

The Passionist Family Group Movement is Australasian home grown community. Its purpose can easily be explained by reference to the logo which is derived from the emblem or sign of the Passionist Congregation. It has a cross mounted on a heart. This signifies what the Passionist founder St Paul of the Cross said, that the cross is “the greatest sign of God’s love”. The PFGM logo has a cross inside the heart because it is in loving relationships that people carry each other’s crosses. Inside the heart is also a variety of people from different cultures and ages. The motto, written underneath the logo is ‘A Family for All’.

The PFGM is carried by the spirituality of the **Passionists**, which seeks to promote the memory of God’s overwhelming love and the hope this gives especially in times of suffering. It seeks to bring people together of all types and with all their differences, into a **Family**. Because people gather as a **Group**, it is open to all the dynamics that occur when people gather this way and because it is a **Movement**, is always growing and developing.

What is basic to a PFG is what was integral to the early church

- sharing and celebrating faith
- supporting one another
- each person contributing talents according to his/her ability
- building community
- reaching out to and including others

In this model of community, the parish puts people (community) ahead of buildings and maintenance.

In forming a Family Group an attempt is made to place some people together of a similar age (both adults and children) and include a variety of ages. Normally there would be about 12-14 ‘family’ units. Unfortunately many parishioners who might otherwise join a PFG, think that an individual person (e.g. widow or widower) is not suited to these groups. However, the idea is that individuals and families join together to create a family. Family units might include, parents with children, parents without children, single parent families and single, widowed and divorced. It is a Family for All.

The first thing that must happen is that group members have to get to know one another first. In order to do this they are encouraged to gather once a month for ‘low cost or no cost’ get togethers. These could be shared meals and activities in homes or outdoors. Sadly, many people come to see these monthly outings as the ‘be all’ of a PFG, but this is not true. It is what happens in between these outings that really makes a Family Group. This will include building friendships, offering practical support, enjoying common interests, celebrating together and mourning together. To do these things takes time, effort and commitment and this is what really makes Passionist Family Group.

We need to remember that families are about being not doing! We are human beings, not human doings! However these monthly ‘get togethers’ remain a helpful structure even after the groups have bonded

How do we know if a Family Group is working? It is simple. Do the members love and care for one another?

In every parish there are some people who have no family or sense of belonging. They need others to reach out to them. Some other people might say "I have enough friends and don't need a Family Group". However basic Christianity demands we reach out to others. Jesus did not say, "Love your neighbour unless you already have enough friends". Everyone has to make an effort and those who remain in a comfort zone have to question how much they really understand the gospel call.

The spirituality behind the PFG reflects Jesus' life and ministry. It is a response to the call to 'love one another', to accept & welcome others, to be prepared to share meals with 'anyone' and to reach out to those in need. Jesus' great passion was to include 'outsiders' in community. For Jesus no one was an outsider (Samaritan, thief, leper, tax collector).

The early Christians, striving to live this message were noted by one outstanding characteristic.....'See how they love one another'. To be labelled in this way, means they must have enjoyed life together. Passionist Family Groups too enjoy being together. It is amusing sometimes (and sad) to hear others say 'all they do is have a good time'. Is this not a reflection of what Jesus wanted when he said "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full".

A Passionist Family Group is not a prayer group or a discussion group. Like any family they can pray and discuss at appropriate times (eg a liturgy once a year) however this is not the whole purpose. A good Christian family enjoys time together, discusses appropriate issues and prays together at certain times, but don't call themselves 'a prayer' family or a 'discussion' family, rather these are natural aspects of family life because, discussion, prayer and celebration comes out of the life of the group.

It is totally inaccurate to describe Passionist Family Groups as 'social groups' or to say they are 'just social'. There is a call to establish relationships and to grow together as a family.

There are three characteristics or levels of spirituality: the head, the heart and the gut. The head is to do with Insight or the mind and means through reading, input or discussion, a person is formed in their spirituality. The gut is to do with emotion and appreciation and finds expression in prayer, liturgy and ritual. The heart is to do with action and involves care, concern, support and fellowship. All three need to be integrated.

Some people are satisfied to live their faith only through the head or gut and never get involved in Christian action. St Paul warns 'faith without good works is dead'. The PFGM seeks to live spirituality of the heart and it has five simple aims to achieve this.

- To live and love like the early Christians
- To support each others, especially in times of need
- To show Christian example to children
- To build community in the parish

