

THE HOUSE CHURCH

As we are impacted by "social distancing, "the closures of schools, churches, and gathering places, Fr. Alex Steinmiller, CP, a Catholic priest who belongs to a community of missionaries known as the Passionists, has written a thoughtful way of coming together as families in the presence of God.

What can our family do, if we are not able to attend Church on Sunday?

Few of us were able to attend Church on Sunday. This "obstacle" could be an "opportunity" for our families, especially for those who ordinarily do not attend. Think about this reflection as an application of a very early Christian tradition called the "domestic" or "house" church, applied to this "emergency" situation due to the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Have you heard of the New Testament term, "*house church*?" The term appears four times in the New Testament letters: 1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2.

It is the earliest tradition of Christians coming together to worship God and to celebrate the Last Supper. The activity is described in Acts 2:46, "*they went to the temple area together every day, while in their home they broke bread.*" As relationships with the Jewish faith deteriorated, the house church became the usual way of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Towards the end of the 2nd Century, to accommodate new Christians, "church" buildings were introduced. Nevertheless, house churches helped the community economically and were a starting place for missionary work, a setting for leadership, and enabled greater participation of women.

Now that the Coronavirus has effectively canceled Sunday worship, would you consider gathering everyone who lives under your roof, to come together for a brief period of time to deliberately be in God's presence and pray together?

"Wherever two or three are gathered in My Name, there I am in your midst."

This would be a temporary alternative to attending a public Church. We would be offering God, our Creator, Savior, and Spirit, praise, thanks, the desire for reconciliation, wisdom, and grace. The Sunday readings could be shared and talked about. There is nothing wrong with symbolically breaking actual pieces of bread to share in our mutual bond as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

We do not know how long this hiatus from weekly Sunday worship will last. But it could be a wonderful way in which to bond members of the family, who may not feel a part of Sunday worship for all kinds of reasons. Nothing can stop a person from participating in the "house church" only their own reluctance.

May I suggest a simple "order of service" if one doesn't come to mind?

1. Invite everyone at a certain time to gather around a table or chairs in a circle.
2. Call everyone into the presence of God in silence. Continue with the sign of the Cross.
3. An opening spontaneous prayer, or the prayer designated for this Sunday, is made.
4. Readings from this Sunday, followed by shared thoughts.
5. A spontaneous prayer of the faithful.
6. Bread is lifted up with a prayer of thanks to God.
7. It is broken and shared among all present.

A final prayer of gratitude.

Trust God's Spirit in your home, trust God's Spirit in your own heart and actions. You will be surprised as to the reception this will have among members of your family.