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## **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 some other friend couples.

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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 frequenting St Charles Parish

and joining some activities with young people. There I met my future wife, Catherine and made 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 that there was a friendly priest that suggested that I attend Mass every day. This proposal seemed interesting to me because I used to attend Mass only on Sundays, but I thought I would try it and from there I began to go to Mass frequently, I participated in more monthly retreats, spiritual direction, etc ... and finally I saw that the Lord was asking me to become a Supernumerary of 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

(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 frequently travelled to Pretoria (60km from Johannesburg), where they live, to attend some classes. 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.

And we decided to jump in, with the initial fear of not being up to the task, because we were newly married and we had no children yet. 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 very helpful. We were also confident because we were not starting from scratch: we were starting from 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, the four couples found the pleasant news that soon we would all expand the family ...

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 were also 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 have the course, particularly because our families were growing up (we already have three boys, Rob and Claire have three girls...). It has not been an easy task to have a calendar for the meetings and what is supposed to be a 3 or 4 month course ends up taking place for 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 meet Rob and Claire and Murray and Lindsay. This time, with more children around... Precisely because we all already had several children, the course could be

applied directly in the first hand, and the experiences were very tangible.

Last year, as in the whole world, the Covid pandemic has made circumstances very difficult but things are slowly going back to normal and we are hoping to start another course soon. It is through personal encounters that we can transmit the beauty of family life. To try to make things easier, in recent months we have been changing our garden: we now have a small playground jungle gym, some small goal posts in the larger area of grass, etc. We must keep children distracted, while parents prepare themselves to bring their children up well... 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 attracted to the topic to join similar courses. And we count

on your prayers so that in the next editions we can reach out to many young families in Johannesburg and other cities: so if you are interested or know of any couple interested, please feel free to contact Pascal (pascaloloo@gmail.com). You will enjoy as much as we did.

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