



Diocese of Fall River
Office of the Bishop
Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop da Cunha's 2017 Christmas Message

Dear Friends in Christ,

On September 20th of this year, Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm leaving an unprecedented path of destruction in its wake. To this day, many people are without electricity or cell phone service. Because of this, people are connecting, communicating and spending time with each other personally, and rediscovering the value of family time.

Jesus came to reconnect us with God and with one another. He came to reestablish the links that were broken and rebuild the bridges that were destroyed by sin. No tie is more powerful than the bond between families. Family and faith are the most precious gifts we have.

Research shows that people who are disconnected from the real world and from one another are less happy than those who are connected with others, especially family. We were not created to live solitary lives or to experience virtual relationships. We were made to live in a family, in society, and connected with each other. Research has also shown that children of families who share meals together do better in school and are less likely to get into trouble or involved with alcohol or drugs. Imagine how many more benefits it would bring to families and children if they prayed together and spent quality time sharing their values and celebrating their faith together!

What we do in this life, good or bad, impacts the lives of others. Our attitude and behavior also affects our relationship with God. Being part of a family and a social group is a privilege and a responsibility. Loving and being loved is the essence of the human existence. It is in the family that we learn how to love and how to live; it is the key to the meaning of life itself. "The family lives its Spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic Church and a vital cell for transforming the world" (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* # 324).

Jesus' coming made it possible to reconnect ourselves with God and with each other. He gave us the tools to break the barriers of separation and division. He wants us to be one family living as brothers and sisters. Obviously, we have a long way to go. There is still division, hatred and discrimination. These are the effects of original sin, but we have been redeemed. We are called to resist the temptation of isolating ourselves from our families or fostering division among God's people. We are more alike than we are different. We must find and affirm what we have in common rather than what is different. Christ is our peace. He broke the barriers of hostility that kept us apart. "The pleasure of belonging to one another leads to seeing life as a common project, putting the other's happiness ahead of my own" (*Amoris Laetitia* #220).

As we celebrate Christmas this year, let us pause and remember the family of Nazareth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and acknowledge the importance of family in our own lives. We live in a time when everyone is very much influenced and affected by the power of modern communication tools. We are impacted by social and virtual communication. Many, especially the younger generation, are so attached to the virtual world that they end up disconnected from the real world. My hope and prayer is that we will make this Christmas a real celebration of family and unity. "For a Child is born to us, a Son is given us; upon His shoulder dominion rests. They name Him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace" (Is 9:5).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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