

PROJECTS: World CLC Day 2015 – Family

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“The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited.”

John 2:1-2.

Dear friends in the Lord - the World CLC family,

Warm greetings from the World EXCO, with especially good wishes for a Holy season of Christmas and abundant blessings for the New Year 2015!

On the occasion of the year of prayer and reflections on the family between the October 2014 extraordinary and the October 2015 ordinary synods on the family, we celebrate World CLC Day with Mary, focusing our reflections of gratitude, openness and wonder on the gift and invitation of family and families in our lives.

CLC is active in the family mission field from many perspectives first as family members ourselves. All of us are, in one way or another, interested and involved in the building up of better conditions for families everywhere. A significant number among us are engaged directly in studies and other ministries for family life that are aimed at unearthing challenges and difficulties for families today, and finding ways to overcome and resolve them towards fuller lives for all. We are grateful for this tremendous gift, and for the invitation to deepen our engagement with and service of family, both locally and universally.

As a World community gathered in Beirut we put, in a few simple words, two focal thrusts of our call to service of the family - namely to:

- Show openness, compassion, respect, and sensitivity to people who belong to diverse family realities
- Create formation processes for couples and families, in collaboration with others

Yet the two thrusts are very challenging, implying urgent, punctual and long-range mission programs.

Celebration

1. We have much to celebrate of what the Lord has done with us and for us in our own families. Mindful that our own family is among the most primary and priority areas in which God sends us to share his/her mission, sharing on our joys in this front can open us up to the greater wonder of what God is doing, in our families. We receive our own families and loved ones as gift of God. Let us celebrate them and grow the love we have for them. There is much to share on this front, in a spirit of humility, openness and gratitude.
2. We can rejoice at the many wonderful responses to the family call that CLC in our local, and

national community and around the world is making. Many CLC members are also in the service of families beyond their own. In some of our communities, we welcome and/or minister to persons from diverse kinds of families. Let us celebrate the privilege of being sent on this choice mission front. Again, we invite our communities to share on the fruitful experiences of mission to diverse family realities, in a spirit of openness, gratitude and increasing availability to the movement of God's Spirit on mission.

In all our countries, we are aware of the need to care for the less traditional forms of family, even when these may differ from country to country. These families experience themselves on the fringes of our faith communities, yet are no less loved by our Lord who wants to draw all to the core of his heart where the love of God is offered with totality (Matthew 23:37). We have some members who go out on the edges and cultivate the courage to care. This care has developed into serious reflection together with these non-traditional families or their members, bringing in the wisdom of their lived experience, their paschal mystery, into the reflection on the mystery that is our mission. Many Christians in non-traditional families are a testimony to love for the Church even though many of them feel that she has not been able to stand by/with them. Are we open to celebrate these signs of the work of the Spirit?

3. We are increasing in awareness and understanding of the need to develop and share tools for supporting members of families within their diverse realities and their loved ones. In some countries, we have developed a strong tradition for mission to families and we have resources that we can share with the community across the world.
4. In our times, we have experienced a simultaneous call, along with the universal Church, to reflect on how much more we can do in this privileged field. We cannot take it for granted that in many countries at the same time, the CLC community rises in awareness of the tremendous challenge and possibility/opportunity offered by families in our mission.

Challenge

1. None of our own family situations are perfect. Indeed, all of our families journey with many imperfections. We all stand in need of that compassion and sensitivity that our Lebanon mandate calls us to. Some of us live the experience of loneliness, disappointment and a sense of exclusion because of certain realities in our family situations. Each one of us can ask ourselves, am I aware and accepting of my fragility and brokenness in the way I live in and with my family? How can I learn to speak/share about such vulnerability?

In our conversations on our families we have/may become aware that we need to grow in a spirit of companionship and compassion in the face of some of the difficulties at hand. How prepared are we, as individuals and communities, to share about such experiences of disenchantment? How might we develop the skills to live with and speak about disillusionment within our families and communities?

2. Many families or their members are unable to stay in faith community during and after perceived

experiences of failure, perhaps because we may have subtly ‘outlawed’ failure - especially on the marriage and family front - from our conversations. It is possible to have a ‘triumphalist’ approach to our family lives in our communities, which may not welcome and support those who are struggling, or whose family way of life we do not understand, condone or share. We may need to learn how to build safety nets for those who are different and those whose experiences may be perceived as ‘failure’. Mary, our mother and model, can instruct our hearts and community on how to bring those who ‘have no wine’ to the Lord, and how to fill their jars in readiness for the action of God on their behalf.

3. We are learning that conversation on families – whatever their type or realities - belongs to the family conversation. If we separate the conversation about non-traditional kinds of families from that of the traditional family we run the risk of putting all these conversations out of perspective. If traditional-type family discourses ignore the non-traditional family experience, they close themselves off from the wholeness of human family experience. Yet we lay people, live our vocation in the marketplace of reality. All families are about persons and their experiences, their need to love and to belong.
4. As we open ourselves more deeply, we may also find that there is much that has been forgotten or even neglected. There are families in our neighborhoods and countries which are locked out of pathways to fuller life, both in society generally, and in our faith communities, due perhaps to barriers that we have not done enough to remove. Indeed, these may be families very close to us.

Courage

- ± What have we done for Christ in the family?
- ± What are we doing for Christ in the family?
- ± What will we do for Christ in the family?

During this year, the Pope has invited us to be engaged together with our local churches, in the discussions around the 62 paragraphs produced by the extra-ordinary synod, moving towards the ordinary synod with hope that as a Church, we shall find more compassionate and life-giving pastoral attitudes and orientations to all families. We urge our World Community to join this pilgrimage with the Universal Church, collaborating in initiatives and efforts with other ecclesial communities, bringing in the gift of our Ignatian tools into the discernment of God’s gifts to the family in our times, and receiving from the wealth of others wherever possible. With Mary, as at the marriage of Cana, we can prayerfully read the lineamenta for the 2015 synod¹ in our communities, and carefully choose those about which we are called to bring our contribution, ‘filling the jars’ in a spirit of generosity and openness to the action of God. Like Mary (Luke 2:19) let us, “with true spiritual discernment, ... [seek] to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that

¹ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html

surround and suffocate families”². We can bring our contributions through the local Church mechanisms. We encourage you, also, to gather your experiences, ideas and suggestions as local and national communities, and send them to the CLC world secretariat. A CLC World EXCO Committee on Family will find ways of channeling these to the synod processes. We may also use these materials for our further work on the family frontier as a pilgrim community on mission, searching for God's ways in the maze of varied realities.

True, we do not always have answers; Jesus asks us to be present and stay with Him in the darkness of our inadequacy. As Pope Francis³ says, “the Spirit gives us that wisdom which surpasses knowledge, and enables us to work generously with authentic freedom and humble creativity.”

Our role in mission is primarily to love and to listen actively. Families of all kinds are able to speak for themselves, and to share their experiences. When we listen, their experience becomes a path to truth and redemption for them as well as for us. “We ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of listening ... to listen in the manner of God, ... to listen to the people, until they breath the will to which God calls us.”⁴

Let these dispositions stay in our hearts, that they may help us deepen our love for and service to [different kinds of] families in our local, national and global human community.

United in prayer and service,

Edel Churu (Vice President), Denis Dobbstein (Consultor)
with the World CLC Executive Council

² Pope Francis. October 18, 2014. His address to the Synod Fathers at the conclusion of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family.

³ Pope Francis. October 5, 2014. His homily during the opening Mass of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family.

⁴ Pope Francis. October 4, 2014. His address during the prayer vigil leading to the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family.