

Mission

The church and therefore the parish, exists for no other reason than to carry out its mission and this mission can be most simply described as bringing people into the fellowship of God's love. While the description is simple, the task is a great challenge.

In today's culture there is great pluralism, so the call to community has to be far more inclusive and widely embracing than ever before. We live among people of different faiths, who speak different languages, live different lifestyles and hold different values. Many of them feel isolated or alienated. Even people of our own culture and faith tradition experience great pain as a result of feeling unwelcome or unwanted. Many people, marginalised by their particular circumstances feel unwelcome or rejected by the church. Such rejection is not the message of Jesus, nor what the church proclaims. It is not a faithful expression of our mission.

If the parish accepts its overall aim is to build *communio*, focused on the Eucharist, then there must be a place for everyone to belong in the true Christian community. Vatican II has charged it with the task of '*changing the temporal order*'. This is done by changing people's hearts not their heads, and hearts are changed in relationships. There can be no doubt that there is an urgent need to build a sense of community. Social problems such as marriage breakdown, high mobility and loss of the extended family suggest a need to create belonging. This sense of belonging or a sense of community cannot be achieved without relationships and relationships are at the deepest within the family. It is within the family that we can most easily be ourselves and where we expect support, affection and encouragement. The members of a family help to carry one another's burdens. Families are not free from conflict or disappointment. Relationships can weaken - but the extended family offers extended support and unconditional love.

In recent years we have attempted to challenge the direction of the PFGM in regard to mission by means of various general letters or documents issued by the Directors. Some examples of quotes from these letters are:

The PFG community can be the focus for all ministry within the parish. If parishes are too large or too impersonal to prevent real community, other options must be taken. Only when the community is formed as a true entity can it be a force, willing to reach out beyond itself in true mission. (1994)

Since the PFGM started, a number have dropped out. Why? What were they looking for that they didn't find? What needs were not met? We need to think about these people who have been 'lost'. How do we respond to the gospel question of Jesus 'What shepherd among you caring for a hundred sheep, if you lost one, would not leave the ninety-nine and go in search of the one that is lost?' (1996)

What of those who are not involved? These were the people Jesus was particularly concerned with. We know Passionist Family Groups can include them. But are we inviting them? Jesus said to "go out and bring people into the fellowship" (Matthew 28:19). Is that what we are doing? Are we going out? Or are we just saying we are here if you want us? As followers of Jesus we are called to mission. (1996)

Many dioceses have visions of amalgamating parishes into clusters or pastoral areas and some have already begun this process. How will this affect the Family Groups which are 'parish based'? What is our response to this challenge? Many people still think faith is essentially private (saying prayers and going to church) rather than community (relating to others and living the values of Jesus'). They don't see that being a follower of Jesus is a call to be engaged in mission. Some of these people are in our Family Groups. Some haven't joined because they think anything to do with the church must be 'prayers and the Bible'. The challenge is to discern how some of us can move from comfort to mission. (1996)

These questions remain valid as more dioceses have determined to cluster parishes into pastoral areas because this impacts on the relationships that have been established and sustained in our Passionist Family Groups for many years. Those in leadership roles must continually suggest activities and practices that help remind us of our PFG mission. There could be some gatherings or liturgies in the Family Groups which focus the group on Jesus and His message so that members can grow closer and stronger? A Passionist Family Group is not a prayer group, but that doesn't mean the members can't or don't pray. A Passionist Family Group is not a discussion group, but that doesn't mean they can't or don't discuss life issues. A Passionist Family Group is not a task group in the parish, but that doesn't mean it can't or doesn't undertake tasks. A Passionist Family Group is a genuinely spiritual group. It is comprised of believers and semi-believers (just as the early Church communities were) who strive to create fellowship based on Christian values. This mission is basic to that of the church.

Questions

1. How can your PFG members be more encouraged to see how they are living the mission of the church? How can they live it more?
2. How will the clustering of parishes in your area affect your PFG?
2. How can you better welcome people into an 'all inclusive fellowship'?

Ways that PFG's can respond

1. Make something of a monthly Passionist Family Group Mass
 - have some 'attractive' music/songs
 - provide Power Point words & images for songs
 - include a Power Point reflection after communion or before Mass
 - have young people involved in a monthly Mass

- (e.g. commentators, lecturers, welcomers, preparing Power Point etc)
 - have a cuppa afterwards where people mingle or gather
 - have enough people to serve (wear name tag and PFG badge)
 - hold a sausage sizzle, or wine & cake etc on a special occasion
 - make something special of the parish PFG birthday
2. Promoting other forms of prayer & ritual
 - celebrating milestones
 - each PFG have a home Mass or liturgy once a year
 3. Have people consider how PFG's can be more hospitable
 4. Visit one another (especially those who don't attend many functions)
 5. Touch base with people by personal visit phone etc and 'give them a Silver Box' (this can be done on by taking a name out of hat basis as a way of building a sense of 'one heart, one soul')
 6. If we don't get to speak to someone at a monthly activity we can make a practice of encouraging one another to phone afterwards to acknowledge this and say 'hi'
 7. In between activities (e.g. meet with smaller (3-4) people/families on a 'out of hat' basis. This can happen 2 or 3 times a year.
 8. On PFG birthday have all parish groups in the pastoral district come together
This is a way of building up communio within a cluster of parishes
 9. Group co-ordinators in a pastoral district could come together for meetings
 10. When a person fills in a form (to join a PFG) someone needs to follow up on this quickly and not let them wait
 11. Do a 'study' within parish PFG's. Invite people to share their experiences of being single after marriage (death, divorce etc) to learn how these people can be included more and what they need.
 12. Become active in seeking to invite school parents to join a PFG and studying and sharing strategies for inviting Generation X & Y. These groups might need initially to be similar aged. Try forming such a group.
 13. Support the activities of families within a PFG (watch children play Saturday sport, attending their concerts etc)
 14. Make good information available. PFG's sometimes have had bad press?
(Seen as either too social or too holy etc) Many don't understand what the

PFGM really is, and therefore have not joined. Some single people think PFG's are only for families instead of people joining to become a family

15. Newsletters should be used more

- PFG's in parishes could swap newsletters to exchange ideas
- At times should have some detailed outline about what PFG's are doing
- take it to or send it to those who don't 'attend'
- encourage people to contribute
- share the vision of PFG's (living communio)

16. Use parish noticeboard and include photos (show the fun/family side)

17. Remember Francis of Assisi ('Preach always and if necessary, use words') Our best way is not using a lot of words, but show by doing

18. Invite someone who is not in a PFG to come to a monthly function

19. Someone must know (have a list) of which families have been 'lost' (those who used to belong) Can these be found, spoken to & personally re-invited?

20. Have members help out (volunteer) at the school & get involved this way (mixing with Gen Y parents) so as to get to know them and draw them in.

21. Be active in inviting people to join the PFGM as a way of living their faith

22. PFG Christmas Carol singing for shut ins etc (Gives example to and involves children, which is one of our Aims). Gift giving and visit at Christmas for these people is outreach

23. Every now and again we need renewal. In some parishes the PFG's may need renewal. Dialogue with PP about a 'relaunch' or other ways to raise awareness of PFG's, increase commitment etc.

24. Encourage PFG members (especially once a month if there is a Family Mass) to 'look out' for new or uninvolved parishioners and welcome them. This has to be a designated role for people who have the gift/ability/interest and wearing a name tag helps.

25. Promote the September PFG Youth Retreat and World Youth Day This is a way of involving Generation Y. The Passionists are looking at a formative experience before and afterwards, for youth who are associated with their charism.

