



Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.

Bishop da Cunha's 2016 Christmas Message

Dear Friends in Christ,

When God the Father sent Jesus to save the world, the first thing he did was choose a family for his Son. He prepared Joseph and Mary to be His parents so that Jesus could have a family. Both Mary and Joseph accepted God's plan for them to be Jesus' mother and foster father. Thus, the Holy Family of Nazareth was established.

In many ways, Christmas is the feast of family. Joseph, Mary and Jesus teach us what a family should look like. This Christmas, many families will gather at the table to share a meal, remember their stories, celebrate the gift of each other, support one another, and show love for family members. As we gather with our families this Christmas, let us also remember those who have no family, those who are away from their families; the broken families, the divided families, the wounded families, the migrant families, the refugee families, and children waiting for a family.

Christmas is a wonderful occasion for us to take time to recognize and appreciate the gift of family, not only what they mean to us individually, but also the importance of family for the Church and for the world. Family is where we learn that loving and being loved is the essence of human existence. It is in the family that we learn how to love and, consequently, how to live. It is in the family that we learn how to share and to give. It is in the family that we learn how to forgive and to ask forgiveness. It is in the family that we learn the fundamental principles of our faith. It is in the family that we learn the meaning of life itself. ***"It is in the warmth of the home that faith fills every corner, lights up every space, builds community. At those moments, people learn to discover God's love present and at work."*** (Pope Francis)

Each of us was born into a family. We did not choose our family, God chose for us. He gave us this gift. Who would we be without our family? Sometimes we take our family for granted because we assume they will always be here. But after God, family is the most precious gift we have in this world.

Families are facing many challenges in our modern society. The values of the traditional family are eroding. Personal encounter, time together, and personal communication are all being challenged by modern means of communication, social media and electronic devices; many are left in isolation. Children will suffer if the family is not the center of their lives and the foundation of their formation as they grow. As a consequence, society will also suffer.

We all remember Father Peyton's motto: *"The family that prays together stays together"*. How many families today spend time praying together? Perhaps they are too busy to dedicate time for prayer as a family. If they only realized the benefit that prayer brings to their family, more people would take the time to do it. ***"Moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon."*** (Amoris Laetitia #288). This Christmas, I would like to invite all families in our Diocese to spend time in prayer together as a family. May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph intercede for all our families and help us to become like the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
Bishop of Fall River