




A child

gives life to love and love to life!



In this Jubilee of the year 2000, we celebrate the birth of a child who was given to us: a child who was named Jesus. The *Catholic Organization for Life and Family* invites you to celebrate this special year of grace and blessing. For us it is an exceptional opportunity to appreciate life and to reflect on the miracle of each child. We know from Jesus' coming among us that the birth of a child can change the world. Each child is a promise of grace and a blessing.

The birth of a child is a grace and a blessing

The family is the oldest of social organizations, the place where human history is forged, the most enduring of all existing structures. Does each newborn baby's story begin in love? Victor Hugo believed this was so: *When a child is born, the family circle openly rejoices. The child's gentle but penetrating gaze transfixes all, and the most dour of faces, the most sullen of spirits, suddenly brightens to see this innocent and happy child.*¹

A new life in a family is a story to be told, a gift to be welcomed, and an awesome responsibility! Life is not something that we possess; it is a gift. It is a story of love full of the promises of God, especially through Jesus Christ, who has loved us profoundly for 2000 years.



The arrival of a child: a gift to the world

Do we truly consider children to be a gift to the world? Judging by society's lack of hospitality toward children at times, it may seem doubtful. Do our actions live up to our words when it comes to welcoming children into our midst? How do we create a favourable climate for children? *When economic and social realities mean that most parents, be they couples or single, are out of a home from morning until early evening, families need a new kind of support system.*²

Why should we have children today? For what tomorrow? For what future? Many young couples are reluctant to start a family when life seems so uncertain at times. Yet many others choose to give life, to continue to trust in life. Perhaps they feel that the gift they have been given needs to be passed on. Like a runner in a relay race, they want to pass the baton they received from those who came before them to those who come after, who will in turn pass it on to others. This is how life and love, the most precious gifts in the world, are transmitted from generation to generation.

The Indian poet Tagore said: *Every time a child is born, God tells us that he does not despair of humanity.* Giving life allows God to express hope for humanity. What good news to tell the world! A child is not merely made or designed, but a gift to be received. A child is more than a particular person; he or she testifies to the creative presence of God in the world. What good news to tell the world again and again!

The arrival of a child signals the birth of a family. A family is a work in progress that must be built day by day amidst countless compromises and commitments. When you visit a family that is overflowing with life, the first thing you notice is the things that are scattered around the house. Both inside and outside, the signs of children and adolescents are easy to see: a Lego spaceship, a doll's comb, a dropped cookie, the pacifier that disappeared two days ago, the latest CD from a hot new band, a pair of in-line skates. Happy are the children who are allowed to share their parents' space and are given the time to grow at their own pace!

Raising and educating children is a long-term endeavour. Until the end of their days, parents will always be parents. Children change everything! Parents know that having a child is a lifetime commitment; helping a child to grow and develop occupies their time and their hearts forever.

Growing up takes much time, but it is a time of grace

Time is the most precious thing that parents can give their children and yet today, one of the biggest problems facing parents is a lack of family time. Arriving late for a meeting one day, a man was told by an Aboriginal person: *Don't worry about it. Take your time. The Maker of time made lots of it.*

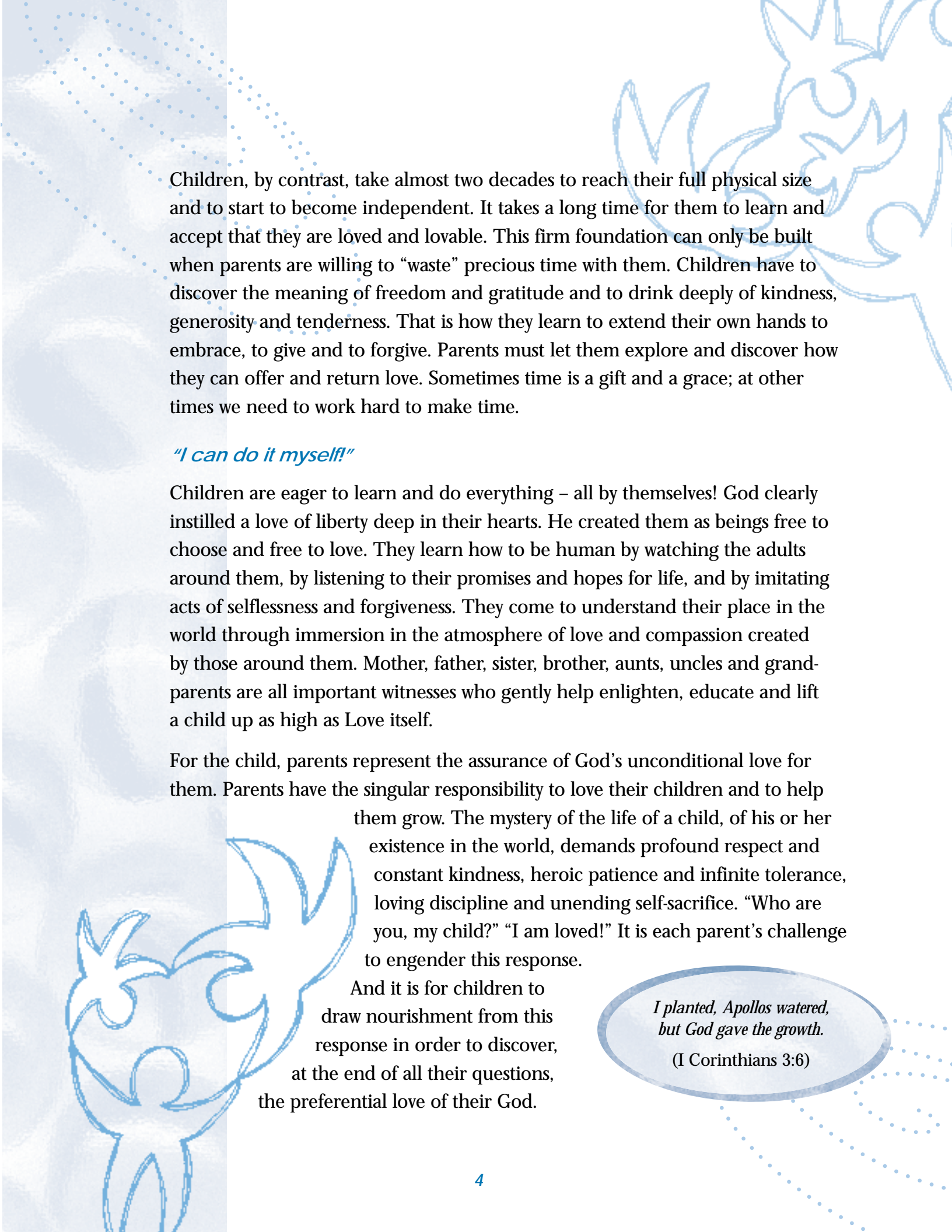
God knows that it takes time for us to grow. We learn this, too. As we help children to grow, we realize how many years of presence, supervision and patience each one of them needs.

It would be so simple if children's development mirrored that of certain animals. In April, for instance, we see thousands of white geese arriving on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. After feeding for a few weeks, they start their long journey to the far north. Six months later we are astonished to see them return with their offspring, who now not only are the same size, but are already equipped with the same instinctive knowledge as their parents.



*Yet it was I who taught
Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in
my arms;
but they did not know
that I healed them.
I led them with cords
of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants
to their cheeks.
I bent down to them
and fed them.*

(Hosea 11:3-4)



Children, by contrast, take almost two decades to reach their full physical size and to start to become independent. It takes a long time for them to learn and accept that they are loved and lovable. This firm foundation can only be built when parents are willing to “waste” precious time with them. Children have to discover the meaning of freedom and gratitude and to drink deeply of kindness, generosity and tenderness. That is how they learn to extend their own hands to embrace, to give and to forgive. Parents must let them explore and discover how they can offer and return love. Sometimes time is a gift and a grace; at other times we need to work hard to make time.

“I can do it myself!”

Children are eager to learn and do everything – all by themselves! God clearly instilled a love of liberty deep in their hearts. He created them as beings free to choose and free to love. They learn how to be human by watching the adults around them, by listening to their promises and hopes for life, and by imitating acts of selflessness and forgiveness. They come to understand their place in the world through immersion in the atmosphere of love and compassion created by those around them. Mother, father, sister, brother, aunts, uncles and grandparents are all important witnesses who gently help enlighten, educate and lift a child up as high as Love itself.

For the child, parents represent the assurance of God’s unconditional love for them. Parents have the singular responsibility to love their children and to help them grow. The mystery of the life of a child, of his or her existence in the world, demands profound respect and constant kindness, heroic patience and infinite tolerance, loving discipline and unending self-sacrifice. “Who are you, my child?” “I am loved!” It is each parent’s challenge to engender this response.

And it is for children to draw nourishment from this response in order to discover, at the end of all their questions, the preferential love of their God.

*I planted, Apollos watered,
but God gave the growth.*

(I Corinthians 3:6)

Happy is the child who discovers in the thousands of small acts of everyday life that freedom can develop in the context of an educating love. Education in love is an unheralded and unspectacular task, based on the unconditional and consistent expression of love day after day, through thick and thin. Happy is the child who realizes, through receiving and offering love, that he or she is truly free.

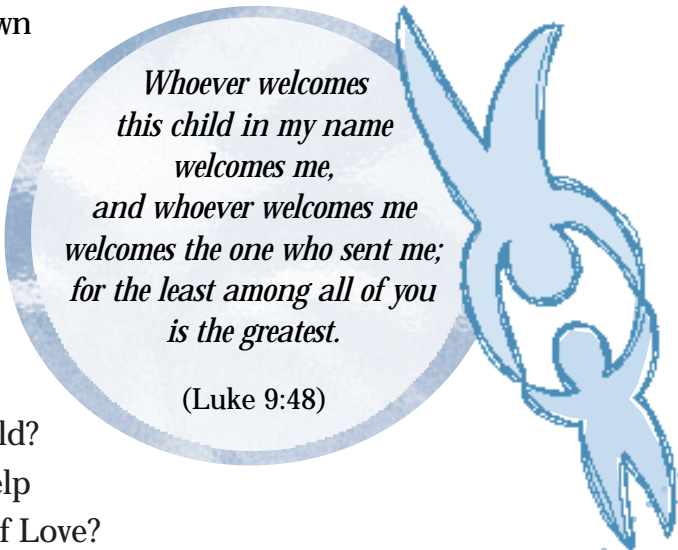
The arrival of a child brings Good News!

A year that sees the birth of a child is a year of grace and blessing for the parents, for the event fosters their own continuing personal growth. Naturally, there are days when parents become discouraged. The infant with colic, the two-year-old's tantrums, the eight-year-old's wish for privacy, the adolescent's need for independence can wear down even the strongest parent.

Mother Teresa made a wonderful observation: *The Good News is that God still loves the world through each one of us. You are God's Good News; you are God's love in action.*³

After all, what more direct way could God demonstrate his love in our world? What better way could there be to help young people believe in the source of Love?

We could even say that God gave children a mission to help their parents grow! Children draw parents into a boundless adventure of love. What is both awesome and mysterious is that through their children, couples enter more deeply into their love for each other. In truth, loving a child is more an act of life than an emotion. True love often demands great courage. It has been said that giving life means experiencing a small death of oneself. Certainly, having children is an extremely intense human experience. Yes, a year that sees the birth of a child is a year of grace for the parents. Yes, dear parents, God continues to love the world through your love for your children....



*Whoever welcomes
this child in my name
welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me
welcomes the one who sent me;
for the least among all of you
is the greatest.*

(Luke 9:48)

In this Jubilee year, Lord, grant to all parents,
who are on this great adventure of giving, hearts
that have no doubt of your presence
and your love and that are
ever mindful that...

*... Love is patient;
love is kind;
love is not envious or
boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrongdoing,
but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends.*

(I Corinthians 13:4-8)

1 Victor Hugo, *Les feuilles d'automne* [translation], Paris, Flammarion, 1970, 253 pages.

2 Canadian Council on Social Development, National Forum on Family Security, *Family Security in Insecure Times*. Vol. II, Perspectives – Vol. III, *Building a Partnership of Responsibility*, 1995, p. 247.

3 Mother Teresa of Calcutta. *Charity: the soul of missionary activity*, Osservatore Romano #14, April 8, 1991.

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Catholic Organization for Life and Family

This message has been prepared by the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF). Copies are available from the COLF offices at 90 Parent Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1. Tel: (613) 241-9461 ext. 230, Fax: (613) 241-8117, E-mail: ocvfcolf@ccc.ca



COLF is a joint project of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity and the essential role of the family. Members of the Board of Directors of COLF are: Archbishop Bertrand Blanchet, Ms. Louise Couture, Archbishop Adam Exner, O.M.I., Ms. Dolores Fehr, Ms. Sharon Harland, Ms. Hélène Leboeuf, Mr. André Normand and Mr. Michael Sheehan.

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