

Ideas to Incorporate Justice at Home

Re-assess Family Roles and Responsibilities As a family, keep track of how family responsibilities are shared at home (who does what, how often, how long). After a month, evaluate what the list tells you about family roles and responsibilities. What criteria are used for deciding who does what—gender, talent, availability, desire, sharing the tough stuff evenly? Are family tasks shared justly? Why or why not? Try out a new configuration of sharing tasks around home for a month or two, then sit down again to evaluate how well the system is working. Young people's involvement in seasonal sports and extracurricular activities often means that some months are overcrowded while others are thin on outside commitments. Re-assessing family responsibilities on a regular basis can help see that tasks are shared equitably, keep everyone attuned to what is going on in family member's lives, and create a bit more openness to “going the extra mile” with household tasks when it is needed.

Family Finances Talk through finances regularly so that all family members have a better idea about what is involved in budgeting and how much things really cost. Decide how and when major purchases will be made. Discuss together how the family shares its resources with others, how much of the family income goes to church, charitable, and social change groups, and how the money is divided.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution Sharing expectations and developing realistic guidelines for action and discipline before problems arise helps keep family tension under control when times get tough. Institute regular (biweekly, monthly, seasonal) family meetings to assess family needs, discuss family guidelines, ease tensions, and plan future family events. Develop an agenda together, keep track of what's been decided, and regularly rotate leadership.

Celebrate Justice Events at Home Add a justice celebration to the holiday and family events you celebrate as a family through the year. The justice event you choose to celebrate could be: „, an event that is celebrated internationally, for example Human Rights Day (December 10), World Health Day (April 17), or Women's Equality Day (August 26). „, a justice event of importance nationally, for example, celebrating the day the Bill of Rights was ratified (December 15, 1791) or the day the Supreme Court declared racial segregation in schools unconstitutional (May 17, 1954) a date of importance to people of your ethnic group or to the ethnic groups in your community, for example Mexican Independence Day

(September 16), National Native American Heritage Day (fourth Friday in September), Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month (May), or African Freedom Day (May 25). Choose a church feast day reflecting the cultural diversity of the church or raising justice issues, for example, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi (October 4), the celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12), Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha (July 14), or St. Maximilian Kolbe (August 14). ., the birthday anniversary of a justice hero or heroine, Mohandas Gandhi, 1869- 1948 (October 2), Shirley Chisholm, first black woman elected to House of Representatives (November 5), the North American women martyred in El Salvador (December 2), or Susan B. Anthony, 1820-1906 (February 15). Your celebration can be a simple or lavish affair: share the story of the event, enjoy a special meal, plan and celebrate a brief prayer service, design special table decorations.

Bring Justice into Family Prayer Incorporate justice in how you pray together as a family. Take turns offering grace before meals. Ask individuals to include three elements in their prayer: a general note of thanksgiving (Thank you God for food, and friends, and family), a specific personal insight or need prompted by the day's experience (thanks, too for the weather), and an element that incorporates a community or global perspective (may this meal strengthen us to continue your work of feeding the hungry or assisting those in _____ who are suffering from _____).

Discuss Justice Issues in the News and Media Families do not need to look far beyond the home to find justice issues that impact their lives and the lives of families like themselves throughout the world. Helping family members grow in their understanding of the justice issues they meet in day to day life can be an important first step to ongoing involvement in justice activities. Use the justice issues played out in daily newscasts or newspapers as a springboard for helping family members talk about justice issues and how they might react to similar situations in their own lives. A rash of stories or articles on environmental pollution, racism, homelessness, or world hunger offers parents an opportunity to share the stories or questions they have about the issue. If you are watching the evening news together, ask what your son or daughter thinks about the situation being described. Raise questions about causes, consequences, and the options open to the people involved in the story reported. Move beyond the questions of who, what, and when, to the issues of why and how. Discuss, for example: Why did people respond as they did? What values are at stake in the story? How could

things have been handled differently? How might you react in a similar situation? Talk through an issue of local, national, or global injustice from your local newspaper or a news magazine, over a meal or at any other convenient time. Issues that impact “close to home,” that is, that directly affect your child, the community she or he lives in, or people of his or her age, offer an easier starting place for family or one-on-one discussion. Let your child know what you think and why, without expecting him or her to mouth exactly the same sentiments. Talking about the issues together with respect for one another's thoughts and opinions is far more important than agreeing on all the details.

Popular media (music and movies, television programs and video games) provide abundant examples of justice issues that demand a considered response from Christians. Here, too, the process of dialogue is far more important than the ultimate decision. Children and youth can learn a lot about communication skills and interpersonal relationships from such discussions. They can also learn what Christians think about justice issues and begin to use these learnings in formulating their own views about issues of importance in their lives.

Justice Issues in Life Experiences and Relationships As adolescents assume greater responsibility for their personal lives, expand their circle of friends and acquaintances, and take on part-time jobs in the “adult” world, issues of justice that once seemed abstract may become very real. Prejudice, or sexism, or unequal treatment in the work place may, for the first time, be personally experienced or experienced vicariously in the life of a friend. Having parents or other trusted adults around to share stories with, and to help differentiate the “crummy” from the criminal in personal experiences can be a great benefit.

Eat for a Week on a Food Stamps Budget Plan your meal menu a week or month in advance as a family, then shop together for the food you need. Keep your meal budget to \$3 per person per day—the financial allotment provided to families that receive U.S. Government food stamps. As you eat your simple meals (and refrain from eating snacks on the side), think about and pray for those for whom this exercise is an ongoing necessity. Let the activity flow naturally into a discussion of the extent and causes of poverty locally and in the country.

Stewardship and Allowances Allowances can teach children, even very young ones, a lot about the value of money. In addition to sharing suggestions on how money is wisely spent, offer suggestions on how money can be wisely shared with

others. Even with a small allowance, young children can be encouraged to set aside just a bit for sharing with others.

Tithing (recognizing the responsibility to share what God has given to us with others in need) does not need to wait until children have jobs or careers of their own. If it starts young, chances are better that it will continue throughout life. Encourage your child to add a dime or quarter to the check you are sending to your favorite charity. When you are food shopping and picking up items to add to the shelves of your neighborhood food pantry, invite your child to add an inexpensive candy bar or dessert treat that someone his or her age might enjoy—and to pay for it from his or her own resources. Talk together about why the money or food is needed and how they will help people in need.

Operation Rice Bowl Take part as a family during Lent in Operation Rice Bowl, a program developed by Catholic Relief Services to make Lent a time of prayer, sharing, and learning about how to help those in need around the world. Yearly family packets developed by CRS provide sample prayers, family menus and educational resources to assist families in this venture. Money set aside by family members to help those in need is collected in the Rice Bowl and turned in through parishes to CRS. For information on Operation Rice Bowl: www.orb.crs.org.
Alternative Family Vacation Plan an “alternative” family vacation this year.

Take part as a family in a work camp experience or environmental work project. For information on work camp experiences check with your diocesan family life, youth ministry, or mission office. Check, too, with missionary groups working in your area or national self-help groups like Habitat for Humanity (<http://www.habitat.org/intl/na/list.aspx>).

A Word of Family Concern Write a joint letter to your state or congressional legislators about an issue of concern to your family. If the letter is about an issue currently on the agenda for legislative consideration, it will carry additional weight. By following the bill's progress through the legal process the entire family will get a better idea of how a bill becomes law and how people can let their voices be heard around on of equality and justice.

Acts of Boycott/Acts of Support Issues of environmental concern or economic justice on a national or international level are sometimes hard to get a handle on. They often seem too big to get involved in or too complicated to be able to do

anything. Boycotting offers one approach to cutting enormous problems down to individual or family size. If you are concerned about a company's environmental or employment practices, boycott their goods or services. Write a letter to the company as a family, detailing your concerns and the action you are taking. Boycotts in the past have proved very effective as a means of shifting company policies and practices.

Cast a Vote for Justice Gather as a family (with adolescents and young adults) prior to local and national elections for a family discussion of election time politics. Try the following process: 1. Rather than open your discussion with a debate on specific issues—which can easily separate people and make dialogue difficult—ask family members to jot down several key values or principles that they think the political system should support or which seem to be at stake in this election. 2. Compare your list of principles with those offered by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their election year pastoral letters on political responsibility: (www.faithfulcitizenship.org)

Economic and political decisions need to be judged on how well they uphold the dignity of the human person. Human dignity is best protected when people's basic human rights are guaranteed. Dignity is realized and rights achieved in relationship with others. Family life must be respected as the primary form of community. Economic policies should protect the rights of workers and uphold the dignity of work. The poor and vulnerable have a special place in Catholic teaching. Responding to the needs of the poor is of utmost concern.

Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in the 1990's and demands an outlook of solidarity with all the world's people. 3. Discuss the implications of these six principles for the issues to be decided in the upcoming election. 4. Explore the party platforms and policy statements made by the candidates for office. See how their statements or past voting records compare with the values raised in your discussion. 5. Finally, share how you expect to vote, and why. Listen to one another with an open mind. 6. Bring your political decisions to prayer following your family discussion and throughout the period leading to the election.

Family Sharing Garden Plant a garden as a family, neighborhood, or parish group—planting crops that would be helpful to local soup kitchens and food pantries. Share your produce in season. Preserve or can the remaining produce for later use. Do not be afraid to start small—use containers if space is limited or

confine your garden to just two or three items. Let your child take special care of a plant or two of his or her own. Let him or her accompany you when you deliver the fruits of your labor. Talk about the people who will benefit from your gardening and why they rely on the soup kitchen or food pantry for their food.

Adopt a Family Through the Salvation Army's Adopt-a-Family program—or a diocesan program—you and your kids can contribute to an area family that needs help at the holidays. Families who are eligible for assistance sign up for the program and are matched with sponsoring families. For everyone's privacy, the relationship is anonymous. The sponsoring family receives a list of the other family members' ages, clothing sizes, and needs, so that appropriate gifts can be given. Because Adopt-a-Family is organized locally, programs vary from place to place (contact the commanding officer of your nearest Salvation Army chapter for information). You also may find similar programs run by churches, banks, or social service agencies. If you donate to an Adopt-a-Family program, consider giving a nonstandard gift, such as a membership at a local YMCA, a few months of a diaper service, a museum or zoo membership (which would entitle the family to free admission), or a book of movie theater coupons. When giving such a gift, check with the organizers to be sure your donation is appropriate. If possible, give membership to services and facilities accessible by public transportation.