

## YEAR OF THE FAMILY – INTRODUCTION

### English District Lifeline Team

In his instruction on the Fourth Commandment in the Large Catechism, Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546) paints a very clear picture of the estate of the family as instituted by God. It is through the mother and father that God creates, “nourishes, protects, and defends,” and rears new lives, bestowing, “so much good on body and soul.”<sup>1</sup> Put simply, parenthood is ordained and gifted by Him.<sup>2</sup> Parents are the ones primarily responsible for their children’s upbringing, *including their education*; when they can’t complete the task themselves, they engage others to do it, who are answerable to them.<sup>3</sup> Children, young and not so young, are called to honor their parents in “love ... modesty, humility, and submission to a (God-given) majesty hidden in them.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, children are to honor their parents by serving and helping them and “provid(ing) for them when they are old, sick, infirm or poor.”<sup>5</sup> Honoring one’s parents is quite literally the highest work anyone can do, following the worship of God that is detailed in the first three commandments, thus this commandment is placed at the very top of the second Table.<sup>6</sup> In turn, God gives the parents the responsibility of providing for the physical needs of their children, and also “train(ing) them to honor and praise (Him).”<sup>7</sup> Dr. Luther goes on to point out that ultimately, all authority, including that of the employer, the civil government, and the pastor, derives from the authority of parents.<sup>8</sup> After all, God uses them as well to meet the needs of body and soul and it is one’s duty to honor them.

Of note, the Fourth Commandment contains a promise, “that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.”<sup>9</sup> When children do not honor their parents and/or when parents do not exercise due diligence in bringing up their children, chaos, misfortune, and death ensue. Similarly, when people do not honor the other authorities placed over them by God (which follows from not honoring parents).<sup>10</sup> The next generation of parents becomes inadequate, and we lack for “excellent and able” persons for civil and Church leadership.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, God has ordained the family as the basic unit through which He creates and sustains life and draws each of us out of inward focus on self to outward focus on service to others. When that breaks down as a result of human sin, the estates of government, economy, and church break down as well.<sup>12</sup>

As we look around us today, we can see these very things unfold. The very estate of marriage itself is no longer viewed as the lifelong union of one man and one woman as an earthly example of Christ and His Church,<sup>13</sup> for the purpose of bringing new life into the world and nurturing and sustaining it. Sexual activity is now largely seen in terms of personal gratification rather than in mutual self-giving, and abortion is rampant. Many children who are born are, from very early on, sent into a system of indoctrination in which they are taught to question even the very basic fact of their God-given gender. Parents are given no say whatsoever in what their children are taught, and children are groomed to actively disobey them when they don’t conform to the current “woke” ideology. Children have no time for aging parents, place them out of sight and mind in various facilities, and increasingly support their murder by way of “assisted suicide” or euthanasia.

Sadly, on so many fronts, our elected leaders are aggressively pushing and enforcing the breakdown of the family through bills and laws that redefine marriage, redefine gender, push abortion, “assisted suicide”/euthanasia, and “gender-affirming treatments,” put teachers above and against parents, close churches while keeping casinos open and running, etc., and punish those who don’t conform.<sup>14</sup> With these attacks on the nuclear family and the resulting breakdown of parental authority, it is hardly surprising that we are also witnessing a breakdown of the authority of employers, civil and even church leaders. The result is the chaos and misfortune of societal breakdown as individuals don’t show up to work, crime runs rampant, and we wonder about whether we will even have the basic necessities to support our physical lives. And yes, these are sanctity of life issues!

Given the attacks on the family on multiple fronts, your English District Lifeline team has selected *Family* as the overall AD 2023 Lifeline theme. Through resources to be offered in *Servant to Servant* and on the Lifeline webpage, we will unpack our theme in four quarterly focuses:

1. The gift of children
2. Love and care within the family
3. Chastity/sexual ethics
4. Elder care

Our plan is to address each of these items in terms of that which we see happening around us, God’s ideal, and how we as a Church might winsomely engage our neighbors in a proclamation of family as His declaration of the sanctity of human life from fertilization to forever. We will include constant reminders that for repentant sinners, there is always life-giving absolution available at the foot of the Cross through the pastor. Know of course that we are here to support you, and if you have any other life issues with which you need assistance, we would be honored to help. We hope that these resources will be salutary to you and the members of your congregations and pray God’s richest blessings on you and your congregations throughout this new year of His grace.<sup>15</sup>

End notes:

1. Large Catechism (LC), First Part (I), Paragraphs 128-129; notations henceforth will be in the form LC I 128-129. Specific wording throughout is taken from Paul Timothy McCain ed. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader’s Edition of the Book of Concord, Second Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006).
2. LC I 108
3. LC I 141
4. LC I 106
5. LC I 111
6. LC I 103-104, 125
7. LC I 168
8. LC I 141-166

9. LC I 131, parallels the promise attached to the First Commandment, “but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:6)
10. LC I 122-123, 134-136, 148-149, 154-156, 162-163
11. LC I 124, 172
12. Dr. Luther’s instruction is supported by numerous passages in Scripture. An illustrative example may be found in Ephesians 6:1-9.
13. Ephesians 5:22-33
14. Government does retain the authority to kill to punish evildoers; see, for example LC I 181 (from Dr. Luther’s explanation of the Fifth Commandment). Similarly, soldiers and others in similar vocations, see Dr. Luther’s *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, downloadable at <https://wolfmuller.co/whether-soldiers-can-saved/> (accessed 5 January, AD 2023). Government is not authorized by God to kill individuals who have not been convicted of a capital offense or to force citizens to do things which He has prohibited (or to not do things that He has commanded). See for example Acts 5:27-29.
15. LSB 896