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HOW IT BEGAN

The Passionist Family Group Movement is supervised by the Passionist Congregation and their trained team. The founder is Fr. Peter McGrath CP. Family Groups began in the parish of Terrey Hills (Sydney) in 1972 when Peter was pastor. At that time the parish was very small, but it had begun to attract people from nearby areas, many of whom had been lapsed Catholics or were married to people of other faiths. As the church attendance grew, the strong sense of community was at risk, and it was in response to the fear of losing this, that PFG's began.

GROWTH

In the years since the first groups formed there has been constant growth in the parish and parallel growth in PFG's.

There was no intention of spreading the FG concept to other parishes, but other parishes became interested in the model and in late 1982 the PFG's spread to another parish for the first time. In 1985 Passionist Directors were appointed to various regions in Australia, and the Movement began to expand. Family Groups first started in New Zealand in July 1988. By December 2007 , 83 parishes in NZ had PFG's. Groups have also formed in Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian and Uniting Churches in NZ.

CARE AND CONTROL

The Passionists and their teams of laity are determined to avoid the development of a super-structure which might overlook the simple and primary aims of the individual parish groups.

The Family Group Movement is an authentic ministry for Passionists and this has enabled them to make a significant contribution to the local Church. The name and logo have been registered to ensure that the responsibility for establishing and supporting PFG's is monitored and directed by the Passionists and their team for the benefit of the local parish groups.

FINANCING THE PFG'S

At present the contribution (before GST) is:

1.	Establishing of Passionist Family Group Movement.....	\$450.00
	plus the (in advance)annual contribution for the first year	\$950.00
	Total	\$1400.00
2	Annual Contribution (We prefer an Automatic Payment of \$89.00 per month GST inclusive)	\$950.00
3	Annual Leader Weekend/Day	\$ 20-\$100 Approx (per couple)
4	Annual Co-ordinator Costs	\$200.00 Approx.

The stipend is adaptable, especially for struggling parishes. Necessarily it includes travel costs.

THE FAMILY GROUP TEAM

Rob & Lynn Hill are the National Directors and they work closely with the Passionist Directors in Australia. There are 3 couples working as Regional Directors, Murray and Aileen Straight, South Island, Paul and Linda Darbyshire, Wellington and Palmerston North Dioceses and Clive and Frances Bleaken, Hamilton and Auckland Dioceses. In local regions there are Regional Co-ordinators who assist the Directors. Working as a team, these people retain contact with the local pastor, the Parish Co-ordinating couple and local PFG Group Co-ordinators.

Part of their ministry is to assist and support those in leadership so that the PFG aims are kept in mind, and that the spirit of PFG's does not go astray in a local parish. Through regular contact with the parish Co-ordinators, the PFG team assists when particular difficulties emerge.

Generally, more supervision is required in the first twelve months than afterwards. Local co-ordinators are introduced to co-ordinators from other parishes particularly on their annual training weekend, which enables the exchange of ideas and experiences.

SETTING UP THE GROUPS

It is recommended that some consultation be taken (eg. Pastoral Council) to discern the appropriate timing and need for this. If a request to start PFG's reaches the Directors a description of the procedure for establishing FG's and the agreement of a suitable date would follow. The waiting time can be between 3-6 months.

Passionists have put considerable energy into preparing a team to set up the Movement in parishes without their presence. The Passionists are keen to spend the time they do have available in N.Z. on ongoing formation of leaders and general support and direction of the Movement in N.Z. and they see this as their first priority.

NORMAL PROCEDURE

1. Some time before the agreed starting date (eg. 2-4 weeks) members of the Passionist team would speak at all the parish Services and to any other appropriate group (eg. school parents). Our request would be that the speaking be done at the homily time and that it be followed immediately with directions from the speaker, for parishioners to be invited to complete a simple sheet or card indicating interest in joining a Family Group. This gives the team and the pastor an advanced idea of how many families are likely to be involved and how many leader couples will be required. Likewise at the weekend of the setting up a member of the Passionist Lay Team will speak at Homily time. Where a Passionist is conducting the weekend, that Passionist would preach.
2. Literature would be sent with accompanying directions suggesting appropriate times and ways to distribute it (eg. through the church school etc).
3. Arrangements would be made for someone from the team to speak with a couple (or couples) nominated by the pastor for the role of Co-ordinating FG's in the parish. Information concerning this role would be given to the pastor before he selected the couple.
4. Following a similar procedure, arrangements would be made to speak to people nominated by the pastor for the role of PFG Group Co-ordinator.
5. The priest would be encouraged to remind and invite parishioners during the weeks before the establishment date, to attend the respective Information sessions.

6. Some of the Passionist team would conduct an Information session at an agreed time.
7. The setting up is usually done over one weekend. A session for new leaders would normally be conducted on Saturday afternoon, and an Information Session for all parishioners joining the groups would follow the last Sunday morning Service. The actual forming of the groups would be done with the help of the PFG team. This is done prior to the set up with late enrolments being added over the weekend. Groups are formed in consultation with the Parish Priest and Parish Coordinators.
8. The groups meet for the first time under the direction of the team, on that same Sunday, (during or after lunch) following the Information session. This would be the actual launching of the groups.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

There are contact people who can provide information concerning how to go about starting PFG's. If a parish would like to have someone speak to a Pastoral Council or other group we suggest you contact the Directors. If you require further information or wish to request the establishment of PFG's, please contact:

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WHAT ARE FAMILY GROUPS?

DIFFERENCES IN DIFFERENT PARISHES

While there is a definite structure within the Passionist Family Group Movement, supervised by the Passionists, it should be understood that different parishes require the structure to be adaptable and flexible. This adaptability exists even for different Family Groups within the parish. Parishes differ in size and in age profile. A parish with young families will have more children in the family groups than a parish with a higher concentration of older people. A large parish may have over 200 families involved, while a smaller parish may have 50-60 participating families.

THE BASIC FAMILY GROUP

On average there are 12-14 families in a group. The suggested minimum is 8, and the usual maximum is 15 families. An average group would have about 40-45 people including children. It is essential to keep in mind that PFG's are open to all people. Some single or elderly people who no longer have family members living at home, can misunderstand the FG concept, and think PFG's are not for them. Family Groups are a way of broadening the sense of family to the extended family mentality and including everyone - married, single, divorced, old or young, regardless of their religious tradition.

HOW FAMILIES ARE GROUPED

Those people who indicate their willingness to join, do so with the understanding that they do not choose the group to which they will belong. There are Parish Co-ordinators (normally a married couple) of all the groups and each group has Group Co-ordinators, who may be a married couple or two people from different families working together.

Parish and Group Co-ordinators are selected (to serve) by the parish pastor. The pastor with the help of the Parish Co-ordinating couple, his parish team and the Family Group team creates the groups according to the following criteria.

- a) Attempt to create an extended family (age distribution).
- b) Arrange to have some children of similar age in each group.
- c) Disregard neighborhood boundaries.
- d) Include single people, solo parent families, etc, in group.
- e) Avoid cliques of friends in a group.

INCLUDING THOSE FROM ALL TRADITIONS

There have been many who have partners from other traditions who have found Family Groups very comfortable for them. This meets a very important need for the church - going person who is often unsupported in his or her faith life. Some partners from other traditions are exercising leadership of groups with their partners in various parishes. There have also been many non-church attenders who have joined a Family Group with a married partner who is a church attender.

HOW THE GROUPS FIRST MEET

Once a group has been established an initial function is arranged. Experience suggests that this be an "adults only" function. It is recommended that every second FG function be an "AO" outing. It is the adults who need more time than children to learn about one another and develop bonds. Children can do this very quickly. PFG's is one environment in which adults are encouraged to be aware of themselves and their needs, so that the whole family may benefit. In that sense they are adult oriented. It is good to think of a PFG as a group

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of families growing into one family. In a normal family adults don't include children in all their activities. It is the same in the Family Group.

MONTHLY GATHERINGS

The outings or gatherings should take place once a month and include the kinds of things that families do together:

picnics	cricket matches	barbeques
bush walks	card games	pot luck dinners, etc

An important factor is that outings be kept to a minimum cost. The leaders encourage someone to host the first adult gathering, and encourage families to take their turn to organise either a family day or an adult's night.

Normally a group would hold a planning meeting and agree on some dates perhaps for six months or nine months ahead. Obviously, because of other commitments, not everyone is able to attend every FG function. Once a year the group goes away for a weekend camp. Some groups use tents, while most choose dormitory accommodation, such as church camp sites provide. This is a wonderful PFG experience and should be a high priority.

THE BUILDING OF BONDS

Because the PFG's are relationship oriented rather than task oriented, there needs to be a commitment to the group, but not compulsion. As bonds develop, people will want to be with their

PFG's, and so attend the outings. In providing monthly outings as an occasion to meet, the group allows itself the chance to grow and strengthen.

In time, the outings become secondary to the interaction that occurs outside of these monthly gatherings. One person expressed it this way

"The outings are like an airstrip which is used to touch down and take off, but all the flying is done in ordinary day to day contact."

MEETING EACH OTHER'S NEEDS

Once people develop bonds and begin to understand each other's needs better, they are able to offer support in times of need while, sharing and celebrating the good times. Many of the needs that people have are unknown within a parish

Often the burden could be so easily lightened by an understanding ear or a simple act of generosity, such as preparing a meal or doing some shopping, mowing lawns or talking over the phone. In this way, the FG grows from being a socially comfortable group to a supporting and caring Christian family.

THE SPIRITUALITY BEHIND FAMILY GROUPS

The spirituality is basic. It is about the ordinariness of daily Christian living. Family Groups are not prayer groups, nor are they discussion groups. People who feel a need for such groups can belong to a Family Group as well, but just as prayer and discussion is a part of family life, so it is with Family Groups. The emphasis is on allowing people to put the gospel into practice through mutual care and support -

"See how they love one another"

People from other traditions and irregular church goers ought to find the sense of belonging to a FG non-threatening. In time, as these people feel part of the community they usually become extensively involved in parish life and liturgy. It must be recognised that while Passionist Family Groups do bring people back into the church community, they are not intended as a catchment for converts!

The simple spirituality behind PFG's can be difficult to comprehend for those people who don't recognise the presence and action of God in ordinary everyday ways. Similarly when people feel any gathering of believers must remind itself explicitly of faith, by external prayer, then they tend to tag PFG's as "just social". If this be the case, then most of Jesus ministry was "just social".

FAMILY GROUPS ARE PARISH GROUPS

Care is taken that PFG functions do not clash with, but support parish functions. At times one group may join with another group for an outing and at least once a year the groups will have a combined function. These are ways of ensuring that while the PFG cell develops, it does not become a clique, nor become isolated from other cells. Occasionally even inter-parish P FG functions are conducted which can give people a still broader perspective of the church to which they belong, and an idea of the expanse of what can be created when their small group joins with others.

INCLUDING NEW FAMILIES

After the groups have been formed, if new families express a willingness to join a FG, they are either placed in an existing group if it seems the group will be suitable for them, or they may form

part of a new group. In either case this is done according to the same criteria as mentioned on Pg 5. Before PFG's are formed or before a new family joins a group, an information session is conducted to explain the aims and goals of PFG's are explained to them.

THE ROLE OF PARISH CO-ORDINATORS

It is our recommendation that this role be exercised by a married couple . It is better that they not be leaders of one of the groups, unless there are only a small number of leaders (eg 3-5). In a parish with a large number of groups we have found it wise to divide the leaders into groups and have other couples who may be leaders act as Co co-ordinators. Normally the Parish Co-ordinating couple would be appointed initially for one year, after which time they may be re-appointed for a further two years.

The principal roles of the Co-ordinating couple are to support and maintain contact with the other leaders, to liase with the parish pastor, to be in contact with the Regional Co-ordinators and to supervise the development of the PFGM in the parish.

In most parishes the pastor delegates to this couple, the task of placing new families or dealing with requests from individual group members. The Co-ordinators working closely with the pastor, would ensure that the PFG's support the parish activities wherever possible, and that occasional combined group activities are held to promote a wider sense of community. They also determine the appropriate time to invite new families to join PFG's and make arrangements with the parish pastor to promote this.

THE ROLE OF GROUP CO-ORDINATORS

We recommend that the leadership role be exercised by two people (a married couple, two singles, etc). The group takes its name from this couple (eg Jones Family Group). The role is taken on initially for a 1-2 year period. We recommend strongly that group Co-ordinators be encouraged to relinquish their role after a period of service, in order that the leadership be shared and others in the group take a turn.

The leaders normally experience the expected joys and frustration's of pastoral ministry. They will sometimes feel disappointed, frustrated, and taken for granted. A network of support for leaders is essential, and the primary basis for this is regular meetings with each other. It is suggested that these meetings take place about every six weeks, and it is hoped the parish pastor could attend most of these meetings. Regional Co-ordinators or support people appointed by them will be present at some meetings, particularly in the early stages.

The group co-ordinators must be caring people who will not dominate the group, but serve them. They need to have some basic organisational skills, but more importantly they need a clear vision of the PFGM and be committed to it. They need to be friendly, and be able to recognise and encourage people to use their gifts.

THE ROLE OF THE PARISH PASTOR

The pastor appoints the Parish and Group Co-ordinating couples to their ministry. From practical experience pastors indicate that their primary role is supporting the Co-ordinating couple in an active way and supporting the leaders mainly by their presence at leader meetings.

The pastor advises on the initial make-up of groups and would always continue this role in the establishment of new groups. He may delegate much of the general arrangements to the Parish Co-ordinators, but make a point of meeting regularly with them. Since the Co-ordinators undertake such a significant and demanding role, the need for support from the pastor cannot be highlighted too much. In most parishes such a relationship becomes reciprocal.

Since the parish pastor is already familiar with the demands of ministry, he will be in an advantageous position not only to support, but also advise his leaders about "real" expectations, avoiding burnout, collaborative ministry, delegation and other aspects of modern pastoral ministry.

ROLE OF THE PASSIONIST AND THEIR TEAM

Apart from being involved in the establishment of the PFG's, the Passionist team continues to direct and supervise the groups in each parish, to ensure that the basic aims and goals are retained, to give training and support to the Co-ordinators . They assist the pastor in the

development of parish community and pastoral activity through the proper growth of the leaders and their groups.

At appropriate times there is a need for a particular group to assess its current situation. This can especially arise with the changeover of leaders. These occasions require competent advice and direction and sometimes one of the Passionist team will facilitate a meeting of the group.

Each year the leaders from different parishes come together for a formation weekend conducted by the Passionists and their team.

Some parishes which have begun PFG's have also had a Passionist team conduct an adult faith renewal Mission. The Passionists have also instructed Liturgical leaders (*appointed by the parish pastors*) in various PFG's so that the group is able to have a liturgy when the pastor is not available (*eg a weekend camp*).

NOT EVERYONE WILL JOIN , BUT ...

Passionist Family Groups are not for everyone, but experience shows that as time goes on, more and more parishioners want to be in a group. They see the evidence of the new

life that PFG members experience, talk about and want to share. Some hold back at the start; others are not inclined to mixing - and these reservations must be respected. In time the Family Groups can become the basis of all that happens in the Parish. At present many people think of laity involvement in terms of liturgy only. Passionist Family Groups allow people the chance to minister to one another and live as the early Christians did, sharing together and caring for one another's needs. As people develop bonds with one another, they begin to reach out and care for one another. Needs that were previously hidden can be met.

If we can look ahead to a time when, a major part of the Parish is involved in Passionist Family Groups we will be looking at a Parish that has a strong sense of caring, a strong sense of support and a strong sense of welcome. This is the church alive and the belonging, caring, supporting and welcoming will be being ministered by the laity. The evidence of this is emerging already. It is the church of the future - happening now.

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