The Saint of the Family

As we begin the month traditionally dedicated to the rosary and the promotion of pro-life causes, we are blessed this year to celebrate the first feast day of St. John Paul II. May we entrust each council to his special intercession as the Order launches its “Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive” initiative.

Addressing the 2014 Supreme Convention, Msgr. Sławomir Oder, postulator of the cause for canonization of St. John Paul II, reminded us of the importance of family to our new saint: “He himself was able to enjoy his own family very briefly: when he was nine years old his mother died, as a 14-year-old boy he lost his brother, and at the age of 21 years he lost his beloved father. But how rich and deep must have been his experience of love in his family! Years later John Paul II talked about his family home as his first seminary, and about his father as the one who first formed his priestly identity.” Recalling that Wojtyła first learned how to pray from his father, Oder said: “It was his father who instilled in young Karol an ardent love for the Mother of God, when in his strong soldier’s hand he held Karol’s childlike hand, prayed the rosary and took Karol on pilgrimages to Marian Shrines.”

The enormous potential of spiritually active and engaged families in our parishes highlights the need for chaplains to ensure our councils offer a welcome home for men seeking to deepen their faith and a catechetical formation for those brother Knights still encountering the newness of Gospel living. Chaplains should work with grand knights and council officers to put in place a spiritual outreach and formation plan for the coming year. For example, councils could organize parish-wide screenings of Father Robert Barron’s Catholicism or the Augustine Institute’s Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained series, accompanied by a renewed promotion of the Catholic Information Series materials (available at kofc.org).

The prayerful example of Karol Wojtyła’s father and the fruit of such witness inspired Father Luis Granados, DCJM, a member of Dr. Earl C. Bach Council 3340, to establish the “Toward a Family Friendly Parish” program at St. Mary Catholic Parish in Littleton, Colo. The 12-month program, whose focus is to draw families closer to each other and to their parish family, is the model of the Knights of Columbus’ “Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive” initiative. May Saint John Paul II be with each of us as we seek to lead our brothers to the same holiness.

Vivat Jesus!

Building the Domestic Church, Waking a Sleeping Giant

Catholic families are a sleeping giant. They possess a great power for joy and evangelization. They are the “human space of our encounter with God.” As the family of Nazareth was the path chosen by God to become one of us, our family is the path offered by God to become his friends. But since the giant is sleeping, all this potential is lost. Perhaps it is better to say that Catholic families are not sleeping, but struggling. They fight alone in the midst of the world, without adequate help. It is not good for the family to be alone!

The “Building the Domestic Church” program aims to help families wake up and become “fully alive.” I confess I struggle calling it a program. Of course, it is a planned group of activities, or “something that has been written” for a specific purpose.

“Building the Domestic Church” Materials Available

This month we launch “Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive” to help both our families and parishes grow in the faith.

Recently, a mailing of the Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive booklet (#10162) was sent to all chaplains of record. Additional copies of this booklet can be obtained by contacting the Supply Department at 203-752-4320. An online copy of the booklet and additional resources are available at kofc.org/familyfullyalive. Each issue of Columbia will also include the program’s materials for that month. In addition, the preparatory catechesis prepared for the World Meeting of Families is now available for purchase at worldmeeting2015.org/about-the-event/catechesis/.
I’d like to begin with a wonderful new program the Order has launched. It’s called “Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive.” Now, when we priests hear about “a wonderful new program,” we sometimes just shake our heads — we’re often up to our elbows in “wonderful new programs” — but (and you’ve never heard this before) this one is different!

Each month [of the program] has a theme drawn from the teachings of Pope Francis, Pope Emeritus Benedict or Pope St. John Paul II. The idea was to make accessible their teaching — not just to make it understandable, but to help families and parishes take part in getting a hold of it and making it a part of their lives.

So, let’s discuss how we and our brother chaplains can promote this program in the state jurisdictions and local councils throughout the Order. One thing every council can do is to make sure this booklet gets into the hands of each of its families, and maybe also do some outreach.

Our monthly chaplain’s messages could center on these themes; I will also be developing them in my column in *Columbia*. The council could also sponsor a monthly movie night, not only for its own members but for the entire parish, and the booklet has a lot of tips as to how to make that successful. And then council families and others can do a monthly service project as suggested.

All this shows that the Order really is family friendly and makes it attractive to younger families trying to find their way. Before I move on to a few comments that are more chaplain-specific, let me highlight an initiative underway in this fraternal year — that of the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington. All the work that is being done at the shrine aims at instilling in us real devotion to Pope John Paul II, who was a wonderful friend of the Order and whose witness, teaching and legacy we need to understand better. This will be true of the chapels — for example, the small chapel that contains the relic of the pope’s blood will be adorned with mosaics of the Luminous Mysteries.

The permanent exhibit will feature multimedia presentations of the various stages of the pope’s life and times, illuminated by the themes of his life and teaching. The shrine probably won’t be fully complete for more than a year, but the number of visitors has already picked up and donations are up. The point here is that this shrine is a real destination, a place of pilgrimage. I’d encourage you to organize pilgrimages to this shrine as a way of enhancing the spiritual life of brother Knights and their families.

For my part, I’d like to make a few general observations. I don’t think we can overemphasize the importance of the chaplain’s role to the health and growth of the Order. Father McGivney founded a lay-run organization, but he also understood it needed a priestly witness and a priestly presence if it would fulfill the pastoral goals which he had in mind. When a chaplain befriends his brother Knights and their families and takes an interest in what they are doing, he not only generates good will but creates an opening for helping the Knights grow in their relationship to Jesus Christ, in their life of prayer, in their vocation and in the ideals of the Order.

As this happens, we have also to foster the outreach of the Knights. I mentioned earlier that men, more than women, seem to be disconnected from a relationship with Christ and the Church. And nothing does more to bring families back to the faith than when a husband and father has a change of heart and begins to practice the faith or discovers the faith anew. Each council ought to be a clear channel through which these men are reached, man to man, neighbor to neighbor, involving them first in projects of service.

Sometimes our programs of service offer unchurched men a non-threatening way to reconsider committing their lives to the Lord and to the Church, but for that to happen, chaplains will need to engage with the Knights. And it’s not as if when we chaplains do this we’re doing something “extra” — it’s just another way of accomplishing the mission and ministry the Church has given us, the mission of evangelization.

*Vivat Jesus!*
But it is not a “program” in the sense of some materials I just buy, receive and apply. More than that, this initiative is meant to generate encounters within the family, with other families, priests and, mainly, with God, the origin of true love. Only by fostering these relationships will the sleeping giant awake and become what it is called to be: a domestic church which builds the Catholic Church, the “Ecclesial Family.”

Let me consider some elements of the program. The monthly psalms and family projects are an invitation to pray together and to build the family life. The monthly songs and the image of the Holy Family will help to celebrate the joy of belonging to a family of families, with common tradition, art and music. The movie nights are intended to generate the encounter with other families that share the same joys, struggles, hopes and anxieties. Finally, volunteering together will help the family to understand its mission, reaching out to the poor, lonely and needy.

Every month we remember one of the spiritual pillars of the family. October invites us to strengthen the relationship between our families’ generations. God works in the communion of persons, not in the loneliness of individualism. As St. John Paul II proclaimed in his first visit to the United States, “The great danger for family life lies in the fact that people close their hearts and become selfish” (Washington, D.C., 7 October 1979). For that reason, the year will start with strengthening or rebuilding the relationships between generations.

St. John Paul II said once that “as the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live” (Perth, 30 November 1986). He was not exaggerating. If the family, the sleeping giant, awakes, there will be great hope for our nation and for our world. May this new initiative of the Knights of Columbus help to make it happen.
Prayer for the intercession of Saint John Paul II

O Blessed Trinity, we thank you for having graced the Church with Saint John Paul II and for allowing the tenderness of your fatherly care, the glory of the Cross of Christ and the splendor of the Spirit of love to shine through him.

Trusting fully in your infinite mercy and in the maternal intercession of Mary, he has given us a living image of Jesus the Good Shepherd. He has shown us that holiness is the necessary measure of ordinary Christian life and is the way of achieving eternal communion with you.

Grant us, by his intercession, and according to your will, the graces we implore, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(CNS photo/Joe Rinkus Jr.)