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In South Africa: Growing as a Family

After participating in some courses about Family Orientation, a couple living in Johannesburg decided to start and lead their own course with other married friends.

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Hi everyone! Let me introduce myself: my name is Simon. I am originally from Durban, South Africa, but I live in Johannesburg, where I moved for work reasons in 2010. When I arrived in Johannesburg, I

started attending St Charles Parish and joined some activities for young people. There I met my future wife, Catherine, and made some good Catholic friends.

One of them invited me to participate in a spiritual retreat. It was there that I got to know Opus Dei for the first time. I don't remember much of the retreat except the friendly priest who suggested that I attend Mass every day. I used to attend Mass only on Sundays, but I thought I would give it a try. I took part in more monthly retreats, and began receiving spiritual direction. Finally I saw that our Lord was asking me to become a Supernumerary in Opus Dei.

I have already told about my wife Catherine. Our marriage is a great source of joy and now we have three boys aged 6, 4 and the youngest almost 2, and my wife is pregnant

again (she is hoping for a girl!). From the beginning, my wife and I wanted to be well-trained in issues related to the family and the formation of children.

And so, Betty and Pascal, a married couple with many years of family counseling experience, introduced us to the wonderful world of Family Orientation. The first year we often travelled to Pretoria (60 km from Johannesburg), where they live, to attend classes there. On some occasions, also when other couples joined us, they traveled to Johannesburg. It soon became clear that it would be much more practical if my wife and I took it upon ourselves to start a new Family Orientation course in Johannesburg.

So we decided to jump in, with the initial fear of not being up to the task because we were newly married and as yet had no children. We started

the Marriage Course with three other couples: Rob and Claire, Murray and Lindsay, and Pietro and Danielle. In that first course, we were also a bit nervous because one of the attendants had a Master's degree in Psychology and also worked as a Marriage Counselor. That intimidated us a bit, but soon we were very encouraged to know that she found all the material very interesting and helpful herself. We were also confident because we were not starting from scratch. We were relying on the experience of many years of Family Orientation courses around the world. As an anecdote, none of the four couples had children at the beginning of that first course, but during the year all four couples received the joyful news that soon our families would grow.

For the second course, we had new participants: Khulo and Lerato, and two other couples. The course was

once again a very good experience, with the added bonus that two of the husbands were not Catholic. They too were delighted with the course, as the ideas explained are applicable to everyone. One of the difficulties this time was to find the right days to hold the course, particularly because our families were expanding (we now have three boys, Rob and Claire have three girls). It wasn't easy to decide on a calendar for the meetings, and what was supposed to be a 3 or 4 month course ended up lasting almost a year. But we made it!

The third year we moved from the Marriage Course to First Steps. Again, we needed the help of Pascal and Betty. And again we met with Rob and Claire and Murray and Lindsay. This time, with more children around... And since we all now had several children, the course could be based directly on first-hand experience.

Last year, as in the whole world, the Covid pandemic made circumstances very difficult but things are slowly getting back to normal and we are hoping to start another course soon. These personal encounters enable us to transmit the beauty of family life. To try to make things easier, in recent months we have been making changes in our back yard. We now have a small playground jungle gym, and some small goal posts in the larger area of grass... We want to keep the children occupied, while we parents prepare ourselves to bring them up as well as possible.

We really enjoy these courses because we end up learning more each year, and also because we see how much other couples seek to grow and learn. We encourage those of you who are interested to join similar courses. And we count on your prayers so that in future courses we can reach out to many

young families in Johannesburg and other cities.

For more information about Family Orientation courses around the world, see the article *Strengthening Families Around the World*.

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