

Families

This last Monday was the International Day of Families. This United Nations day is observed on the 15th of May every year. To quote the UN website: "This year's observance focuses on the role of families and family-oriented policies in promoting education and overall well-being of their members. ... The Day highlights the importance of all caregivers in families, be it parents, grandparents or siblings and the importance of parental education for the welfare of children. ... The Day also aims to discuss the importance of 'knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development'"

That is a very far-reaching aim, and the inclusion of the promotion of a culture of peace is of particular interest here at St Martin's. For families are very important. Though in some cultures family ties remain stronger than they have perhaps become in the West. Of course families vary enormously, and not only in size. Some families enjoy good relationships. In others there may be tensions, even conflicts. There is that well-known saying that we can choose our friends but not our relatives.

For Christians family life remains particularly special. However, as we heard in our reading just now (Mark 3.31-35) Jesus expands the understanding of family beyond the traditional family unit and relatives. And so the Church is seen as a family. Indeed for some people that is the only family they have. It is only in the Church that they experience fellowship and support. And it is vital that the Christian community offers that service and ministry.

Of course even within the family of the Church there may be conflicts. For we are all human. As in other families Christians have to continue to work for reconciliation amongst themselves.

Yet the concept of the family extends even beyond the Church. We talk quite rightly of the human family. For key to our understanding of God's creation is that we are all connected. We share a common humanity. We are all children of God. Yes, in a very true sense our family is everyone around us. That can be quite daunting but it is also a cause for thankfulness and joy.

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Kingsley Boulton