

Suggested Leader Guide Timeline

Part I: Personal Study and Reflection as a Parish Staff

Part II: Parish Application and Discussion as a Parish Staff (By June 30)

Part III: Practical Toolbox for Parishes (Ongoing considerations for 2026-27 planning)

Part I: General Discussion Guide for Parish Study

Before moving to planning and implementation, parish staff are encouraged to engage in this pastoral letter personally and prayerfully.

- All staff are invited to read the Pastoral Letter on your own, but time will be created to read it at staff meetings.
- Two staff meetings in the months of February and March will be dedicated to personal study and reflection with all parish staff.
- Utilize the discussion guide below to direct your reflection as a staff.

Discussion Guide:

1. Where do I see my own family story reflected in this pastoral letter? (Consider both my current and previous immediate family experiences.)
2. Which passages challenged or consoled me most?
3. Where do I feel hope for families in our parish/school? Where do I feel concern?
4. How is Christ inviting me to grow in patience and trust in my role and ministry?
5. How does my own relationship with Jesus shape how I accompany families?

Part II: Parish Application Discussion Guide

Now that parish staff has pondered the letter and what it means personally, it will be important for the whole staff and parish evangelization team to consider the practical implications of this Letter to the ministries each person is involved with leading.

- All staff (and relevant parish personnel, as defined by the pastor) should engage in considering the application of the letter in the areas of their specific ministry. This work is recommended to take place over the course of two staff/team meetings prior to June 30, 2026.
- The discussion guide below can be used for this as a whole parish team or in appropriately broken-out areas of ministry (this might be dependent on staff/team makeup and/or size).
- Note that below, the Letter is broken into parts, with high-level summaries provided for each section to assist in making decisions on how best to utilize the team's time in the discussion of the Letter.
- Consider each element while planning for the fall or anytime in the upcoming year, as is right for your parish

Prologue & Section I (§1–5): Ordinary Holiness & the Narrow Path

This section highlights ordinary family holiness, cultural challenges, and the Parable of the Sower, inviting readers to examine the spiritual soil of their hearts and homes.

Questions for Parish Application

- How can our parish highlight ordinary holiness to encourage families?
- What parish settings, events, or groups could best introduce this section?
- How might families reflect on the Parable of the Sower together?
- Pastors: How might my homilies or small group content reflect this teaching?

Section II (§6–10): What Is Required of Families

This section identifies three key practices: putting Jesus first, living virtue, and fostering dignity.

Questions for Parish Application

- How can we invite families to take one small step toward deeper discipleship?
- What ministries naturally connect with this section?
- What can we ask existing groups to consider?

Section III (§11–16): Sacramental Marriage as Foundation

Marriage is presented as the foundational relationship shaping family culture and faith.

Questions for Parish Application

- How can this section strengthen marriage preparation and enrichment?
- Who in our parish could accompany couples more intentionally?
(consider both staff and laity)

Section IV (§17–20): Family, Become What You Are

Families are called to holiness, hope, and reclaiming Sunday as a day of worship and rest.

Questions for Parish Application

- How can this message of hope be shared with discouraged families?
- Do we know who our discouraged and/or lukewarm families might be? If not, how might we identify those who can most use this message in our parish/school community?
- What parish and school practices could help invite more to reclaim Sunday?

Section V (§21–28): Parish as a Family of Families

The Church accompanies families through all seasons of life, offering sacraments, formation, and community.

Questions for Parish Application

- Where do families feel most connected in our parish?
- Where might they feel least connected (areas of opportunity)?
- How can parish life better reflect the liturgical year?
- Are there ways to elevate the different seasons of life for those not presently in them (i.e. the sacraments for those not currently going through prep? In funeral ministry? etc.)

Section VI (§29–33): Passing on the Faith

This section emphasizes prayer, devotions, sacramental life, and the central role of parents.

Questions for Parish Application

- How can we equip parents to pray with their children simply and confidently?
- What resources could support ongoing family faith formation?

Part III: Practical Toolbox for Parishes

Sample Parish Calendar for Implementing the Letter:

This sample parish calendar is intended as an optional month-by-month offering, organized into four practical deliverables, and can be used as is or as an inspiration to parish and school teams to make their own plan:

● **Homily Suggestion:** In this we are hoping to provide priests encouragement to have one weekend's homilies focus on a particular theme or section of the letter. If possible, we link this suggestion to the other areas referenced for the month.

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:** In this we are proposing a prayer of the faithful that could be used throughout the month at all Masses that resonates with a theme or section of the letter to have this be heard regularly and form the imaginations of parishioners. The provided sample is just an idea of what it might be, clearly those who plan liturgy in the parish will be well suited to write the appropriate text.

◆ **Blessing:** In this we are suggesting that on one weekend each month a particular subset is blessed at all the Masses. The provided blessing text is just a general idea for what it might look like - our pastors are well suited to make decisions on the appropriate verbiage. This subset is tied to a theme or section of the Letter and often is tied to the other monthly suggestions. Again, the goal of this is to begin to quietly form the hearts of parishioners and keep the Letter's message top of mind in a variety of ways. It also acknowledges and re-emphasizes the need of parents to be linked to the Sacraments and the life of the Church.

▲ **Feast/Celebration:** In this we are linking a feast day that is relevant to the content of the letter to the life of the parish in some practical way. It is meant to demonstrate how the very life of the Church's year provides ample opportunity to live our faith in unique and beautiful ways.

SEPTEMBER

- **Homily Suggestion:** The role of faithful grandparents in the formation of their grandchildren in the faith. Grandparents can support and augment, and in some cases take the place, of the primary educators in the ways of faith. Letter quotation:

- *“Nobody journeys alone. No genuine vocation originates simply from our own idea of self-fulfillment or self-determination. It comes from our Creator. If we are able to accept that being a faithful Catholic parent or grandparent or son or daughter is a calling from God, and that it originates in His plan, we can be confident that He will both bestow on us the grace that we need to live out that vocation and to empower our cooperation.” (§6)*

- **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *That the Lord God will give grandparents wisdom and patience as they assist their children and grandchildren in growing in the Catholic faith and living lives of truth and integrity, we pray to the Lord. (USCCB Grandparents Day prayer)*

- ◆ **Blessing:**

- *My dear friends, from the Sacrament of Marriage the family has received newness of life and the grace of Christ. The family is specially important to the Church and to civil society, for it is the primary life-giving community. We call down the Lord’s blessing upon you, so that you may continually be instruments of God’s grace to one another and witnesses to faith in all the circumstances of life. We ask that the Lord also bless all those who co-labor in the vineyard with you in the formation and education of your children: teachers, catechists, coaches, and others. May they bring support and care to this important work. With God as your help, may you fulfill your mission by conforming your entire life to the Gospel and so witness to Christ before the world. (Adapted from the Book of Blessings)*

- ▲ **September 8 - Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:** Consider how to connect this feast day to the grandparents in your parish – a social after daily Mass for all grandparents in which they are prayed for and blessed.

Only One Thing Is Necessary

HOW CATHOLIC FAMILIES CAN STRIVE TO BE UNITED IN THIS LIFE AND THE NEXT

OCTOBER

- **Homily Suggestion:** The three things that the Martin family did in their home. Consider how to encourage all parents present to do the same. Letter quotation:
 - *“But they made it a point to do three things very well: to love each other and their children unconditionally; to teach their children about God and the virtuous life; and to worship God at home and in the parish.”* (§20)

- **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *That the Lord God will equip all parents “to love each other and their children unconditionally; to teach their children about God and the virtuous life; and to worship God at home and in the parish,” we pray to the Lord.*

- ◆ **Blessing:**

- *We ask the Lord to bless and protect all married couples. Their love is meant to be a witness to the world in the way in which they make of their homes through the Lord’s grace, a domestic Church. May they love each other unconditionally and worship God at home and in the parish.* (Adaptation of the Letter)
- Could select from one of the many blessings the Church has for married couples.

- ▲ **October 1 - Feast of St. Thérèse:** Preach about St. Thérèse at this Mass and consider a way to ask all parents to celebrate this day by incorporating her “Little Way.” Some quotations to consider for inspiration:

- *“Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.”*
- *“A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul.”*
- *“Remember that nothing is small in the eyes of God. Do all that you do with love.”*
- *“My whole strength lies in prayer and sacrifice; these are my invincible arms; they can move hearts far better than words.”*

NOVEMBER

● **Homily Suggestion:** Use two examples of the married couples who are on their way to sainthood as the inspiration for the All Saints Day homily from the Letter §2:

- Blesseds Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi
- Blesseds Józef and Wiktorina Ulma

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *Lord, thank you for the holy lives of the saints, models of faith, hope, love, and heroic virtue. Just as you inspired the ordinary lives of the Ulmas and Quattrocchis, inspire us to see our families as the place of sanctification and a step towards holiness, we pray to the Lord.*

◆ **Blessing:**

- *Lord, just as Saints Joachim and Anne brought the Blessed Virgin Mary to the temple to be presented to the Lord, a step leading her closer to that beautiful Fiat many years later, we ask that all the grandparents here be blessed to see with eyes of faith that their role in the lives of their children and grandchildren can be like Saints Anne and Joachim who walked the ordinary road of life. May all these grandparents be blessed today. (could connect this blessing to the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary)*

▲ **Christ the King Sunday:** Preach on how families can make Christ the king of their home.

Use Letter inspiration

- *“From Sunday to Sunday, daily Mass to daily Mass, sacrament to sacrament, we center ourselves on Christ, that “one true thing.” We quiet our souls. We sense the stirrings and nudges of the Holy Spirit.” (§23)*

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DECEMBER

- **Homily Suggestion:** Use the season of Advent and that interior journey we are all asked to go on as we prepare our hearts for the Lord, inspiration from the Letter:

- *“We must travel with eyes open, while also allowing the Lord to lift our gaze to the deeper, truer, and more lasting realities that envelop all of us as believers.” (§3)*

- **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *For the families in our parish/Archdiocese, that they would allow the Lord to lift them to the deeper, truer, and more lasting realities that envelope all of us as believers.*

- ◆ **Blessing:** All children.

- *“When he came into the world, our Lord, the Son of God, became a child and grew in wisdom, age, and grace in the eyes of God and of all who knew him. Jesus welcomed children, believed in their dignity, and held them up as a model for all who are seeking the kingdom of God. But children do need the help of grown-ups if they are to develop their individual gifts, and their moral, mental, and physical powers, and so reach human and Christian maturity. Let us therefore ask for God’s blessing, so that we will devote ourselves to the Christian upbringing of these children and so that they will accept willingly the guidance they need.” (taken from the Book of Blessing)*
- To love their parents well and be open to being formed and loved by them.

- ▲ **Feast of the Holy Family:** Use this as an opportunity to potentially highlight this quote from the Letter: *“Dear families, take heart. You are not alone. The Church loves you and needs you!” (§1)*

JANUARY

- **Homily Suggestion:** The dignity of all life and the sanctity of the unborn taking inspiration from §9 of the Letter.

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *That families would foster a culture of dignity that recognizes that all children are God's children first, we pray to the Lord.*

◆ **Blessing:** Expectant parents and anyone who desires to be a parent, their openness to bring new life in a co-creator role with God the Father

- *God, the Lord of life, by his will brings every human being into existence and he rules and sustains the life of every one of us. Our faith tells us of God's particular care over those born of a Christian marriage, since through the Sacrament of Baptism they will receive the gift of sharing in the divine life itself. The reason for the blessing of a mother-to-be is that she may await her hour of delivery in faith and hope and, as the partner of God's own love, may already cherish with her maternal love the child in her womb. We also implore, Oh God, for you to bless any couple who desires to have children. We ask intercession from Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of La Leche, St. Elizabeth, St. Gerard Majella, and St. Gianna Beretta Molla to bring this request to your most sacred heart. Bless these couples and their children and future children. (Adapted from the Book of Blessing)*

▲ **Baptism of the Lord:** Preach on the baptismal promises parents make at the time of their child's baptism and how as parents they need the Church. Utilize the Letter paragraphs 5 and 16 for inspiration.

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FEBRUARY

- **Homily Suggestion:** Consider tying this homily to the Presentation of the Lord (see below).

■ **Prayer of the Faithful:**

- *For parents in our parish/Archdiocese, that they would find solace and hope by remaining at the foot of the cross with Mary. (§15)*

- ◆ **Blessing:** Parents of children who have left the faith or any parent who has undue burden or struggles right now.

- *God, we ask you to send your Holy Spirit upon these parents who face real suffering. Whether it is because a child has left the faith or a child is experiencing some kind of undue burden. You alone know the heart of each parent and the heart of each of their children. Breathe life into them so that they can pray unceasingly and open their hands in surrender to say – they are yours Lord, my children, please care for them. Lord, bless these parents and give them the virtue of hope.*

- ▲ **February 2 - Presentation of the Lord:** Preach on the reality of suffering all parents are asked to endure - they have Mary as a model as she is told by Simeon “and you yourself a sword will pierce.” Utilize paragraphs 1, 6, and 7 in the Letter for inspiration.

MARCH

- **Homily Suggestion:** Use the questions posed in paragraph 4 for the inspiration of a Lenten homily:
 - *Where in our home life are moments and places of silence and reflection encouraged?*
 - *Where in our home life are we encouraged to step off the stage, to settle in and go deeper into our minds and hearts, and ultimately, into prayer?*
 - *Where in our home life do we find ways to examine our consciences?*

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *For fathers, that they would look with confidence to God the Father for the grace they need to live out their vocation, we pray to the Lord.*

◆ **Blessing:** Near the feast of St. Joseph do a blessing on all fathers – biological and spiritual:

- *“Heavenly Father, we give You thanks and praise for the gift of fatherhood, for all fathers, biological, adoptive, and spiritual, who mirror Your divine love and strength. Bless our fathers: Grant them wisdom to lead, courage to protect, patience to teach, and steadfastness in love. Strengthen them in their vocations: May they find joy and perseverance in their daily tasks, reflecting Your care and sacrifice. Guide our spiritual fathers: Bless our priests, mentors, and grandfathers who guide us with fatherly love, helping us grow in holiness. Remember those who struggle: For fathers who are absent, estranged, or have passed into eternal life, pour out Your healing grace and grant them Your everlasting peace. Intercede for us: May Saint Joseph, the guardian of the Holy Family, intercede for all fathers, that they may be faithful, just, and devoted to their call. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.”* (Adapted from multiple Catholic blessings on fatherhood)

- ▲ **March 19 - Feast of St. Joseph:** Purchase St. Joseph prayer cards to give to all fathers or host a father and son event in which a simple woodworking project is done.

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APRIL

● **Homily Suggestion:** See below for suggestion on Divine Mercy Sunday

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *“For all brokenness in families caused by neglect, abuse, selfishness, judgment, indifference, resentment, and faithlessness. That the Divine Healer can enter the hearts of all members of families and heal the wounds that divide, we pray to the Lord.”* (adapted from §14)

◆ **Blessing:** Engaged and newly married couples:

- *“We know that God’s grace is a constant need for everyone, at all times. Yet no one can doubt that members of Christ’s faithful have special need of that grace when they are preparing to form a new family. And so, let us ask God’s blessing upon these couples who are preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage and are newly married, that they may grow in mutual respect, love each other more truly, and approach and continue to live out the reality of marriage chastely through appropriate companionship and prayer together.”* (adapted from the Order of Blessing an engaged couple)

▲ **Divine Mercy Sunday:** Utilize the Letter to preach on the mercy and forgiveness of God towards us and the need we have for that mercy in family life which is so messy. Quote from paragraph 8 below:

- *“Who can live up to this? Who of us is blameless before the face of God? God is not asking for perfectionism. No, as a Catholic parent you are not called to be perfect as though already a finished product. But please, dear parents, model the way as one daily striving toward perfect friendship with God.”* (§8)

MAY

- **Homily Suggestion:** The reality of communion and how humanity is meant for community. Use inspiration for this in Section III.

■ **Prayer of the Faithful Suggestion:**

- *“For all families that they may experience the communion of the Lord in their homes. Keep quarrels, bitterness and pettiness far from them, and for their occasional failures, instill forgiveness and peace, we pray to the Lord.”*

◆ **Blessing:** Mothers (and spiritual mothers)

- *“Heavenly Father, We thank You for the gift of motherhood in all its forms. You have called women to bring forth new life and to nurture, guide, and sacrifice for those entrusted to their care, whether through birth, adoption, spiritual mentorship, or fostering. For Biological Mothers: Bless them with strength, patience, and joy as they bring forth and care for new life, reflecting Your own boundless love. For Spiritual Mothers & Mentors: Strengthen those who provide emotional, spiritual, and physical support—godmothers, grandmothers, teachers, and all who nurture faith and well-being. Give them wisdom to guide and inspire. For All Mothers: Fortify them through Your Word and Sacraments to endure trials and find delight in their vocation. Comfort those who mourn the loss of a child, and those who have lost their own mothers. We ask this, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”* (Adapted from Catholic Online and the Diocese of St. Petersburg)

- ▲ In preparation for the **Feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (June 4) and the Immaculate Heart of Mary (June 5)** provide your families with a “How To” resource on the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in their home.

Summer:

- **Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in homes**
- **Feast Day celebrations at the parish in a potluck family style to honor:**
 - Ulma Family feast day, July 7 (day of their wedding anniversary)
 - Louis and Zelig Martin feast day, July 12 (day of their wedding anniversary)

Examples of how to use the Letter with specific ministry areas:

Marriage Preparation

Suggested Reading: §11–16

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

- How do we understand marriage as sacrament and mission?
- What practices will help us build a faith-filled home?
- Testimonies from your parish?

Baptism Preparation

Suggested Reading: §1–5 and §29–33

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

- What hopes do we have for our child's faith?
- How can prayer become part of daily family life?
- Role of godparents? Role of grandparents?

OCIA / Adult Faith Formation

Suggested Reading: Prologue, §6–10, §21–28

Discussion Question for Reflection:

- How does the Church accompany believers through all seasons?
- Where do we see faith lived in ordinary life?
- How is the Lord inviting me into deeper service of my parish family?

First Communion/Reconciliation Prep

Suggested Reading: §1–5 and §29–33

Discussion Questions for Reflection:

- Centrality of the Eucharist: How am I noticing the Lord’s real presence in my life?
- Where can the Eucharist increase in our family (Adoration, occasional daily Mass)?
- Family holy hour?

Confirmation Prep (i.e. Young Adults)

Suggested Reading: §3-5, §6-10 and §21-28

Discussion Questions for Reflection

- What path do I currently see myself on? Regardless of the soil, how have I experienced the hopeful love of God the Father, who does not wait for us to be the best soil?
- How does the reminder that the Creator God has everything I need in store for me help me think about my own thoughts or plans for the future? Have I asked the Lord to reveal His will to me regarding my vocation? How might I better put Jesus first in this discernment?
- How does the Church accompany me in all seasons?
- How might the Lord be inviting me into deeper service of my parish family? (If I do not yet have a “home parish,” where is the Lord nudging me to become more active in the Catholic faith?)

