Mrs. Mary Ann Johnson
c/o Trinity Lutheran Church
Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008

Dear Mrs. Johnson,

I wanted to write and tell you how refreshing it was to see a real family on television for a change - a real family facing the same sort of problems and concerns that our own family faces. The nearest thing to it so far was the day Fred Rogers had his wife and two sons in for a family portrait. (My own boys are 3 and 4 - so we watch Fred Rogers a lot at our house.)

You seem to be facing the same struggle we're constantly facing. My husband's a mining engineer and everyone seems to think that automatically guarantees a high salary - but it doesn't. A year ago the mine he worked for closed down and we spent two months eating up our savings. It hasn't been replaced yet and the possibility of our replacing it in the near future seems pretty dim. When we moved, quite a few things were broken and had to be replaced. The house we moved into in (we moved from New Mexico to Utah) was half as big and three times as much to rent. Because his vocation calls for quite a few moves, we've never felt it wise to invest in buying a house, although some do. We live in mortal fear that we might be beseiged by a serious illness that would necessitate large medical bills - we just couldn't pay what the insurance doesn't cover. Had we stayed in New Mexico and sought welfare, the house would have been big and roomy, the rent $20 a month, and the atmosphere so much healthxier for the children.

When he was in school and I supported us on a secretary's salary, we lived in a 4-bedroom house, old but comfortable, for $90 a month and had extra to spare for movies, bowling, entertaing, etc. Now we don't accept social invitations because we can't afford to repay the invitation. The only movies we go to are drive-ins because we can't afford a baby-sitter. We do attend the symphony because we both are music lovers and feel it is worth the price to be supporting the furtherance of something so good in the community.

I was especially admiring of your determination to send your children to parochial school because you wanted the added moral discipline. We also feel that such moral discipline is necessary and just not available in public schools any more. Perhaps that's the reason I prefer Mister Rogers Neighborhood to Sesame Street. Mr. Rogers is a minister and his teaching is morally sound as well as educationally worthwhile. Sesame Street concentrates too singularly on the numbers and letters.

Your family looked almost the same as all our friends. In Golden Colorado it's Dick and Kathy Johnson and the church is the Presbyterian. Or Rod and Phyllis Vasconcellos. Both working just to keep ends together. I suppose when my three-year-old goes to school I'll go back to work and have been doing some writing for religious publications while at home to keep in trim. In New Mexico, the friends are the Griswolds or the Harashas and the church is Episcopalian or Catholic.

But always it's the same story. People aren't satisfied with their children's education unless it will include moral discipline. Always there is "you've got it made" look from others, but the real truth is that the balance in the checkbook at the end of the month doesn't leave any margin of safety at all. I noticed your sparing breakfast. So is ours. I feel guilty for feeding my kids lunchmeat and peanut butter so much. But something fanciersggoes to waste and we can't afford to waste anything.

I noticed the mention of no color TV. And I wonder about Sesame Street being intended for underprivileged families but their teaching of colors depends on people having a color TV. If you and I can't afford color TV sets, how can underprivileged families?

I rushed the baby with toilet training not because I was tired of changing the diapers, but because the diapers were worn out and we couldn't afford to replace them. The underpants the older one had outgrown were in better shape than the diapers, so he graduated to the underpants before he was really ready to.

The church has evidently played an important part in your family life and I'm glad you brought that out so clearly. Our big date when we were going out was church and our big day of excitement is still Sunday. Because of my husband's Moravian background, we've always tended toward liturgical churches as being the most comfortable. In New Mexico and Utah it's been the Episcopalian Church. I know the Lutheran Church is also close to the Moravians in worship form. We participated in choir in New Mexico and here we're teaching Sunday School. Our children look forward to Sunday as the happiest day of the week, for it's then they can see other children their own age who don't say "You weren't in church last Sunday so you're a sinner" (the other children, naturally, in our neighborhood mean"you weren't at the LDS church, so you're a sinner.) This is very difficult for pre-schoolers to understand, because they <u>know</u> they were in church - so how does this other kid come off saying they weren't?

I have an article coming out in the April issue of the North American Moravian and I'd like to send you a copy if this ~~xxxx~~ address is sufficient. Since we don't have much money, I feel that perhaps the best thing to give to the church and to God's work and to the support of good people like yourself is the talent for hanging two or three words together in a reasonable sentence or two. The pay certainly isn't astounding. $15 and 2 copies for the Episcopalian and 6 copies for the North American Moravian - but it's the thought that you have in some measure contributed to the expansion of good in your own sphere of influence that is so important.

One of my recent publications brought with it a flood of letters enclosing various devotional guides from a variety of denominations. One of them is enclosed. This particular devotional also includes a prayer union, similar to the Moravian prayer union and the prayer group that is active at Dave Cook publishing. There is power in prayer - and more prayer in united prayer.

I'm glad the public affairs people chose a family with a strong religious background - they probably don't realize that a family in Illinois that a family in Utah can identify with is a novelty. Most of the families and characters on most network shows don't have any feligious background, or if there is a background, the writers cop out by side-stepping the issue. Neither the Flying Nun nor Sarge could be called fair representations of characters having Roman Catholic backgrounds. Integrity, industry and faith are vitally important, real, and necessary to people like the Johnsons at Trinity Lutheran in Rolling Meadow - or the Johnsons at Golden Presbyterian in Golden, Colorado. No one seems to be interested in representing us anywhere, except the church.

I also noticed that you have a Democrat - usually, and a Republican - usually. We're just the opposite. I'm the Democrat - usually, and my husband is the Republican - usually. Having been raised in a democratic family - I've seen enough of the Democrats to be not all that enthused all down the line. And my husband was raised a Republican with the same affect. To hear the evening news tell the story, the whole country is divided into two camps - either Democratic or Republican. Such is not true - but then television is insistent that the whole world is either black or white with no room in between for the independents. I think the independents who could go either way are increasing in numbers and are really the wisest.

Your husband reminds me of my husband's uncle Boyd Teufer, who works for Bethlehem Steel in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. They talk in the same hearty tones and keep the family on the same even keel with a well-balanced sense of personal discipline. Uncle Boyd and Aunt Trudy live in his mother's house because they couldn't afford to buy their own and the grandmother needed someone to look after her. So she deeded the house to them with the provision that they'd care for her. Really a formal agreement that would have been carried out anyway. They, like we do, buy groceries from a Food Corporation and depend on a locker to combat the high food prices and don't have a margin of surplus for evenings out, large medical expenses, or any of the other expenses many people feel the middle-class family can easily afford.

Again, I wanted to wish you luck. I know that easy solutions to such problems are a myth spawned by too many generations of black-and-white formula movies and television shows. Whatever comes, comes from persistence and industry and a sincere effort to do what is right in every situation, with the help of God. I admire your pluck - but more than that - I admire your honesty. Not all people from a neighborhood such as yours would be willing to admit publicly that there is seldom a wide margin at the end of the month to absorb unforeseen complications.

Sincerely, Mrs. P. J. Albrecht, 2763 S. 15th E., Salt Lake City, Utah 84106