

Vatican City, 25 February 2014 (VIS) – Pope Francis has written a letter to families asking them to pray for the next Synod of Bishops, which will be celebrated in the Vatican in October, and the theme of which will be “The pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelisation”. The letter, dated 2 February, Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, is published in full below:

“Dear families,

With this letter, I wish, as it were, to come into your homes to speak about an event which will take place at the Vatican this coming October. It is the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which is being convened to discuss the theme of “pastoral challenges to the family in the context of evangelization”. Indeed, in our day the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel by confronting the new and urgent pastoral needs facing the family.

This important meeting will involve all the People of God – bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful of the particular Churches of the entire world – all of whom are actively participating in preparations for the meeting through practical suggestions and the crucial support of prayer. Such support on your part, dear families, is especially significant and more necessary than ever. This Synodal Assembly is dedicated in a special way to you, to your vocation and mission in the Church and in society; to the challenges of marriage, of family life, of the education of children; and the role of the family in the life of the Church. I ask you, therefore, to pray intensely to the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit may illumine the Synodal Fathers and guide them in their important task. As you know, this Extraordinary Synodal Assembly will be followed a year later by the Ordinary Assembly, which will also have the family as its theme. In that context, there will also be the World Meeting of Families due to take place in Philadelphia in September 2015. May we all, then, pray together so that through these events the Church will undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.

I am writing this letter to you on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. The evangelist Luke tells us that the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph, in keeping with the Law of Moses, took the Baby Jesus to the temple to offer him to the Lord, and that an elderly man and woman, Simeon and Anna, moved by the Holy Spirit, went to meet them and acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. Simeon took him in his arms and thanked God that he had finally 'seen' salvation. Anna, despite her advanced age, found new vigour and began to speak to everyone about the Baby. It is a beautiful image: two young parents and two elderly people, brought together by Jesus. He is the one who brings together and unites generations! He is the inexhaustible font of that love which overcomes every occasion of self-absorption, solitude, and sadness. In your journey as a family, you share so many beautiful moments: meals, rest, housework, leisure, prayer, trips and pilgrimages, and times of mutual support... Nevertheless, if there is no love then there is no joy, and authentic love comes to us from Jesus. He offers us his word, which illuminates our path; he gives us the Bread of life which sustains us on our journey.

Dear families, your prayer for the Synod of Bishops will be a precious treasure which enriches the Church. I thank you, and I ask you to pray also for me, so that I may serve the People of God in truth and in love. May the protection of the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph always accompany all of you and help you to walk united in love and in caring for one another. I willingly invoke on every family the blessing of the Lord.”