that we have reached a turning-point in history. There is no longer a single definition or description of the family, especially in the European West. The 'traditional' Christian family structure is in the minority and seems to be fast disappearing. At the same time new models are appearing, borne by powerful social trends:

- * Democracy is recognised as the best social structure with its emphasis on human freedom and dignity, partnership and co-operation.
- * The women's movements have given woman a new sense of her dignity and awakened in her the desire to play her role in society. She recognises her equality with man while acknowledging her difference from him, and insists on equal rights and duties. She wants to be seen as man's partner.
- * There is a new awareness of human sexuality. Many of the old taboos and fears have been overthrown. People are gaining a more holistic approach to themselves and their sexuality. The expression of emotion and tenderness is not only allowed, it is expected.
- * The secularisation of life is now complete. The secular sphere is seen in its own right as opposed to the religious. The world in all its variety is affirmed, and Christians are expected to be fully engaged in it. Their task is to discover God in and behind events and things.

It cannot be denied that much that was good has been destroyed. These powerful forces at work in our society have their shadow side. Yet we Christians have every reason to see the Spirit of God at work in these signs

of our times. If we have understood him correctly, he is urging us powerfully to re-fashion the home and family life as the basic cell of society. If the family becomes more human, society will become more human. We have to take up all that is positive in the trends of our times and use them to create a `new' Christian world.

We cannot do this on our own. We need to live in solidarity with other couples and families striving for the same values and goals. Christian husbands and wives can encourage one another by exchanging their experiences. We, the authors of this booklet, would like to come into dialogue with other couples. We have not tried to tackle every aspect of family life, but have raised issues that seem important to us.

This booklet is in invitation to other couples to spell out once again that lovely word 'love`. The important thing is to make room in our partnership for love, and to do this time and again. Quiet, intent listening to God's Word, are a great help to couples on their way through life, which is by no means easy for many who are joined in marriage. The most precious things we can share, like the bread and wine, are our experiences and the trust that marriage and the family are wholly taken up into God's embrace and care.

Prayer for each day

Dear and loving God,
you are love,
your very life is love.
You created us human beings
in your image and likeness.
You created us as man and woman,
you created us to love,
to make your life and love visible
here on our earth.
You created us as a family.
YOU TELL US: I LOVED YOU FIRST!

You bless our children.
You have entrusted them to us,
that we may care for them
and give them everything
that will open their hearts for you.
We are in your debt -
and in their debt.
YOU TELL US: REMAIN IN MY LOVE!

Give us that strength from above,
the fire of your Spirit
which united the first Christians as your family
gathered around Mary, your Mother.
Comfort and heal us
where wounds have made us silent or withdrawn,
where limitations and faults drive us to despair.
YOU KNOW: LORD, WE WANT TO LOVE!

Make us creative
to discover your intentions for marriage and the family
in the changed circumstances today.
Let our marriage and family
become the place where you make your presence felt
as you did in Nazareth,
so that it may become
the refuge for true humanity.
WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE!

Amen.

Preserving the magic of the first moments

Kiss me

with the kisses of your mouth,

for your love-making is sweeter than wine;

delicate is the fragrance of your perfume,

your name is an oil poured out.

The Song of Songs, 1, 2-3

1. Preserving the magic of the first moments

A text for people in love! Made drunk by love, this tingling feeling when the loved one is nearby - the magic of the first moments! This experience makes us happy, it is a gift. It can be the start of a relationship. As this relationship develops, it changes. The initial fascination, the wooing and winning, becomes life together. In the process love loses much of its magic spell, especially if we have had an idealised picture of each other. Our love is challenged. We have to learn to remain faithful to it in the normality of everyday life with all its duties and difficulties, its highs and lows. We have to learn to cope together with challenge and hardship. The magic of the first moments gives place to the routine of everyday life.

Although this development is normal and necessary, it is also dangerous. Our enthusiasm for each other gives way to a more down-to-earth and realistic assessment of each other, with our strong points and weaknesses. The effort to please each other can become indifference, the excitement of the first caresses can become boredom, the joys of physical union can become a fulfilment of marital duties.

The time has then come not to lose sight of what we found so good to start with. We need moments in which we feel that we are in love with each other. It requires fantasy and creativity if we are not to leave this to chance. We need to find definite occasions for it. It is precisely these little caresses and acts of tenderness that keep our love alive - a loving look, a kiss, a hug, a word of understanding or affirmation, going dancing for a change, or simply a little surprise. These are ways of making room for our love in everyday life and of telling each other: You are important to me! It will also mean not looking upon our work, sport fixtures or parish appointments as more important than spending an evening together. Possibly with music and candlelight or going for a walk together - hand in hand. With enough time to discuss everything that is important to the partner. In an atmosphere that leaves room for caresses, where we are relaxed and yet open to a new encounter with the other, where we can again fall in love.

Let us leave behind our everyday lives for a moment and fall in love again - so that the magic of the first discovery can be re-captured.

PRAYER

All-loving God,

God of life and
source of all love,

our greatest longing is that
our love may stay alive
as we journey through life together.
We want to be faithful to each other
and keep alive the magic
of our first moments together,
for these were a precious gift
from your hand.

Help us never to forget
the importance of tenderness
for each other.
Let us always be thankful for the beauty
of our partner,
and never lose our wonder
at the uniqueness of the other.

For you have created each of us
and we meet you
in our partner.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Love does not mean possessing someone
and it can never be stored up for later

Ulrich Schaffer

2. Giving each other room to develop

To put him to the test,

one of them put a further question,

'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?'

Jesus said to him,

'You must love the Lord your God

with all your heart, with all your soul

and with all your mind.

This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second resembles it:

You must love your neighbour as yourself.'

Matthew, 22, 35-39

2. Giving each other room to develop

Love your neighbour! We know this by heart. But to love ourselves? What does that mean?

Jesus pointed to a central reality - we cannot love our neighbour if we do not love ourselves! That is to say, unless I love and accept myself, I cannot love and accept other, especially my partner and my children. My self-esteem decides how I treat others. Children, in particular, are very sensitive in this regard and discover at an early age how we stand to ourselves, and hence to them.

How am I to learn to accept myself? Despite all the limitations and hurts I experience all the time? It is not a simple or easy process. I must listen to what others value in me and be grateful when I am touched by their love. I must learn to wonder over my achievements and successes, and to trust my dreams and experiences. I have to confront my history and learn to accept it. I may not take the good things for granted, but begin to see God behind them. He touches me with his love through people and events. In this way the realisation can grow in me: God loves me, I am valuable in his sight! He loves me as I am, so I can and may also love myself as I am. He has given me many abilities and possibilities, and he gives me room, the freedom and the energy to develop them.

Love yourself, because I love you! That is God's commission. My answer to him is to accept his love and let it work in me. I must recognise my talents and abilities, I must enjoy them and give them expression. Love one another! This also means giving our partner enough room to develop his or her talents. Encouraging each other to accept our feelings and thoughts, our needs and wishes. Each of us has the right to take time regularly for themselves, we may feel good about it. In that time we should do what is important to us and what we enjoy doing. We will discover new sides to ourselves and new possibilities, and this will keep our relationship alive. This is because life means change, movement, constant growth. Let us give it room.

PRAYER

All kind and loving God,
you planned each one of us
as a unique human being.
You gave us life.
You love each one of us as we are.

We often find it difficult
to love ourselves.
We would like to be different -
more courageous, more clever, stronger, more gifted.
Our partner and our children
as also often not the way
we would like them to be.

Help us to understand
that you want each one of us
just the way we are,
that we are lovable
precisely because we are
the way we are.

Show us the ways and means
to help each other
to accept ourselves,
to develop our abilities
and to grow in love.
Amen

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

To love someone means
seeing them

the way God wants them.

Fedor M. Dostoevsjy

3. Experiencing togetherness and loneliness

Two hands -
close and yet apart,
relaxed and yet in tension.
Two right hands facing each other.
The man's hand upright and protecting,
the woman's hand nestling lightly in it
and at the same time supporting it.

There is space between them -
both painful and blissful.
Painful
because there cannot be perfect
and permanent union
between two people on this earth.
Blissful
because these two hands belong
to each other.
They are one
despite all distance and otherness.

Two hands touching lightly -
they aren't holding onto each other
compulsively.
There is room between them for trust, for love.
There is room - for God.

Theo Schmidkonz

3. Experiencing togetherness and loneliness

>I would never have thought that ...!< How often those words pass through my mind - in a positive and negative sense. Sometimes the thought shocks me that we are such different people, I will never be able to understand you completely. I then feel the emptiness of loneliness, I feel that a gulf separates us - even when we experience that we have much in common or are physically close to each other. There is always a sense of mystery, a sense that something is hidden from me, somewhere where I cannot follow you. That hurts, it separates, it makes us feel isolated. I want to be very close to you.

It is possible that I have the wrong idea about marriage. Do I expect you to fit into the picture I have of you?

How often you do things quite differently to the way I would, you feel differently about things, you think differently. There are times when I cannot understand you. You are so quiet, but your silence is like a cry for help, as difficult to understand as a book in another language. Your way of feeling, of seeing things, is so different to mine. Your way of looking for companionship is so different from mine. Your arguments are outside the reach of my feelings, and my feelings seem to be meaningless to you.

Could this not mean that we are being given the opportunity to give each other what we lack? We can balance out each other's imperfections and limitations. If we complement each other, we form a greater whole. Isn't this the meaning of our need for closeness and communion with each other?

Completing each other, letting ourselves be completed, brings blessing to a lifelong community. When we seek communion, we have to be open for another. If we are open and honest with each other, if we acknowledge problems and try to solve them together, if we accept responsibility for them, our limited self will grow to become a new 'we'. What a gift, what potential! We experience our difference, we exchange views and ideas, and in this way catch a glimpse of God's inexhaustible riches.

PRAYER

All-kind and loving God,

thank you for allowing us to love each other
and see each other as our partner.

We are different.

Help us when we find this difficult to bear,
when it is difficult to be open
and understanding.

Help us both to grow through this tension
of togetherness and loneliness.

We thank you for letting us constantly
discover something new in the other.

Both of us are enriched
and gifted by the other.

The space between us is not empty.

Let us experience a trace of your riches
and a hint of your love
in this space.

Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The bridge of love

has to be built from both banks.

Irmgard Erath

3. Remaining in contact

All you need say is

'Yes' if you mean yes,

'No' if you mean no.

Matthew 5, 37

3. Remaining in contact

Jesus obviously valued honesty and truthfulness. He raised a central issue of marriage: Talking things over! We talk a great deal, but all too often what we say is superficial and does not express what is going on deep within us.

The communication we dream about is far more than this. What we are really looking for is to communicate our feelings, our thoughts, our emotions. We want to express ourselves. This needs time and a certain atmosphere. In our family, for example, we manage to communicate at greater depth when we are out walking, or when we are washing up. Others have found out that they can talk things over during a longer car journey. Others keep an evening free, turning off the telephone and TV. They are there just for each other!

Real communication is an exchange. The difference between man and woman is both an obstacle and an opportunity. If someone is governed more by their mind, they often find it difficult to communicate feelings. They also find it difficult to give equal weight to intuition and emotion. Yet feelings and emotions also need complementation. If we make use of our differences, if we try to understand the other, we will be mutually enriched. We will help each other to discover and understand new aspects of reality, to feel things more deeply and to give more.

>But that is not what I meant ...!< If we find it difficult to express what we really want to say, it is even more difficult to understand what the other is really wanting to say. That is why Jesus demanded that we speak out clearly. >How did you mean that?< or >Have I understood you correctly? Do you mean ...?< or perhaps >Tell me more!< Such remarks have often helped us to understand each other better. And if during a conversation we take our partner's hand we involve another of our senses in the discussion - not just our ears! If there has been real communication we often 'feel good' about things afterwards. We feel understood, we feel that we have understood. At such moments the silence between us can be more eloquent than words. When we are really close, we can often manage to pray - a three cornered conversation!

PRAYER

Loving Father,

you gave me my partner.
Thank you for the moments
when we are very close to each other
so that we can exchange many personal thoughts
and deep feelings.

We have experienced
that our communication remains alive
when you are with us.
We want to be open with each other
so that we can truly meet
and say a full yes
to each other.

Remain with us so that we can love
each other
as you love us.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I give you my time and my attention

5. Living the sacrament of love

Have you not read that the Creator
from the beginning made them male and female
and that he said:

This is why a man leaves his father and mother
and becomes attached to his wife,
and the two become one flesh?

They are no longer two, therefore,
but one flesh.

So then, what God has united,
human beings must not divide.

Matthew 19, 3-6

5. Living the sacrament of love

Jesus gave a very clear answer to a question that concerns us personally. He was speaking about the kingdom of God in relation to our marriage. Jesus upgrades our love. He says: In marriage God is himself at work. He, God, brings us together, and he does so in such a way that we are no longer two, but one.

Jesus reminds us expressly of the creation account and hence of God's intention when he created us. God created man and woman so that they could become >one flesh< in marriage. In their love, in their relationship, in their lives with each other and for each other they are God's image and likeness.

Jesus encourages us to bear witness to the coming of God's kingdom also, and very precisely, in marriage. He is not afraid to be very direct: God's work of uniting his creation is made visible in the marriage union. His love and his faithfulness are made present in our mutual love and faithfulness - and that in the midst of the world.

So our passionate love for each other becomes a sign of his closeness and our oneness an intimate expression of God's liberating and fruitful love for us human beings.

This love must prove itself in everyday life - in good days and in bad, in active support of each other, in the tiny gestures of tenderness, in bearing with each other and forgiving each other, in our sincere efforts to promote the wellbeing of each other, in our common concern for our children, our work, in our solidarity with each other.

Despite all its imperfections, our love is a sign of his perfection. God is in us and works through us. When we come up against the limits of our ability to love, God's promises can give us courage and give our love the strength we need to be faithful. We are not alone in our love! Love is a sacrament, a sign and instrument of God's coming into this world.

PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven,

your love created us
and you have called us as man and wife to love.
You brought us together
and let us become one.

Your Son, Jesus Christ,
gave marriage a new meaning and depth.
He sanctified marriage
and made it an effective sign
of his presence here on earth.

You want our marriage to succeed
and increasingly make room for that indestructible love
with which you love us
and want to lead us home
into your kingdom.

Give us the grace
to live our marriage covenant in such a way
that also others can discover in it
a sign of salvation,
a sign and instrument of your coming.
Send us your Spirit
and enkindle in us the fire of your love.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Married couples are actually

the most perfect image and likeness

of the Triune God.

Joseph Kantenich

6. Living and passing on the faith

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting. And he said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting. Start off now ... Say, 'The kingdom of God is very near to you.'... Anyone who listens to you listens to me!

Luke, 10, 1-16

6. Living and passing on the faith

You and I, we two - are we the two disciples Jesus sends out? A shattering thought! Yet - we are a pair. So is Jesus' intention. He wanted to work through believers and to pass on his message through them. His commission was given to us directly through baptism, confirmation and the sacrament of marriage.

So he is speaking to us: God wants to make himself heard through us, he wants to love and be loved through us. I can discover traces of his presence in our family life - in the loving embrace of my partner, in the boisterousness and joy of a family celebration, in the acceptance I experience even after I have hurt my partner, in the openness and honesty with which a conflict is solved, in the criticism which helped both of us to grow. Didn't God touch us in this way? Our children at play, the joy they have given us, our concern for them, their trust in us, our communication with them. They have often questioned and challenged our beliefs, but they have also surprised us with their faith and given us new courage.

How should we experience God's presence unless through people and events? He obviously wants it this way. When children experience the love of their parents and also the love of their parents for each other, they automatically find the way to God - without many explanations. The family is the first and most influential place where the gift of a relationship to God can be given. It would seem that God wants to be made present in a very human way - where love finds its origin, where it can grow and be tended. This is where the faith is first passed on.

This initial and primary experience is underlined by signs and feasts in which our faith becomes visible - the sign of the cross drawn on the forehead of our partner and our children, praying together, reading the Bible together, preparing for the feasts of the Church year, for birthdays, or anniversaries such as baptism, first communion, etc. Talking about God, sharing our experiences and difficulties with the faith particularly when the children are older, allowing them to search independently while supporting them with our openness. Even if we come up against our limitations in the process, we can trust in Jesus' promise. He sent us out as a pair. If we do this, we will show that God is connected with every facet of our lives. If friends or neighbours can share in this life, the faith is passed on even beyond the confines of our immediate family.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

you sent out the first witnesses of the faith
by twos. You sent them to those places
where you wanted to come.
Your words also apply to us.

We want to be the witnesses of your love
within our family
and as such open to welcome you
and your good news,
which we want to pass on
with courage and creativity.

But we are often brought up short
by our limitations
and the smallness of our faith.
We feel that too much is being asked of us,
that we are unable to pass on our faith
in a vital and attractive way.
Let us feel
that you really are with us
and work through us.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

If we are truly human
we will be a bridge for others
on their way to God!

Joseph Kantenich

7. Having time for the children

Then people brought little children to him,
for him to lay his hands on them and pray.
The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said,
'Let the little children alone,
and do not stop them from coming to me;
for it is to such as these
that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.
Then he laid his hands on them
and went on his way.
Matthew 19, 13-15

7. Having time for the children

Jesus had time for children. He welcomed them. He laid his hands on them and blessed them. A blessing means accepting the other and wanting them to develop. In the end Jesus let the children go and went on his way.

Acceptance, development, letting go! That was Jesus' way with children. Could we parents not learn from him how to deal with our children?

Children are a blessing. They give us a great deal of joy. It is a matter of life or death for them whether we accept them - no matter whether they are gifted or not, healthy or handicapped. God has entrusted them to our care. We should protect and feed them, educate and love them. Love that is open to welcome children and make room for new life. Can we uphold this attitude even when our plans are threatened and possibly totally destroyed? Conflicts can arise that demand a great deal of us.

Children must be allowed to develop. Development requires time, it demands patience of us and the repeated attempt to come to a mutual understanding. Yes, children can get on our nerves, especially when they do not know what they really want, when they have lost their bearings and don't know whom they should listen to. What happens if our children develop quite differently from what we expected and planned, e.g. if they become homosexual? What happens if they cannot cope with our society, if they cannot find work, if they start taking drugs, if they allow others to influence them in a detrimental way?

We try to help them, we do not break off the attempt to remain in communication, we try to show them that they are not alone. We turn with our concerns and worries to God, discuss all sorts of things with him in prayer, and remind ourselves that in actual fact this is "God's child".

So, by keeping God in view, we can let go of our children. We trust that God has a plan for our children, with each one of them. Each child has been given a message from God for others. When we educate our children, we want to try to help them to discover this message, to develop their talents, and to live their lives as free personalities.

PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven,

you gave us our children
so that they can experience what a family is like.
We should care for them,
we should feed and clothe them,
we should educate them
Thank you for trusting us.
We rejoice in each of our children.

Help us to recognize and promote
their originality.
Let us never forget
that the children need our time
and our love,
they need our courage to educate them.

Our heartfelt love for our children
should not restrict them, but set them free
to become free and strong characters,
who walk their path through life
to you and to others.

Lay your hands on our children,
bless them,
protect them from the influence of the evil one.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Let us imitate the Good Shepherd.

'I know my own and my own know me' (Jn 10,14).

Get to know your children.

Joseph Kantenich

8. Coping together with conflict

Carry each other's burdens;

that is how to keep the law of Christ.

For if those who are nothing

think they are something,

they deceive themselves.

All must test their own work; ...

For all must carry their own loads.

Galatians 6, 2-5

8. Coping together with conflict

Yes, in the course of a marriage there are difficult times. There is illness, personal crises, financial worries, different recognition at work and from the world around us. A marriage can be endangered if we come to totally contrary decisions about educating the children. Relationships to people outside the marriage, for example, parents-in-law or friends, can also pose a threat. We hurt each other. There are also personal faults and limitations.

What do we do about them? Silence or fighting can destroy much. If I am intent on winning the power struggle or having the last word, I will probably shout ... or fall silent. The partner hasn't a chance. If we want to cope positively with conflicts, we have to take joint responsibility for them. When we approach a conflict, it is not easy to remain open minded towards the other person's guilt, questions and worries. We need to spell out the conflict and fight it out. Fighting is not an alarm signal for a relationship. If there is no fighting in a relationship, it could be that it is not alive. But do we fight in the right way?

When I say something, it is a good thing to express my feelings and thoughts openly and honestly. Attacks and apportioning blame separates us, so does drawing in old conflicts. To be fair, I must remain with the present situation. I make it easier for my partner and myself if I tell him (or her) the effect of his (or her) behaviour on me. 'I feel hurt' is far less damaging to our relationship than saying 'You are unfair - just like your mother!'

Listening properly also including letting things stand. My body language shows whether I am paying attention, whether I want the conversation to continue, or not. We have to take time for each other, time for our conflict. We need time to be able to say sorry, we need time to forgive.

Conflicts are opportunities to discover each other at greater depth, even if every conflict is not resolved. There are things we have to let be, we have to bear with them. It does us both good to place our conflict in God's hands and say: See to things! We can't manage on our own.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

when we start our life together
we said a whole-hearted yes to each other.
This yes has to be repeated time and again,
it has to prove itself.

There are times when we withdraw from each other,
there are times when guilt separates us.
Help us when problems threaten our relationship
and we experience how helpless we are.

Give us the grace to trust each other,
help us to remain open to each other,
so that we can meet and accept each other
whole-heartedly.

Forgive us our guilt,
so that our love can go on growing
and coming to maturity.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Forgive us our guilt
as we forgive those who have offended us.

Jesus of Nazareth

9. Suffering with hope

It happened that soon afterwards he went to a town call Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, `Young man, I tell you: get up.' And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, `A great prophet has risen up among us. God has visited his people.'

Luke 7, 11-16

9. Suffering with hope

The death of an only son. And the mother a widow. It is a situation we find hard to understand. Jesus was moved with pity.

In our marriage and family life many things happen that hurt us profoundly and give rise to tormenting questions. If people love, their love is a burden, their heart is easily wounded. There can be misunderstandings, guilt, unemployment, illness, addiction ... It is good at such times to remain close to each other, to support each other - when we weep, when we shout aloud, when we try to talk things over, when we bear with the pain.

How much it hurts when we lose the support of our partner - through conflict or separation. Or through the death of our partner, the death of a child! Suffering that remains unspoken, that isolates us - even when surrounded by good friends. Losing a beloved partner changes everything - just as everything changed when we set out on life together. Love made many things possible, it set unimagined forces free, the soul took wing. We were prepared to pay a high price for our love. Lovely things have happened. We have struggled and celebrated, we have slept peacefully, we have prayed, we have simply lived together. And now? Uncertainty casts a pall on everything. The person who gave us support and security is no longer there. God, whom we would like to question, is hidden as though in a cloud. Does he share in our suffering?

We will have to suffer through times when we are searching for meaning, when everything appears senseless. It is a blessing when people we love then approach us, speak to us, comfort us and give us the courage to tackle everyday life again. Who are simply there. There will be times when I will try to understand what the course of life has to be. The pain of loss can change the more we discover that the beloved is present to us in God. Love comes from God and makes the other present in God. In death this becomes final! That is our hope.

What happened at Naim is a picture of God's intention for all of us: his promise of eternal life. Jesus' resurrection proves that love is right. 'Love is strong as death' (Song of Songs 8,6). It is strong, because God lives in this love and welcomes those who love into his house. My loved ones, who seem so far away, are awaiting me. They are adoring God.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,

you know the power of love,
which brings us together in suffering,
which wants to help and to hold.
You know the suffering of separation
which wounds people who love
and casts a shadow on their lives.

Stay close to me when I mourn.
Keep hold of me - as at Naim -
and speak to me
those words of hope and of life.
To whom should I go?
You have the words of eternal life.

I want to hope and love
together with the many
who are united in this belief
and who are looking forward to a future
in the house of your Father.
Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The mystery of love
is greater than
the mystery of death.

Anon

About this booklet

The YEAR OF THE FAMILY 1994 once again made people aware that the marriage and family are important not just for the people concerned, but for the whole of society and the Church. The Schoenstatt Family Movement in Germany, Austria and Switzerland organized many gatherings in the course of 1994 during which couples could exchange their experiences and enjoy their holidays together as families. Those who took part were greatly encouraged in their purpose to build up sound family life. This booklet should serve to continue this initiative.

The YEAR 2000, the turning point to a new millennium, points to a new historical epoch with new challenges. The closing decades of our century show clearly that the Church has to live in the family if it is to survive in the pluralistic society of today, if it is to be 'the salt and leaven' for the world. Marriages and the family will most probably be the seat of the 'new evangelisation' that has to be undertaken, very much as the monasteries and convents with their spiritual families were the seed out of which the Christian West developed in the past. It will take many such initiatives to make people aware of this fact. That is why couples are addressing themselves to couples in this booklet.

Since its foundation by Fr Joseph Kentenich in the concentration camp at Dachau in 1942, the SCHOENSTATT FAMILY MOVEMENT has been trying, together with other spiritual communities and initiatives in the Church, to promote the 'new evangelisation' called for by our Holy Father. Encouraging experiences on the way are cause for gratitude, and invite us to join in prayer and dialogue.

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It cannot be denied that social structures today militate against family life. The Church again and again admonishes Western societies to find new solutions to the problems faced by families. She has to do so. The Church tries to support married couples and their families in various ways, including spiritual initiatives. She points to the signs of the times and offers alternative ways and means of coping with them. The authors of this booklet >Make Room for Love< draw from the life of the Schoenstatt Family Movement to offer inspirations to married Christians and encourage them to enter into dialogue. They have managed through reflecting on their own experiences to give expression to many aspects that will be a help to couples in their everyday life. I can only express the wish that this booklet will be widely distributed and be welcomed by many couples.

George Cardinal Sterzinzky
Chairman of the Commission for Marriage and the Family
in the German Bishops' Conference