

## Empty Nesting: Navigating changes in the home

**Objective:** Children moving on for college, the service, or marriage can be big for a family, especially when it's the first or last child. Or perhaps the ONLY child. These changes can also be felt in younger homes as children move on to full-time school. Use this session to work on exposing the emotions surrounding the change, and the need for communications between spouses. How do we prepare for these changes? Older fathers should see this coming – are they preparing? Younger men may have seen their parents deal with this – poorly or in a good way. Older fathers may have seen their children deal with the last one off to school, how did their child deal with it? Did they discuss it at all? This doesn't have to be just the old guys talking, there are many ways to engage the young and old on this subject.

**Song Suggestion:** Gather Us In (Red 743)

### Suggested Bible and Catechism Readings:

#### **Deuteronomy 30:19-20**

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

#### **Mark 10: 6-9**

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.

**Catechism 2228:** Parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. As the children grow up, the same respect and devotion lead parents to educate them in the right use of their reason and freedom.

**Catechism 2232:** Family ties are important but not absolute. Just as the child grows to maturity and human and spiritual autonomy, so his unique vocation which comes from God asserts itself more clearly and forcefully. Parents should respect this call and encourage their children to follow it. They must be convinced that the first vocation of the Christian is to follow Jesus: "He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

**Saint:** Although there is no specific saint for empty nesters, Catholic saints hold a special place in their hearts, offering them guidance and inspiration in this new phase of life. From St. Monica, known for her unwavering faith and prayers for her wayward son, to St. Joseph, the patron saint of fathers and families, their stories provide comfort and strength in navigating the empty nest journey together.

### **Vignette:**

Jerry was a father of four and he loved that job. Jerry and his wife Bea knew they wanted to be parents early on and that made the task of raising a family all the more rewarding. Jerry and Bea were active in their kids sports and school activities and didn't mind talking about the kids and their events to anyone and especially to each other. Even when they stole away for the occasional dinner, they wound up talking about the kids in one way or another, but it didn't seem to bother them. After nearly 30 years of actively raising their children and having one child at home, even part time if they were away at school, now their children would all be out and on their own. As the time was nearing Jerry was concerned whether he would have as much to talk about with Bea. How would their days and nights be filled? Would they be a statistic like so many others he knew that grew apart once they were alone? How could he prepare for this? So, the first thing Jerry and Bea did once their last child left home was to go on a Marriage Encounter weekend. Bea thought that they had done a pretty good job taking care of their marriage over the years but knew things would change after the kids left and thought it would be good to get some time to figure out what they needed from each other at this stage in their lives. Jerry appreciated that Bea wanted to be intentional about their relationship and not just assume things would work out. He thought they probably would have but getting that weekend to brush up on their communication skills and actually make some plans for this next phase of their lives was really nice. Jerry and Bea think they feel a lot closer to each other than a lot of their friends who are empty nesters that haven't taken the time they did to get things off on the right foot.

### **Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:**

Do you have a looming change in your "Nest" that you should be preparing for? Are you communicating with your spouse about it?

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Do you have dread over changes with children moving on because you feel you haven't done enough to prepare them? There are times when guilt or feelings of inadequacy can be a factor in these situations.

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As parents you are tasked with preparing your children to be independent and while loving their parents is key, loving God should be above all else. Are you preparing your children to be close to their Father in heaven?

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Are you or your spouse holding on too hard to your children? Can you let them go with the confidence that your relationship will continue, even if it does change?

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**Resources:**

<https://catholic.net/op/articles/4475/cat/1254/empty-nesting.html>

<https://www.catholicdigest.com/family/201506-01contemplating-an-empty-nest/>

<https://sacredheartopedale.org/empty-nesters>

<http://www.catholicdigest.com/family/relationships/201309-09making-the-most-of-your-empty-nest/>

<https://catholiccounselors.com/feathering-your-empty-nest/>

<https://www.catholicfamilyfaith.org/empty-nest.html>

<https://blog.familyrosary.org/empty-nesters-pray-to-st.-anne#:~:text=Empty%20Nesters%3A%20Pray%20to%20St,Anne>

**Action Plan:**

- Examine your nest. Are there things that you could prepare for better? In order to combat the sadness and loneliness you may feel, you need to be healthy physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Health in these areas will strengthen your ability to transition successfully to the next stage of life.
- Think about your relationship with your wife, can you come up with some actions to make sure you are in sync with upcoming changes in your household. Is making an investment in your marriage by taking advantage of programs like Marriage Encounter ([www.WWME.org](http://www.WWME.org)) or, if your marriage needs a little repair work, Retrouvaille ([www.HelpOurMarriage.com](http://www.HelpOurMarriage.com)), the right action for you and your spouse?
- How could you improve things so that when the children leave, you are prepared, and your marriage thrives? Plan a date to discuss this with your spouse.
- Are you preparing your children for an adult relationship with God? Make it a point to show your children that God should be first in their life. Bottom- line, the “secret to success” in building a satisfying and fulfilling family life in its prime AND empty nest IS the correct ordering of priorities. We must live every aspect of our lives always keeping these priorities at the forefront of our minds. God, Spouse, Children, Extended Family, and Others.

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