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Consilium Internationale
FAMILY COMMISSION
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CONCLUSIONS OF SYNOD ON THE FAMILY Part III **THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY**

PRESENTATION

We continue our work focused on the final report of the synod on the family of October 24, 2015. This third and last part, which is made up of four chapters, deals with the mission of the family. The following article was prepared by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFMCap, and summarizes the first of the four chapters - from No. 56-61 - and relates to the formation of the family.

INTRODUCTION

"From the beginning of history, God was full of love for his children (cf LG, 2) so that they could have the fullness of life in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 10:10). Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, God invites families to enter into this life, to proclaim it and to communicate it to others (cf LG, 41)." Pope Francis strongly reminds us that "By virtue of the baptism received, every member of the People of God has become a missionary disciple (EG, 120)." The Christian family is also a missionary disciple as a "domestic church". In the reality families face in the world, the synod fathers are aware that there is "so much happiness and joy, but there are also much suffering and anguish." They, however, adopt an attitude of "humble understanding" and seek to look at the family with the eyes of Christ. They want to "accompany each and every family to discover the best way to overcome the difficulties they face on their journey." This requires conversion and a "new and more appropriate language." The Synod Fathers recall that "the Gospel is always a sign of contradiction. The Church never forgets that the Paschal Mystery is central to the Good News we announce." Therefore, the Church wants "to help families recognize and accept the cross when it presents itself before them, so that they can carry it with Christ on the journey to the joy of the resurrection." (No. 56)

Chap. 1: The Formation of the Family

1.1. Preparation for Marriage

The formation of the family begins with marriage preparation. The Fathers recommend three stages of preparation already indicated in *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 66), that is, early preparation, then the next and then the immediate. Christian marriage is a vocation and not a mere legal convention: "It is a true calling of God that requires careful discernment, constant prayer, and proper maturity. That is why it is necessary to follow formative courses that accompany the person and the couple so that, along with the communication of the contents of the faith, will come the life experience offered by the

whole ecclesial community." It is recommended that "pre-matrimonial catechesis... which is an integral part of ordinary pastoral care, be improved." (cf. 57).

In the context of promoting or even imposing ideologies and cultures contrary to the human and Christian vision of the family, "the Church's freedom to teach its doctrine and the right to conscientious objection by educators must be firmly established." The family remains the primary pedagogical space, but it cannot be the only place of education for sexuality. It is necessary to "set up real, pastoral support paths for both individuals and couples, with particular attention placed on puberty and adolescence."

There is a need for an increase in formative topics during the pre-matrimonial journey. Education on faith and love, virtues, especially chastity, a precious condition for the genuine growth of interpersonal love, and so on. Moreover, "The formative journey should assume the appearance of a journey geared towards both personal vocational discernment and that of the couples, maintaining a better synergy among the various pastoral fields." It is also important to choose appropriate people involved in pre-matrimonial formation: "Marriage preparatory courses can also be offered by married couples who can accompany the couples before the wedding and in the early years of matrimonial life, thus enhancing the marital ministry."

1.2. The Wedding Celebration

The wedding celebration is also of great importance for the formation of the family. Usually, "wedding preparations occupies the much time for the engaged couple" but, wedding celebrations involve many people in a circle: the engaged couple, their families and their friends, people belonging to other Christian faiths or religious communities. It is an opportunity to deepen the faith and for the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, "the wedding liturgy should be prepared through a mystagogical catechesis that makes the couple feel that the celebration of their union is fulfilled "in the Lord." In addition, "it is a good opportunity to invite many to celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist," in short, to conversion, (No. 59).

1.3. The First Years of Life as a Family

Equally important for family formation are the first years of marriage. The Synod Fathers define them as "a vital and delicate period during which time couples grow in the awareness of their vocation and mission." Therefore, it needs pastoral accompaniment that continues after the celebration of the sacrament. In the document, the Synod Fathers propose both the guidelines and the contents for this accompaniment: "The parish is the place where experienced couples can be made available to younger ones, with the possible involvement of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities:

- We should encourage the bride and groom to have a fundamental attitude of welcoming the great gift of children.

- It is important to emphasize the importance of family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist, inviting couples to meet regularly to promote the growth of their spiritual life and their solidarity in (determining) the basic needs of life.

- Emphasis should be given on the personal encounter with Christ through reading the Word of God in the community, and at home, especially in the form of "lectio divina," as a source of inspiration for daily living.

- It should also be understood that liturgies, devotional practices and Eucharist celebrated for families, especially on the anniversary of marriage, nourish the spiritual life and missionary witness of the family.

- Particular attention should be paid to couples in crisis because: "community closeness through affectionate and discreet support by reliable families is particularly important." (No. 60).

1.4. Formation of Priests and Other Pastoral Workers

Formation of the family also affects the formation of pastoral workers. In fact, the Fathers say that "a restructuring of pastoral care is necessary in light of the Gospel of the Family and the teaching of the Magisterium." "For this reason, there is a need for more appropriate formation of priests, deacons, religious, catechists and other pastoral workers, who must promote the integration of families into the parish community, above all during training for receiving the sacraments as they prepare living a Christian life." Future priests should be real "family apostles." Additionally, it is important to note that the Fathers propose a new parish ministry, that of the spiritual direction of the family: "The spiritual direction of the family can be considered one of the parish ministries." (No. 61).

Conclusion

For the formation of the family, the Synod Fathers emphasize the importance of good preparation for marriage, a serious and festive wedding celebration of the new union, a catechesis which deepens the faith, and announces the good news of Jesus. To this, they add the need for pastoral accompaniment of the new family especially in the early years of marriage, and finally they promote the need for adequate training of priests and other pastoral workers.

Questions to share in fraternity:

- **Identify the contributions of your fraternity or of some of the members which minister to the family.**
- **Share your experiences/thoughts on the proposal of "reliable families" accompanying young couples/families. (cf. No. 60)**

Documents:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly_en.html

We finish our encounter praying together: **THE PRAYER OF THE HOLY FAMILY.**

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