



Sisters of Notre Dame
of the United States

SND USA

FALL 2021



SND USA Heritage: Catholic Social Teaching

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PRINCIPLE 2: THE CALL TO FAMILY,

“Another task for the family is to form persons in love and also to practice love in all its relationships, so that it does not live closed in on itself, but remains open to community, moved by a sense of justice and concern for others, as well as by a consciousness of responsibility towards the whole of society” -Pope St. John Paul II, The Family in the Modern World, 64.

We are not simply an individual but a member of a community. We are made to be in community to support, guide and care for one another. This takes place in a family setting as well as in a group, in our local community, and in the wider society. The gospel calls us “to care for each other and build each other up.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Sister Kathleen Ryan explains, “Family is the first place the Gospel is lived out. For example, when we listen to children and try to hear and understand their pain and frustrations, their cares and concerns, and refocus or reaffirm their actions with respect to themselves and others, we are knee deep in spirituality. Every time we applaud their critical thinking, respect for themselves and others, positive creativity, cooperative skills, curiosity, and self-correction we have reinforced their capacity to be resilient, to think of who they can become. We are teaching them to participate in building up the common good.”

The wider social network also plays an important role in today’s concept of family. Social conditions can contribute to either the stabilization or destabilization of family structures. Destabilizing conditions include unreasonably long work hours, excessive taxation, and a social culture that denigrates fidelity.

Our economics, politics, laws, policies, and social institutions must defend children, marriage, and family life. They must uphold the responsibility to build and care for the common good of the society. CST calls on Christians to stay true to the Word of God and care for oneself and others




Sister Shirley Marie McGovern embraces a California student.

including the teenager addicted to opioids; the homeless person on the streets with no place to rest at night; the pregnant, unwed woman with no emotional or financial support; the trafficked person who does not see a way out, or the person oppressed because of the color of his or her skin.

One example of ministering to families within a community is the work being done by Sisters of Notre Dame in Toledo, Ohio. For the past 29 years Sister Suzette Fisher has worked with children and families impacted by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) in Toledo. “The Sisters of Notre Dame began the DoubleARC Center for FASD in 1992 to equip parents, educators, health care providers, and social service professionals with strategies and information they need to support children with FASD and their families. The ministry began when our sisters in the central city began witnessing a

COMMUNITY, & PARTICIPATION



dramatic rise in behavioral problems. We realized we were dealing with behavior issues possibly stemming from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. At DoubleARC we provide diagnosis, counseling, family engagement and education, training for professionals and parents, and parent support groups,” Sister Suzette compassionately describes. “I even counsel parents who have contacted me from other parts of the country, British Columbia, Canada and Hong Kong.”

She continues, “Approximately 80 percent of the children we work with were adopted or in foster care. Many adoptive parents are unaware their child may have been prenatally exposed to alcohol, but they know their child struggles with problem-solving skills, memory problems, impulsivity, poor judgment, and may lack social skills. The child may be diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), yet the root cause may be prenatal alcohol exposure.”

“Our ministry is not about blame and shame,” Sister Suzette adamantly exclaims. “Birth mothers already feel guilty. Many may not have realized

they were pregnant until several months into their pregnancy. FASD affects the whole family. Siblings are challenged due to the behavior. We try to support families and help them understand

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– Sr. Suzette Fisher, SND

their child’s disabilities and strengths. It is not about survival but helping these children thrive. Most of these children can succeed when adequate accommodations are in place. When you see the successes, it is so heartening!”

DoubleARC Center for FASD has recently merged with A Renewed Mind, another Toledo organization, and Ohio Guidestone in Berea, Ohio. Both are behavioral health agencies serving children, families and adults in northern and central Ohio.

As a religious educator, Sister Jolisa Lazaro models concern for others to the students at Notre Dame Academy Elementary School in Los Angeles, California.



Sister Suzette Fisher works with children and families impacted by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

