

## ***Families: the Heart of the Church***

***Saturday, March 19, 2016***

The family is essential to the Church because it is the medium through which faith is transmitted. This was the primary message of the Conference on the Family, presented by the Catholic School of Evangelization on March 19th.

The Catholic School of Evangelization, in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface, observed Family Month with a special conference in the parish hall of Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens in Windsor Park on March 19th. The conference was followed by the testimonies of two local families about their experiences of faith and life.



*Bishop Noël Simard*



Bishop Noël Simard of the diocese of Valleyfield in Quebec, and delegate at the recent Synod on the Family, was the guest speaker. The author of several books and articles about the bioethics of human sexuality, he discussed the definition of the family, the challenges of modern family life, the vocation of the Christian family and the place of the family within God's plan.

"My first experience of the family was as a member of a family, a large French Canadian family," said the Bishop, who was the 11th in a family of 13 children. "My pastoral experiences, in a parish of an impoverished

neighbourhood in downtown Quebec, also brought me into contact with many families that often dealt with a lot of difficulties."

The Bishop echoed the recent words of Pope Francis regarding mercy: "Before judging and pigeonholing someone, we must first get to know them. We must adapt to the realities of the present. It is not necessary to agree with everything, but we must not judge families that don't correspond to the traditional model."

"Despite changes, the family is a refuge, a haven of peace, a place of security and unconditional acceptance. We must support families so that they may remain domestic Churches, centres of faith, hope and love. It is the responsibility of parents to transmit faith to their children," he reminded. But how can we teach today's children to give and forgive in a society that is based on selfishness? How can we create a sense of community? "The necessary teachings come from the Word of God," stated Bishop Simard. "They are in keeping with the ideals of love and mercy."

Following the Bishop's lecture, two families witnessed to the importance of faith in their respective family lives. Faith helped Marie Cormier-Brunet and André Brunet to overcome their disappointment in not being able to have a child in nine years of marriage, despite their ardent longing.

They finally became parents in 2013. Marie Cormier-Brunet recalled: "I felt completely surrounded by the love of God. Our daughter is two and a half years old and her life continues to amaze and inspire us."

André Brunet added: "A family should be a place where parents talk about God with their children and show them how to live a life centred around God. We are truly blessed to be able to show to our child how to pray and participate in Mass."



*André & Marie with their daughter Emmanuelle*

Adam Moore, from Sainte-Anne, said that for him, "it's necessary to keep your relationship with Jesus a priority. When you get married, there are all sorts of responsibilities that come with, and it becomes difficult to find time to pray. Then with children comes even more responsibility. You must make a conscious effort. It's a challenge, but with challenges come blessings." His wife Gillian, mother of three children and expecting a fourth, added: "one of my friends, just before our wedding, told me 'it's so great that you will be able to help each other get to Heaven!' That's the most important thing. In the domestic Church, we can become the people that God wants us to be."

Dawn Kautz, mother of seven children, saw the advertisement for the conference at her church and is happy she came. "We are raising our children in the Church and it's not always easy," she admitted. "I wanted to come in person and see what it was about. The conference gave me lots to reflect on regarding family."

Kevin Prada, associate director of the Catholic School of Evangelization, concluded by recalling that "the family is the heart of the Church. It is the domestic Church, and for that reason we wanted to focus on it. I'm happy that the public seems to have appreciated this conference."



*Left to right: Kevin Prada, Amber Wsiaki, Bishop Simard and Anita Van der Aa.*