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This presentation develops some of the theological and spiritual issues introduced previously and amplified psychologically by Dr. Musgrave in terms of the relational self and the particular characteristics of intimate relating whether or not genital expression is involved. If we as pastoral ministers wish to better support and encourage the flourishing of couples and families, (1) we need to take more seriously the sacramental character of relationships as they develop within family life, communities and friendships. (2) We need to understand and listen to the wisdom and personal knowing which emerges in the context of familial intimacies and activities of every kind. (3) We need to appreciate that family life really does constitute a "domestic church" as *Lumen Gentium* began to emphasise when it retrieved the ancient language from the tradition. Further I would assert that this domestic church is not an imitation of the Great Church but is in and of itself the context in which we come to know God through the whole texture of familial relationships, not only in the explicitly religious activities of the family. (4) Finally, the members of families, and in many cultures, families as a whole contribute to society and church through their work and creativity. The human significance of work is intrinsic to a sense of vocation, creativity and care beyond the sheer economic necessity to provide for the material needs of the family. Work itself in this framework is yet another dimension of embodied family spirituality.

SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER OF RELATIONSHIP AND FAMILY

Ecclesial documents offer a glimpse of this reality of the family as a domestic church through which God reveals God's self directly, but the documents usually take the Great Church and her sacraments as the model to which families offer a lesser mirror image. These documents tend to neglect and diminish the importance of the revelatory and sacramental nature of the ordinary human experience of family life upon life upon which ritualised, public sacraments derive their potent symbolic power.

God reveals Godself first through the sacrament of the cosmos which in itself is mysterious, life-supporting, revitalising, and exquisitely beautiful. Human persons themselves participate in this self-revelation of God in a primordial way. Our mythic story of Adam and Eve in Genesis portrays the delight and joy of human companionship. As humans we do not experience God apart from human community. Adam, the earth creature, is lonely until he encounters his companion and partner in Eve. Together they discover God in their communion with one another. Creator God literally initiates the process of this

mutuality of communion which becomes families and communities. We only discover ourselves truly in relationship with others. Literally, others give us to ourselves in the dance of intimacy which inquires both individuation and communion. All of this is initially learned in the family.

All of us begin in a family of some kind. Today it is important that we consider the enormous variety and configurations of families within our particular cultures-nuclear families, extended families, blended families, merged families, single parent families. It is also important to consider families as made up not only of parents and children-first the couple then the children, but remind ourselves that families include aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews, grandparents, in-laws, brothers and sisters who retain relationship with one another throughout adulthood. Single and celibate adults remain members of their families in quite specific ways even though they do not originate a new family of their own. And, of course, we have childless families, or families who have become childless through the death of their children. The fact that none of us gets to choose our parents or siblings is true of all families. In the case of arranged marriages, couples do not even choose each other as their life partners, others do. But the crucible of our human spiritual development occurs within the "givens" socially, economically, geographically, culturally of the family into which we are born. This is all part of the mystery of human existence and God is something like all the members of the family and loves us like parents, spouses, siblings, aunts and uncles, in all the same ways.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes believing families first as "centres of living, radiant faith" as the reason why they can be understood as a "domestic church." It describes the home as "the first school of Christian life... Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous-even repeated-forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life (1994, #1656-57). While all of these qualities are true, dare I ask what is missing from this description?

I suggest it is the basic formation in human life itself through all of the ways families embody care through touch, pleasure, comfort, play, domestic work, education; embrace, security, love of every kind-parental, filial, sororal, neighbourly, erotic, and ensuring shelter, safety, clothing and mutual communion through meal sharing and shared living. Included within this spectrum of activity and experience is everything needed for the sustenance of physical life without which we cannot have a spiritual life at all. For young families this means the physical care of infants, feeding, nursing, bathing, cradling, soothing, as well as welcoming development and growing competency in the child. It means celebrating birthdays and anniversaries, appreciating each family member and recognising their accomplishments. It means caring for one another in

illness and experiencing together the shock and pain of grief and bereavement when deaths occur. In many households it means a large measure of shared work among the family members in order to sustain life-growing or buying food preparing and eating it as well as forms of paid labour to provide for other necessities. It means all of this on a daily, shared basis-the sustenance of life, that of family members as well as the plants and animals which supply our food and requires constant tending.

DOMESTIC CHURCH

I, with many others, propose that all of these activities of family life can be of themselves sacramental, making present an intangible reality of love, communion, presence, and care of God for us, in and through the caring for the material needs of life as well the spiritual. These exigencies can be burdensome but they can also become the medium of loving communion among the members of the family and a making present of God-with-us. They constitute the pattern for all forms of public ministry in the Great Church since they offer practice in all the skills and requirements of mutual service (ministry) to one another. Wendy Wright puts it even more forcefully in her book, *Sacred Dwelling*.

That the Christian family is understood to be an authentic, and indeed, the primary unit of church does not necessarily mean that the family mirrors in miniature the institutional church in its structure or simply that family members embrace official Teaching.

Nor does it mainly mean that "religion starts at home" (although this is undoubtedly often the case). Rather to be the domestic church means that the family, in the uniqueness of its way-of-being-in-the-world (as a intimate physical, psychological and spiritual entity) is an authentic community of believers. What the members of the family know to be their own experience of the sacred in the peculiarities of marriage, sexual intimacy, procreation, parenting; the building, sustaining and decay of intimate relationships; the struggles of providing, sheltering and feeding-this experience is authentic and must be part of the knowledge of the gathered church. The ways that the family senses a call to witness to the gospel are true vocations and serve the whole. The family as authentic church can, and must, inform the whole Church of the ways it touches God and of the vocations that it provides (1989, 24-5).

It is in and through this primordial family ministry that each member of the family comes to know God. God is discovered to be loving, trustworthy, faithful, provident, nurturing, safe desirous of the fullness of our life and becoming if we experience the members of our family to be so. The "shaping" influences of appropriate discipline, clear boundaries for behaviour and self-other interactions contribute to a sense of order and safety which promotes

growth in love and self-responsibility as well as responsibility to the group. Self-esteem develops with interpersonal competency and with the ability to achieve at appropriate levels. Through these positive qualities growth occurs for all. If God is sheer being, liveliness, and love, God is implicated in all the ways life comes to fullness.

Explicitly religious dimensions of this formation include worshipping together with the whole community at Eucharist. It includes as well introduction to prayer, family rituals of various kinds in which all members of the family participate and the example of one another as loving, self-giving and generous. Many times, the spirituality of devotion to one another through the routines and activities of daily life is not articulated in religious words. Yet if we reflect on our own experience of our families of origin, we recognise holiness in progress and recognise its absence in the times or entire situations in which selfishness or even neglect occur. It is then that forgiveness is learned when adults as well as children seek the forgiveness of one another, acknowledging failures as soon as they occur. Family life provides the ordinary context and concrete challenges which promote love and mutual care. It does so not out of an illusion of heroic choice but simply because life itself requires it.

I find it interesting, as a friend noted, that the church has failed to develop the metaphor of church as "family of God" in any significant and coherent way. We recognise the church as "people of God" like an extended kinship group but not as family. Other favoured images for the church are spouse, vineyard, flock of sheep, mother, body, but not family. Yet the Epistles are full of family images-Jesus is the first-born of many brothers and sisters, the church first gathered in the houses of believing families, entire households-families and servants converted to Christianity. Might the ever-changing and dynamic inter-relationships of family members as they grow and develop, relate to their family of origins and begin new ones, or serve the larger community through professional life or ministry be a more apt metaphor and symbol for who we are as church? Might we as the Great Church not have much more to learn from the wisdom and experience of the basic sacramentality of family life and its thoroughly embodied character?

GRACE IN THE SENSES: BODILY KNOWING

The embodied spirituality of families includes the pleasures of what we might call "grace in the senses" and the pain of suffering with those we love. According to Giles Milhaven and others, a form of knowing emerges precisely and only through the bodily experience of people. Medieval women mystics drew on this form of experiential knowing as an integral aspect of their divine/human mystical experience; contemporary feminists, along with Milhaven,

suggest this is the form of knowing most neglected as valuable by male patterns of thought. A whole history of theological and philosophical reflection obscured this form of experiencing and knowing because these thought forms were produced primarily by philosophers, members of an elite social group in the ancient world, or later male celibates who had distanced themselves as far as possible from the details of family life.

Milhaven describes a seven-fold typology of this bodily knowing which Hadewijch and other women mystics developed but which had little effect on the larger tradition until feminist thinkers today proposed something quite similar. Milhaven argues that human knowing is bi-polar, requiring both "bodily" knowing and "rational" knowing to account for the breadth and depth of human reality.

What characterises this bodily knowing? (1) Such knowing is individual and particular, restricted to a single moment and place; (2) such knowing occurs in actively affecting another, often as the other person affects the other; (3) physical touching pervades the knowing; (4) this knowing arises in bodily need or desire; (5) this knowing occurs in pleasures peculiar to family life; (6) frequently, the knowing is had in bodily pain; and (7) the knowing often included bodily identification with another. (119). Milhaven claims these seven features combine to form a "single concept of bodily knowing". Further he asserts "they are found together manifestly, though not exclusively, in the same milieu of family life". He concludes by boldly asserting, "Not only by reason, in also in and through their bodies do human beings know other human beings in their humanness, their personalness. Not only by reason but also in and through their bodies do human beings know much that is intrinsically precious is human life" (1993, 119).

What are some of these intrinsically precious aspects of human life? Birth and death for starters. The being and ending of human lives are themselves wrapped in mystery. For many, many couples the joy, pain and wonder of their passion for one another resulting in the birth of a new life-their child in whose delicate body they see themselves mirrored-is one of the most common and exquisite religious experiences of parents. Mothers and fathers experience this mystery differently. Mothers literally labour to give birth-suffer incredible pain as part of the process. And until 1955, the most frequent cause of death for women was childbirth. Today many women report the birth of a child as a mystery of co-creativity with God-the most "God-like" experience of themselves they might ever have occurs in this extremely intimate, bodily experience. For generations the birthing process remained one of the women's mysteries, attended by other women, midwives. Today, many husbands participate with

their wives in the birthing process as coaches and companions, sharing more personally in this experience.

Death is another such embodied mystery. When family members die, the survivors palpably and physically know this loss in their bodies in the absence of the beloved in their midst-each one in a way particular to the relationship. Spouses suffer terribly from the ache of physical longing for the sight, touch, taste, sound, smell of their departed spouse. It is not only loss of their sexual intimacy which they grieve, but all the forms of closeness and touch-the feel of the other in bed, their presence at the table, the loss of their voice, the sound of their footsteps or movement in the home. Death severs the tangible, embodied presence of the beloved from the spouse. Grief is known in a totally somatic way.

Separations other than death also occur-children leave home as they should, one by one. Others have work commitments that require regular or occasional times or separations. Some of these become rhythms of presence and absence, others become used to adult family members or even spouses living for long periods of time separated from the family. Other forms of communication than those based on physical presence and touch become important. The bodily knowing involved in these two great mysteries of the life form the somatic component of empathy. When we hear another's story or feel another's pain, our bodily knowing of something similar in ourselves grounds our ability to grasp how it might be for another.

It is this kind of bodily knowing which allows empathy to develop sometimes across traditional boundaries of care and concern. This kind of empathy allows us to identify with and enter into the mystery of Jesus both through meditation on the Gospel and through recognising how and where we are participating in the mystery of graced Christian life today. When we see another in joy, our bodies respond through our bodily knowing of joy. When we see another in grief, our own bodily grief is evoked. When we have known in our bodies loving touch-the feel of our mother's or father's, lover's or sibling's embrace, support, soothing, we know in our bodies when another's touch is loving. Conversely, when we have been violated, abused, battered, or tortured, our bodies carry that knowing deeply and make us wary of connection with or the touch of others who are in any way similar to the aggressor. It is impossible to tease out the entire range of such embodied knowing in its specific features, but I think you most likely know what I mean.

LEARNING FROM THE FAMILY

Ministers in the Great Church have much to learn from this wisdom of the embodied knowing and caring which is characteristic of domestic life and the

domestic church in which it flourishes. If we were to recognise and honour the intrinsic connections between the Eucharist and meal-sharing celebrations, between baptism and birth or the refreshment of bathing, intimate caressing or therapeutic massage and the sacraments which anoint; both our family life and our ecclesial life would be the richer for it. The point here is not that family life is like the sacraments-family life actually is the particular, experiential pattern for ritual and symbols which expand to include a wider community of believers and which accumulate meanings on the basis of our shared faith.

The great tragedy is that most families do not consciously connect the everyday forms of love and care in all their concreteness and constancy with having anything to do with growth in holiness at all because we have created such a gulf between the sacred and the profane. Most families lack ways of articulating these faith mysteries which they daily live with the notions of holiness or spirituality. Ministry to and with families would help them appreciate and honour this aspect of their vocations - ways in which they grow in love of one another and in love of God and ways in which they come to know God in and through shared life.

An American poet, Pattiann Rogers points explicitly to this kind of bodily knowing of God in her poem, *The Fallacy of Thinking Flesh is Flesh*:

Maybe it's the pattern of the shattering
 sea-moon so inherent to each body
 that makes each more than merely body.
 Maybe it's the way the blood possesses
 the pitch and fall of blooming grasses
 in a wind that makes the prairie
 of the heart greater than its boundaries.
 Maybe it's god's breath swelling
 in the breast and limbs, like a sky
 at dawn, that gives bright bone
 the holiness of a rising sun.

There's more to flesh than flesh (1997, 9).

These lines perhaps evoke more powerfully than my prose what we might mean by grace in the senses if we inhabit a thoroughly sacramental view of life in which everything is susceptible to showing us something about what God might be like.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SACRAMENTALITY OF RELATIONSHIP

This kind of grace in the senses leads us back to a few more considerations related to the sacramentality of human relationships. Because we are embodied spirits, relationships are more than merely relationships. Because we are embodied spirits, every relationship is potentially revelatory of spirit. Our loving partakes in God's love - manifests it in and through our relationships - because we are also gifted with God's because Holy Spirit as the intimate companion of our own interiority as a result of baptism. We love with God's own love poured forth into our hearts. It is easiest to see another person revealing a particular face of God, Joan Timmerman says, "when that person is dynamically present, exuding energy, expressing joy, peace, vitality, love. The face of God we then see is the Creator Spirit, renewing the earth, connecting the dry bones, evoking freedom" (1999, 9-10). If we truly believe in the Holy Spirit at work in us and in our world, then relationships "mediate the divine presence and power through individual persons' actions, both their ritual (celebratory and communal) actions and the ordinary actions of everyday life" (10). This results in the possibility of transformation. Such relationships transform us, especially erotic ones which so powerfully open up human persons to one another. Eros impels us toward another, yet we also fear it because it can change everything. When two people allow their erotic attraction to draw them together in good willing and good loving, it can be extraordinarily creative and transforming. They bring about the discovery in each of the unknown - not yet used - parts of themselves. Hence, they release new energy and possibility. When eros is channelled in a marriage, the entire course of the marriage is sacramental. Leonardo Boff puts it this way, "This reality [God's action] is brought about even when God is not explicitly or systematically involved in the human love. The structure of marriage itself, when it is lived with sincerity, naturally embodies permanent reference to and inclusion of God" (1981, 27). This is so because God is love, eros as well as *agape* and *philia*.

Sacramental relationships do not stop with spouses and are not limited to our families - those whom we know and to whom we are related. Friendships and work relationships may be equally sacramental but in a different and perhaps more opaque way. Friendships, as Timmerman says, "are catalysts for the transformation that happens when unused portions of the self are engaged" (17). Most people need significant relationships beyond their marriages but in harmony with them. Single people and celibates are equally called to love and be loved and so will be selves-in-relationship through a whole network of friendships, work relationships, familial relationships and other forms of community. Celibates and single adults perhaps remind couples that no partner lasts a lifetime for both of them, that separations are part of love, and that it is

possible to sustain oneself and others through non-genital forms of intimate relationships.

WORK AS VOCATION

Finally, the world of work also constitutes much of the reality of families and is embodied spirituality. Much of our theology of work in the past emphasised the necessity of work economically, the suffering sometimes entailed in our work lives, and other negative aspects of work in many people's lives. In the last three decades since Vatican Council II, theological reflection considers work as part of our vocations rather than as a necessary evil.

This is a complex and multi-faceted area not only because there are many kinds of work, some of it extremely exploitive of the worker, but also because our economic realities are changing world-wide. In addition, gender issues profoundly affect the world of work in terms of professions, occupations and employment which are deemed more appropriate for men than for women and vice versa. Since economics developed as a social science women's unpaid labour and economic contribution to family life has been under-reported and undervalued. Church documents reflect profound ambiguity in terms of the image of the family and image of the worker implied in the documents. Church teaching on work still tends to assume the worker is a male head-of-household and that women's proper role is that of a mother whose non-remunerated work at home or in agriculture is assumed or idealised. At the same time, John Paul II's Encyclical, *On Human Labour* states:

It must be remembered and affirmed that the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work....In fact the family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first school of work within the home, for every person. (#10)

Our first experience of work within the family is not limited to work as sheer economic survival although it is that for too many people. Contemporary analysis of work as an element of vocation and spirituality discloses the humanising dimension of work. It is in our work both at home and in society, in our ministries, our professions, our volunteer work, and our jobs that we express our creativity in the world. Work is often the means through which we make a contribution to society for the common good. While some work is dehumanising and even physically destructive of the persons who perform it, other forms of work are vehicles through which we contribute to a more just, more humane, more respectful society. Vatican II clearly taught in *Gaudium et Spes* that the domain or secular life belonged to the laity and that it is in and through

lay Christians creative, enlivening, permeating it that the Church is present in the world itself.

The domain of valuable and fruitful work in every field and discipline, profession and career, paid or unpaid, within the sphere of intimate interpersonal care in the family, or the more public areas of health care, medicine, education, the sciences and the arts communications and transportation-is constitutive of the lay vocation and the primary means through which we contribute to the good of others. Here we share in co-creativity with God as well as compassionately caring with God for the human family and creation itself. Here we also discover more about ourselves in the complex relational aspects of our work as well as particular tasks and competencies our work require us to develop.

Pacem in Terris in 1963 notes that work in the public sector is no longer reserved to men alone and that human beings have a fundamental right to freely choose, under the sway of grace their vocations.

Human beings have, in addition, the right to choose freely the state of life which they prefer. They therefore have the right to set up a family, with equal rights and duties for man and woman, and also the right to follow a vocation to the priesthood and religious life [# 15] Secondly, it is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations with a Christian tradition, and more slowly; but broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions or cultures. Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim both in domestic and in public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person. [#4]

All of us and our very diverse cultures are being positively and affected by these social changes which are re-defining the roles of men and women in both the domestic and public spheres. The Beijing Conference offers a detailed analysis of how women are particularly affected in negative ways by their lack of voice about economic policies and their lack of access to economic resources. In many parts of the world, women are happily working outside the home and participating in public and political life because they experience the fulfillment of what we might call "good work" - work that positively contributes to the common good and work that fulfills a person a potential by developing it through the challenges of work. Yet in addition to this social and economic analysis UN documents also identify the stresses of families and the double burden of work outside the home combined with total or greater responsibility for much of the domestic work. Poor women worldwide have almost always borne the burden of these kinds of stresses. Each culture and society will eventually

solve these challenges in ways harmonious with its own social structures and cultural values. I believe the church could offer unique and creative possibilities were we to find ways of drawing on the resources of the entire community to develop the solutions to some of these issues. Together we might discover ways that the division of labour taking gender into account might respect the full range of human talent, creativity and care for both men and women in the context of families which support the full flourishing of all of their members.

From my perspective and that of other theologians reflecting on the embodied spirituality of family life, I have highlighted four central themes: the sacramentality of relationships; the family as a domestic church with its own wisdom to contribute to the entire Christian community; the particular wisdom which results from embodied knowing; and finally work in the public sector as constitutive of lay vocation and as an important aspect of personal development. All of these themes are further refined in our assumptions and understandings when we take into consideration the affect of gender and gender discrimination in our mindsets, cultures, and even theological presuppositions. Ecclesial ministry to families must ensure the full flourishing humanly and spiritually of all the members of the family and take into account all the forms of family which constitute the domestic church.

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PROCESS/REFLECTION

EMBODIED FAMILY SPIRITUALITY

1. Spend some time reflecting on the sacramental dimension of human relationships in your own experience as a member of a family and in your pastoral experience with families. Recall important persons and experiences who/which disclosed either the presence of God's activity in the family or something about who God might be?
2. In terms of relationships: How are relationships transforming? How do they challenge and develop unknown parts of ourselves? How are ourselves and our experiences of touch, taste, and smell sacraments of our self-presence? How does God's love disclose itself through relationships? Recall any personal experience of your own or someone else's when this was the case.
3. What might a developed metaphor for church in terms of the family of God add to our theology of church and better support for families and their place in it? What might this metaphor suggest about our relationships to one another as members of the same family where Christ is the "first born among many sisters and brother"? What about the ever changing relational patterns of familial living in which children which become adults while remaining members of a family?
4. How might a positive appreciation of bodily knowing contribute both to supporting healthy families and an experiencing of God which women mystics frequently report? Reflect on your own experiences of bodily knowing either alone or with another through which you experienced either human or divine intimacy? What habits of thought might we need to overcome in order to learn from families about this aspect of their spirituality?
5. What positive changes are resulting within your own churches and cultures as a result of changed understandings and attitudes toward women? How might the full flourishing of women as well as men be actively promoted as part of family ministry in culturally sensitive ways?
6. In what ways does the role of family members as workers require greater respect and support as part of an important feature of their spirituality?
7. What new awarenesses does Wendy Wright's description of the family and domestic church add to your present understandings? How might families be encouraged to share their wisdom with one another and with their pastors so that their experience and spiritual path is supported in a positive way in programmes, preaching, and church order?