



# PROGRESSIO

*CLC: Family Life and Mission*



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## Foreword

Family is one of those words that creates an ambivalent response in us. It is a word that carries our memories, our hopes and our ideals. However, for that same reason it is a word that troubles us, because not all our memories are happy; not all our hopes are fulfilled; not all our ideals are realized.

It has always seemed to me that the Feast of the Holy Family, coming right after Christmas, is almost calculated to make us feel bad! At Christmas time we see our families as they really are: we experience a great deal that is good and loving in those days, but we also see the negative side. We discover the old wounds from years ago still rankling, still unhealed. We are reminded so poignantly of the marriages that have broken up in our extended families-the absent spouses, the children perhaps divided among feuding partners. We find how far we may have grown apart from our siblings, how little we really know of each other's lives. The petty jealousies that erupt over gifts and meals show us how far we still have to go. Then along come Jesus, Mary and Joseph the following Sunday, modelling the perfect family in which all is sweetness and light. But is it?

If we take a closer look at that family in the gospels, we find a much more mixed picture than the sermons for that Sunday usually propose to us. It took divine intervention to prevent a divorce before the family even got going. Joseph, of course, had good reason to believe that his fiancé had been false to him-but things are not always what they seem. At an early age Jesus comes out with one of the most hurtful sayings in the gospels. Asked whether he didn't realize that his parents would be worried sick about his being lost, he simply replied that they should have known that he had other more important things to consider-his Father's business. He may have been their son, but that did not define him entirely. He must have been given a good talking-to, for he went back home with them and was not heard of publicly for years!

When he does embark on his ministry and is so engaged with things that he scarcely has time to eat, his family decide he's lost his mind and they set out to bring him home. When Jesus is told that his mother and brothers have arrived and want to see him, he answers, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Then he goes on to say that these strangers listening to him are more kin to him than his own flesh and blood: "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my

mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3.21-35) His whole ministry goes against all that his parents had been at pains to teach him. Luke points out again and again that Mary and Joseph did "everything the Law requires" for their son. Yet he went about questioning that Law and defying it.

Then there is the dramatic moment on the cross when Jesus gives his mother into the care of the beloved disciple. In one respect this could be taken as a mark of his concern for her. However, it is also a final cutting himself off from her. She has a new son now.

The drama of the "Holy Family" is, in a sense, the drama of every family: discovering that your spouse has a unique relationship to God that makes its own demands; getting accustomed to the fact that your children are not just extensions of yourself but that they have their own roles to play in the world; accepting that their search for truth may not lead them the same way it led you. Even for the holiest of families each of these experiences requires time, patience and understanding. Even the holiest of families had to struggle with them, so let us not be surprised if we make some mistakes on the way through. There are no rehearsals for this drama, no pre-recordings. We are always performing it "live" desperately making up our lines as we go.

If you listen to Church-talk about family these days, there seems to be a consistent theme: the family is under attack and we Christians, Catholics especially, are its champions. We must rush to the battlements to defend it. But Christians should be rather careful before presenting ourselves as champions of the family. "Family" can become a code-word for "just us; not those other people." It can become something that closes us in on ourselves rather than opening us to our neighbour. The teaching of Jesus breaks apart the notion of family as it is traditionally understood—remember those shocking sayings of Jesus about "hating" our families? The stories of the early Christian martyrs are full of people who defy their families for the sake of their attachment to Jesus Christ. The Gospel challenges the traditional family; it does not offer it a comfortable nest.

In this issue of *Progressio* the whole range of these questions is addressed. Ideals are discussed, but the reality of actual family life is also present especially in the testimonies of members around the world. Enjoy it!

Dan Madigan SJ

# CLC: FAMILY LIFE and MISSION

*At the World Assembly in Itaiaci, the Christian Life Community, moved by the Spirit, discerned the way forward as recorded in the document "Our Common Mission". In the area of "Christ and Daily Life", a clear directive was formulated in CLC's desire to promote and value family life. In fact, it can be said that all of "Our Common Mission" document is permeated with this perspective, as any area that affects human life has a profound implication for family life.*

## ***CHRIST in DAILY LIFE***

We desire to promote family life as a basic unit in building the world into the Kingdom of God.

Concern for the area of family in its variety of manifestations moves us very strongly since it is so threatened today even to the point of decay.

We will cultivate authentic relationships and affection in couples, between parents and children and between the generations.

We are committed to living marriage and family life in a discerning way in order to integrate them with our faith so as to live these dimensions fully as vocation of the Lord in the Church.

We give ourselves especially to care for families suffering from any kind of brokenness.



## United Nations and Family Issues

*This has been taken from the documentation made by the UN Secretariat for the International Year of the Family in 1994. It reaffirmed the importance of long-term action that would translate the increased awareness of families and family issues into concrete measures to support them in their social and developmental functions and to promote changes in families, where appropriate, and build on their strength. CLC is an NGO with consultative standing at the United Nations*

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All over the world, families are as different as they are alike. Families are essential to the world's future; they are the cradle of the generations to come. Everywhere, their strengths and weaknesses reflect the fabric of the larger society. As the world's oldest human relationship, the family has survived thousands of years, adapting constantly to changing socio-economic conditions and the progress of humanity. Its diversity reflects the cultural pluralism of the individuals that constitute societies.

Peace, economy, the environment, societal justice and democracy are now viewed as integral components of development. At their centre is the human person. As the agents and beneficiaries of development, families are a human-centred link among its various elements, particularly the social elements. Greater understanding of the role of families and support for their empowerment can be crucial in enabling present and future generations to enjoy a decent quality of life and in achieving social progress.

Meanwhile, despite the existence of sustainable means of meeting human needs, billions of people continue to be afflicted by poverty, hunger, homelessness, disease and social exclusion. The disparity between the rich and the poor continues to grow. Peace, development, social stability and progress are being challenged by new sources of conflict. Moreover, technological advances and other aspects of societal change tend to generate not only new opportunities but also new risks and pressures for

social structures. When these are not understood and addressed in an effective and timely manner, even positive societal changes can disrupt family and community life and diminish the capacity of families to mitigate the ill effects of change on individuals and society.

Around the globe, families have long been recognized as basic units of society that perform essential functions and serve as sources of stability, continuity and development. Families continue to be responsible for population renewal and the upbringing of children. They provide the emotional, financial and material support essential to the growth of their members, particularly infants and children, and care for the elderly, persons with disabilities and those who are infirm. They are primary agents of social integration and of preserving and transmitting cultural values. By educating, training, motivating and supporting family members, thereby investing in their future, they constitute a vital resource for development. In many parts of the world, families are important units of production, creating employment and income. As consumption units, they have a direct bearing on sustainability. Greater appreciation of the role of families in sustainable development and support for them is essential for human development. Families warrant special attention and should be helped as much as possible, so they can assume their responsibilities within the community.

Gender equality and equity in the family, as well as the full participation of women in all spheres of society, is essential for sustainable development. Men and women must be partners in productive and reproductive life, sharing responsibility for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. Significant and welcome changes have occurred in this regard: men and women are slowly venturing into non-traditional domestic and economic roles, supported by new family laws and policies designed to promote gender equality and the sharing of responsibilities. There is still a long way to go, however, before full equality is achieved, not least in the realm of families and homes. The double burden of paid labour and unpaid household work still rests mainly on women, and an overwhelming majority of single-parent families are headed by women. It is still women who bear most of the responsibility for raising children. Sadly, the same structures that have limited the full participation of women in society also seem to restrict the movement of men into non-traditional roles.



Changes in the societal context in which families function have also brought about tremendous changes and challenges for them. Whereas families continue, by and large, to be based on religious, civil or traditional marriage, rapid demographic and socio-economic change throughout the world has influenced family formation and family life and altered family composition and structure. There is no universal definition of a family: various forms of family exist in different cultural, political and social systems, reflecting the diversity of individual preferences, societal conditions and pluralism within the human community. New forms of families have also been evolving.

At the same time, poverty, unemployment, urbanization, widespread migration and forced shifts of population have placed greater strains on families. Assistance from extended family support networks may no longer be available. Alternative support systems may be absent or underdeveloped. Parents are more likely than before to require assistance from third parties to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Despite their resiliency and strengths, families everywhere are under pressure and in need of support.

The worldwide recession has had a serious effect on families. In more developed countries, it has caused prolonged unemployment and eroded social welfare benefits. The impact of the recession and of structural adjustment programmes has been far worse in developing countries, where welfare benefits are in any case limited or where a social safety net is altogether lacking. Thus, just as families are required to provide greater assistance to their members who are without gainful employment, their resources are being depleted. Extended families, the bedrock of traditional societies, are also being burdened to a point where many are no longer able to care for and support children, the disabled and the elderly. The trend to nuclear families impairs their capacity to offer care.

Large numbers of families face poverty, hunger and malnutrition, homelessness and disease. Disease usually poses a threat to family well-being and stability. In many parts of the world, environmental health problems, substance abuse and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) are contributing to higher morbidity and mortality. AIDS has devastated families and left large and growing numbers of orphaned children. Caring for those affected by HIV/AIDS places an inordinate burden on families.

The process of urbanization and high levels of migration, within and between countries, are presenting serious challenges for families and straining social services and infrastructure. Military conflicts, civil wars and gross violations of human rights have exacted a heavy toll on family life. While the threat of global warfare and nuclear conflict has dramatically lessened, numerous small-scale conflicts have broken out, threatening civilian populations. Many people have become refugees or have been displaced in their own countries. Forced separation and the loss of family members threaten family cohesion; trauma and displacement inflict overwhelming emotional distress. In several countries, such conflicts have had a devastating impact on family life and led to family disintegration. Many displaced families are headed by a single parent, almost invariably the mother. Human-made and natural disasters and environmental degradation have also triggered large-scale movements of people from their homes and created severe pressures on families.

At the same time, there has been a growing recognition that the private nature of family relationships should not provide a pretext for denying individuals their human rights and freedoms. This is basic to the concept of families and the principle for their support and empowerment. The notion of the family is often equated with repressive, hierarchical structures of family life; the idea of it as a democratic social unit remains to be realized. Long ignored is the widespread incidence of violence in the family. Its most common features are partner and spouse abuse, child neglect and abuse (including child labour, begging by children, incest and child prostitution) and neglect of (or even assaults on) the elderly and the disabled. Particularly common, though generally unreported, is wife battering and sexual violence.

Children have the right to be cared for and supported by parents, families and society and to be protected from physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation. States and families have the reciprocal obligation to ensure that the rights of children are honoured in families and in society at large. In particular, societies must support, through families, the community or the State, those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged by reason of discrimination, disability, illness, old age or unemployment.

The proclamation of the International Year of the Family reflected growing international recognition of and concern for the precarious situation of

families. The Year was conceived as the first step in a long-term effort to support families, in partnership with Governments, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, voluntary organizations and the private sector. Guided by the theme "Families – resources and responsibilities in a changing world", its objectives were to provide an impetus to supporting families as basic social units; to gain and promote an accurate understanding of family issues; to initiate and implement activities to address them, particularly at the local and national levels; and to create a climate and institutional capabilities, at various levels, conducive to these efforts.

The Year has accomplished much of importance. Great strides have been made in achieving its immediate goal: to increase awareness, both among policy makers and the general public, of the unique role of families and the need to address family issues. A positive approach has evolved. The subject of families has become important for the concept of development and is being raised in the related international dialogue. There is greater recognition of the importance of supporting families and of bringing about positive changes in the family realm as an essential part of the efforts to achieve peace, human rights, democracy, sustainable development and social progress. That families can serve as a basis for a holistic approach to numerous social policy issues is being increasingly recognized and operationalized. It is also recognized that, despite the diversity of families, many of the issues faced by them and by the larger society are common to countries and regions. The Year has reaffirmed that international cooperation on family matters is valuable and that the process of support for families is a long-term one.

Given the societal function of families and their role in development, support for them should be recognized as an investment in societal development. While action should be at the local and national levels, in a partnership of government institutions, the voluntary and private sectors and families themselves, regional and international cooperation can provide valuable support. The goals should be to include a family perspective in development efforts and to elaborate family-sensitive policies and programmes. These policies and programmes should have an integrated perspective on social issues, families and their members, communities and the society at large.

## THE PULL OF GOD IN A GODLESS AGE

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*Europe, previously the heartland of the Western Church, is now being described as 'the most godless quarter on earth'. Does this presage the end of Christianity, or the beginning of a new sort of Christian life? This was the theme of an address given by Cardinal Franz König, Emeritus Archbishop of Vienna. The following is an abbreviated text of the address that was printed in the British Roman Catholic newspaper, "The Tablet", on 18 September 1999.*

A special report in *The Tablet* asked the disturbing question: "Where have all the Catholics gone?" From the sobering data at hand, Gordon Heald, managing director of a well-known research institute in Britain, diagnosed that not only had Mass attendance on Sundays declined steadily in England and Wales over the past 30 years, but the figures for priestly ordinations, baptisms, first communions, confirmations and particularly for church marriages had fallen steadily and dramatically year by year. While admitting that this made "depressing reading", Heald cautioned that, as always, the figures must be seen in a broader context. The falling trend applied to all Christian Churches in the United Kingdom, and indeed to the entire European continent, he recalled.

A very detailed analysis by Zulehner and Tonika this year shows similar figures or trends for Central and Eastern Europe with only few deviations. In the former Communist East Germany, for example, 73 per cent of the population do not belong to any Church. The figures for the Czech Republic are similar. The negative statistics for Denmark and Sweden are common knowledge. From comprehensive data in the European Values Studies, Kerkhofs comes to the conclusion that there is a Europe-wide drift away from Christianity to a vague sort of agnosticism, leading to a post-modern, post-Christian secularisation of Europe.

We must accept the fact that on the European continent at the present time the statistics and comparative figures point to a marked decline in religious practice – though some aspects of church life cannot be measured statistically.

But there are other data which go in the opposite direction. Statistics for Africa and Asia show a marked increase in the number of Catholics on both continents. The Pope, as the ecumenical representative of the whole of Christianity, is held in high esteem worldwide, particularly outside Europe, and is given special attention in the media. Time magazine voted him Man of the Year in 1994. In November 1995 *The Independent* said that the Pope was the only anchor in our chaotic world. And the innumerable tributes to Cardinal Hume on his death, not only from the United Kingdom, but from all over the world, were for an exemplary Christian of our time. I am told that Catholic and Anglican schools remain hugely popular in England. The same applies to other countries, above all to Austria.

Thus there is no lack of prominent voices proclaiming a worldwide religious renaissance – the first signs of which are already evident, they say. The French religious sociologist, Gilles Kepel, voices this opinion in his book *La Revanche de Dieu (God's Revenge)*. American historians like Weigel and Huntingdon share his view. “More broadly”, says Huntingdon, “the religious resurgence throughout the world is a reaction against secularism, moral relativism, and self-indulgence, and a reaffirmation of the values of order, discipline, work, mutual help and human solidarity.”

The ecumenical Taizé movement for the young has had surprising success. A few years back almost 100,000 young people from both Eastern and Western Europe flocked to Vienna for a Taizé meeting at Christmastime. And in 1997 up to a million young people came to the World Youth Day in Paris to meet Pope John Paul II – albeit from a complexity of motives.

But this massive interest in religion is mostly outside the Christian Churches. The vast number of sects sends a strong signal that people generally find a religious vacuum intolerable for any length of time. For, as the study of religion and existentialist philosophy tells us, religion belongs to the essence of humanity: men and women seek a link to God or to a deity. It was Pascal who summed up the existential experience of the inquiring human mind with his famous words, “The heart has its reasons which reason does not understand” – a sentence which has never lost its punch in the European history of ideas.

Notwithstanding widespread scepticism today regarding scientific advances and findings, there is a keen interest in atomic physics and astronomical occurrences. When, therefore, top scientists speak out on the question of God, this excites notice. In 1992 the Nobel prize winner for physics (1984) and director of the European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN – Conseil Européen de Recherches Nucléaires), Carl Rubbia, declared in an interview in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “When we list the number of galaxies or prove the existence of elementary particles, then this is probably not proof of the existence of God. But as a research scientist I am deeply impressed by the order and beauty that I find in the cosmos and within material phenomena. And as an observer of nature I cannot reject the thought that here a higher order of things exists in advance. I find the thought that all this is the result of coincidence or mere statistical diversity absolutely unacceptable. A higher intelligence exists here – over and above the existence of the universe itself.”

Albert Einstein, the greatest physicist of this century, came to a similar conclusion. He himself did not adhere to any particular faith, but in his last essay on “Science and Religion” he said: “My religion consists of a humble admiration of the unlimited spirit who reveals himself in the minutest details that we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of superior reasoning power is revealed in the comprehensible universe. That forms my idea of God.”

The Second Vatican Council supplements such scientific assertions when it discusses the meaning of life. “People look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence”, says the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). “The problems that weigh heavily on people’s hearts are the same today as in past ages. What is humanity? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?”

We are all on a quest for the meaning and purpose of our lives. Neither a vague agnosticism nor a secularised environment can give answers to the

unsolved mysteries of human life. So people look for the answers wherever they happen to be on offer, or wherever they happen to find them.

For the search for the meaning and purpose of life is one of the key issues in philosophy, literature and psychiatry today. In Vienna, the late Viktor Frankl, a disciple of Freud's, based his therapy – logotherapy as he called it – on the quest for the meaning of our existence. This quest is not identical with the search for God but comes very close to it, he says. It is not a question of finding just any meaning for our existence, but of finding one for one's own life. Even erroneous expressions of religion in the diverse cultures are, in the last instance, the longing for a reliable answer to the ultimate questions of our existence, an answer to the insecurity of our lives.

It is the comparative study of religion that has shown us in all clarity that, as far as we know, there has never been a people or a tribe which had no religion. This fact alone shows that religion is closely linked to humanity, that it is a part of our being. Comparative religion thus proves that religious practice is an "essential dowry" of the human soul.

If we open the book of history, we can see that in all places and at all times primitive peoples and the major religions of different civilisations have turned inquiringly and beseechingly to their God or gods. Wherever human beings have left us signs and monuments of their lives, we find proof they made sacrifices to their god and implored him for help.

On all continents and at all times, human beings have knelt in supplication and praise, giving thanks and atoning to God, and have left us manifestations of their appeals and prayers so that aeons later we are able to look into their innermost beings. As far back in the history of the world as it has been possible to trace human manifestations and civilisations, the traces and voices of supplicating, praying human beings accompany us.

What do these contradictory views mean for us Christians at the beginning of the new millennium? On the one hand the figures reflect a departure from the Church as a community of the faithful, but, on the other hand, we are confronted with this longing for God.

What is the reason for the present decline of the Christian Churches? Is society to blame? Or is it because the Christian Churches do not understand the signs of the times – or do not want to understand them – and are therefore failing to get their message across? Or is it the fault of the Christians themselves?

### **So, first, is society to blame?**

In this century our society has become pluralistic and multicultural as never before. A far-reaching transformation is detectable far and wide. Science and technology have fundamentally changed our lives. Two world wars destroyed Europe. But the belief in scientific progress as a substitute for religion, which was strong at the beginning of the century, has begun to waver.

Already 35 years ago, with no knowledge of the statistics we have today on the diminishing interest in our Christian faith the Second Vatican Council saw that “the accelerated pace of history is such that one can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human race is viewed as a complete whole, no longer, as it were, in the particular histories of various peoples: now it merges into a complete whole. And so humankind substitutes a dynamic and more evolutionary concept of nature for a static one, and the result is an immense series of new problems calling for a new endeavour of analysis and synthesis” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 5).

A little later, the same *Gaudium et Spes* (9) noted that “people are becoming conscious that the forces they have unleashed are in their own hands and that it is up to them to control them or be enslaved by them. Here lies the modern dilemma.” Thus the council foresaw the dramatic social transformation that would take place by the beginning of the new millennium. And, at the end of the second millennium, the council’s prognosis has proved correct: in their desire for ever greater autonomy, individuals rely more and more on themselves and distrust any kind of institution. Authority is questioned. The outcome, on the one hand, is widespread insecurity and a loss of solidarity with one’s fellow men and women. And on the other hand egotism and arrogance have led to increased criticism of the state and society – from which the Church, in its role as the Christian community of the faithful, has not been spared.



Public opinion has undergone a transformation. A dynamic and flexible media society has replaced the former stable order of firmly established institutions. A general change of values is gaining ground. Marriage and the family are particularly affected. Since the Sixties freedom and independence have become the slogans of the younger generation. But freedom without responsibility for oneself and for others is fragile.

Almost imperceptibly, the ambivalent power of the media is becoming the decisive factor in multicultural public opinion. Local events are frequently blown up to a global dimension these days, and single facts generalised. Everyone is convinced that they are perfectly informed and can therefore comment on and criticise the most distant of events. Everything is in a state of flux and anything seems possible. On the one hand we have a proliferation of knowledge and experience, a new willingness to help prompted by global access to information; on the other hand, there is talk of "the power of evil images", a climate of ruthlessness and violence which many link to the influence of the media. There seems to be a growing conviction that it is easier to solve conflicts by force than through dialogue. Where is Christianity's place in all this?

### **Secondly, is the decline the fault of the Churches?**

With its breakneck speed, media society, which has eyes only for the human side of the Church, adds to the feeling of insecurity in church practice. Thus, spread by one-sided media reporting, the negative image of the Church and of the Christian faith is blown up out of all proportion. Faced with such a scenario, church leaders have become increasingly uneasy. Some try to withdraw from such a complex situation and turn their attention inwards. They busy themselves with self-criticism and attempts at structural reform. In post-conciliar discussions this tendency is further aggravated by the division between the "conservatives" and the "progressives". A sort of "church navel-gazing" is taking place.

But the primary concern of the Christian Churches, of every Church, but particularly of the Catholic Church, in whose name I speak, cannot first and foremost be its public image. Its primary concern must always be to pass on the Gospel message with its partly adaptable and partly unalterable standpoint. And so I am faced with the question: how do I fulfil my task of conveying my message in the world as it is today? It is not an easy task and

requires – much more than it used to – honest cooperation between bishops, priests and laity. Here, too, it was the Second Vatican Council which repeatedly pointed to the necessity of such cooperation. As *Lumen Gentium* 33 says, “Now, the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth.”

And this, too, is the reason why church leaders should not be afraid of too great a diversity. Over the years their fears in this respect have led to an excessive and defensive centralism and bureaucracy. Ever since the Second Vatican Council, it has become increasingly clear that the Catholic Church faces a problem of a particular kind in the future. The Catholic faithful in the parishes and dioceses lose heart when they receive no reassurance or comfort from the central church leadership, when – with the exception of those documents and encyclical letters written by the Pope himself (I want to emphasise this) – warnings of error and heresy predominate in the countless documents that pour out of Rome. The Catholic faithful expect signs of encouragement and a mutual flow of information as a sign of unity and of diversity.

That is why the question of what kind of leadership the Catholic Church requires in order to preserve its unity in a rapidly changing world, and what forms of diversity are possible without seriously endangering that unity on the threshold of the third millennium, keeps cropping up nowadays. That Pope John Paul II is aware of this question is evident from his encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* (95), in which he recalls with emphasis the link between the college of bishops and the pope. “The bishop of Rome is a member of the college”, he says, “and the bishops are his brothers in the ministry.”

The diversity of the Church must be given room – in reliance on the Holy Spirit – in every field and every issue of church life. The community of the faithful is rooted in the families, the parishes, where people grow into the community and become Christians through baptism and the sacraments. It is these small living communities which form the network of the Church with their knowledge of Christianity, their basic religious instruction for adults (catechism) and their faithful solidarity. In such turbulent times, this network needs information, communication, reinforcement and encouragement from the larger structures of the world Church which, according to the principle of subsidiarity, must be

supportive and not dictatorial. Then the solidarity of the church community will grow.

### **Thirdly and finally, is the decline the fault of the Christians themselves?**

God created living people and not structures. In the last instance it is always people we are dealing with. The best structures are no help if we human beings fail. That is what Jesus meant when he was teaching in Israel, and said after the *Sermon on the Mount*, as Matthew 5:13 tells us: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out... You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid... Let your light so shine before men and women, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." And finally, "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon a rock."

This means that it is not enough to discuss the word of God and comment on it: we must above all carry it out and bear witness to it by the way we live. There is no spectacular answer, no secret recipe. The Churches, the faithful in the Churches, must be credible interpreters, witnesses of God's love for humankind. That is the secret of a Mother Teresa or a Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, who changed the world around them. And so Christianity and its Churches do not have to invent anything new. They must simply go on proclaiming the same Gospel, not so much with words but through bearing loving witness by the way they live.

In order to highlight its endeavours to understand the world, the Second Vatican Council began its great pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world with a renewed statement of Christian humanism: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts" (*Gaudium et Spes*, I). With great momentum the council produced the equipment for the Church's future course in its texts, with which one must be well acquainted. I can only mention a few keywords here: the renewed image of the Church, the efforts to promote ecumenism, the cooperation of priests and laity, the significance of the major religions from the Christian

point of view through inter-religious dialogue, and finally the emphasis on religious freedom.

Let me sum up: the Christian community in Europe, which from the Emperor Constantine's conversion in the fourth century onwards had the respect and support of public opinion, has today been thrown back on itself by a non-believing, indifferent, often even hostile environment, and as in its first beginnings is out on its own, left to its own resources which have evolved from both a divine and a human element. The traces of Constantine's Church would seem to be fading, and a second turning point as fundamental as the Constantinian one confronts us. Faced with a cold wind of resistance, the ecumenically united Christian community is once again becoming the salt of the earth and the light on the mountains. For the call to be a light which shines from the mountaintop, to be salt which does not lose its taste, holds good for the Christian way of life in all centuries.

Let us finally listen to the voice of a man for whom bearing witness was of the utmost importance: "Shine like a light in a world of darkness..." One would not have to say this if our lives really did shine out. We would not need to tell if we let deeds speak.

"There would be no heathens if we were true Christians, if we kept Christ's commandments. But we love money just as they (the heathens) do - in fact more than they do. We fear death as much as they do. How then are they to be convinced of our beliefs? By a miracle? There are no more miracles. By our behaviour? It is bad. By love? Not a trace of it anywhere. That is why one day we will have to account not only for our sins, but for the damage we have done."

The man who expressed his concern so forcibly was St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople and a contemporary of St Augustine's in the fifth century.

What Chrysostom said when Christianity was in its beginnings holds true for us in our multicultural society today as we begin a new millennium. Words alone are not enough. Human beings and what they do are the decisive factor.

# WHAT MAKES A MARRIAGE CHRISTIAN?

By Michel Istas, S.J.

*Reprinted with permission from the book  
"Spirituality for Lay Christians, At the Dawn of the Third Millennium"*

People were getting married before Christ came and, when he came, marriages continued with no changes in the way they were celebrated. Jesus went to a wedding in Cana in Galilee; he did not give the couple a new ritual or regulations but gave them wine to drink.

Today, whether they believe in Jesus or not, people continue getting married and, at first, there does not seem to be any difference between those who do or do not believe. Jesus actually acknowledged this when he spoke of the days of the Son of Man: "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so too it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them" (Lk 17:26-27). Jesus warns the people: you are going on with your business and you are not paying attention to what God is planning for the world. But if we want to pay attention to what he asks, what should we do? What should we do to make our marriage Christian? Jesus himself tells us very little about the way marriages should be lived.

The first Christians did not think that their faith should make their marriages very different from other marriages. In the first century, they describe their attitude as follows:

Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs.... They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children...

Yet there is a difference; the same author goes on:

...but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven (*Letter To Diognetos*, chapter 5, written around 129 C.E.).

Jesus did not change anything in marriage. But by changing people's understanding of what is important in life, his teaching brought the people to change their attitude towards many of the practices connected with marriage. People who became Christians, in these very early days of Christianity, soon understood that they had to change some of their ways of behaving.

What about Africa? Like everywhere else, people here are also faced with the same problem. They want to follow Christ, but they also have their own traditions. Do they have to reconsider their ways of doing things if they want to follow Christ? Jesus did not change the traditions of his people; should we change ours? The Church today has come to realize that traditions are often good and meaningful, actually helping people to respond more fully to God's call. But what should be kept, what should be changed? The Bishops of the continent gathered together in their Sixth General Assembly, in Yaoundé, Cameroon in 1981, and reflected upon these questions. They saw three aspects of marriage on which, they said, "Sufficient light has already been thrown for an evaluation to be made of their compatibility with the Gospel" (1.5).<sup>1</sup> They are:

- Marriage is a reality that is both personal and communitarian;
- Marriage is brought about by a dynamic process in successive stages;
- Marriage is in view of childbearing.

These are fundamental aspects of marriage in Africa. Each of them supports marriage but also creates problems for married people. These aspects have somehow to be integrated in a Christian perspective. To achieve this, both the African tradition and the Christian perspective have to be examined. The Bishops gave some orientations on these points which are going to help us in our reflections here.

### **A Reality That Is Both Personal and Communitarian**

In marriage, two people are committing themselves to each other in order to form a community of life. They choose each other and depend on

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<sup>1</sup> Number in parentheses in this chapter refer to those of these SECAM resolutions entitled "*Recommendations and Conclusions on Christian Family Life and Marriage in Africa Today*" which appear in *AFER* 23 (December 1981): 370-76.

each other for better or worse. An agreement is made with expectations on both sides but also with a commitment that goes beyond these expectations; even if they are not fulfilled – and they seldom are – the partners are committed to each other. The relationship, which binds them together, is fairly complex involving different feelings and desires; but, today, it is normally assumed that one of its most important elements should be a deep personal love for each other. Love is what binds husband and wife together and makes them become one as the Bible demands. When there is no social pressure for them to be faithful to each other and to help each other, love is the only bond that helps them to overcome tensions and difficulties. It is something intensely personal or, more precisely, interpersonal, as it really binds two different people, with their own background and desires, into one couple. This is what the Bishops referred to when they said that marriage is personal.

But marriage is not just for husband and wife; it also involves their families. This is its communitarian aspect. When a person marries, it is not just for his or her own sake: marriage is also a service to the families and communities involved. Sometimes, it even looks as if the involvement of the families is more important than the people's own. Such is the case when the choice of a partner is decided by the families or when, on the contrary, the family refuses the choice of the individual. The community decides and it is easy to understand why the community feels concerned: it has to ensure its own continuation and harmony. It cannot do so if every member is allowed to bring in for marriage some unknown person who would inevitably weaken the internal cohesion of the group and who sometimes might prove to be unreliable. Everyone has obligations towards the family, which has brought him or her to life, and these obligations must be fulfilled. Indeed, in many traditional societies, they come first: a person must do whatever is best for his or her family; the demands of others, even of a spouse, come second. It is more important to remain united with one's own family of origin than with a partner in marriage.

This is not just an old tradition. Not so long ago, the famous Otieno case showed how, even today, courts can rule that a man has to be buried with his family of origin not with his wife. In this case, the problem was particularly acute because the wife belonged to another ethnic group. But similar cases occur even within the same ethnic group. Sometimes, property rights are involved and the family of origin claims that its rights are superior to those of the wife. Such quarrels not only arise when one of

the partners dies; but they can deeply affect the relationship of the couple; the bonds with the family of origin have prior claims upon a person's loyalty before those of marriage. This does not necessarily make the personal relationship weaker; in fact, it is assumed that it provides a framework in which it can become stronger. But it also happens that the family bonds tear the couple apart.

In Christian teaching, the emphasis is put on the personal dimension. Even the way marriage is spoken about differs from traditional ways: thus, it will be said that marriage creates a new family. Once marriage has taken place, the loyalty of the spouses is supposed to shift: it is no longer with the family of origin, but with the partner. However, this emphasis on the personal dimension is not specifically Christian. There is nothing in the gospels that makes it normative. It is in many ways, a product of modern social evolution though it has roots in ancient history. More particularly, this is the way marriage worked in Israel. The Bible tells us, for example, that, when Jacob married Rachel and Leah and quarrels arose with his wives' father Laban, both women took sides with their husband and said about their own father: "Are we not regarded by him as foreigners?" (Gn 31:15). Would any woman in Africa say this about her father? But Jesus never made this a rule.

In Israel, this approach goes back to the time of nomadic life, when it was made necessary by circumstances. In the Church, however, it did become a rule, partly because this was also what the laws of the Roman Empire prescribed. Later, in Europe, the urban development of the Middle Ages again made it into a normal expectation. Yet, at the time, the Church also acknowledged the value of the communitarian dimension of marriage as the African tradition does. It recognized that it has always been God's plan to use marriage so that two families, which used to be strangers to each other, may become allied, "so that love which does not exist by descent would be born by marriage" (Hugh of St Victor, ... 1140).

Later in history, however, this dimension ceased to be relevant in Western society and even within the Church, the emphasis was laid entirely on the personal dimension. But disregard for the social dimension is largely a product of history and is not directly connected to Christian faith. It is true, however, that Christianity has found the emphasis on personal relationship in marriage particularly meaningful and has supported it, particularly in modern times, because it has found that this approach more



easily supports human dignity and is similar to the relationship that a person should develop with God. The Church has come to recognize that this love relationship is central to the reality of marriage and, therefore, considers that everything which stands in its way should be avoided, as far as possible.

Yet the African Bishops do not consider that the communitarian dimension of marriage constitutes an obstacle to the development of a relationship of true love between husband and wife. It can create problems, certainly, if the families are more concerned with themselves than with the harmony of the couple and the spouses have more loyalty to their family of origin than to each other. But this is not an inevitable consequence of the communitarian dimension of marriage. By itself, this dimension indeed represents a chance for Christian love to manifest itself more widely. By itself, it should not be considered as an obstacle to a good marriage, but as a value. The Bishops list four areas in which it can contribute positively to its development: "It prevents marriage from becoming too individualistic; it protects the stability of the couple; it brings out the social values of marriage; it helps the couple at the beginning of their married life" (2.1.1).

These are real values that the Church should encourage. The Bishops acknowledge that tensions may arise and, therefore, argue that "the communitarian aspect of marriage must be balanced by the personal aspect if it is to be more in keeping with the Gospel" (2.1.2). This should not be taken as though the personal aspect was proper to the Gospel and the communitarian aspect proper to Africa: both can be found in Christianity and in Africa. But the challenge today is to bring them to a proper balance. Thus, the Bishops can, with good reason, argue that in Africa today, Christian marriage should integrate the communitarian dimension of African tradition so as to strengthen the bonds of love between many people.

So, what makes marriage Christian in this context? The Church considers that the community plays an important role in the celebration and the development of marriage. But the Church is also aware that communities, or more specifically the families, should not be given too much authority because their interests may be different from the interests of the spouses. Therefore, to some extent at least, the Church reserves to itself the right to overrule the families and encourages the partners to

assume full responsibility for their relationship with each other. This does not mean that marriage is taken away from the community. On the contrary, the Church wants to insert it into the Christian community so that there the necessary support and guidance may be given to the couple. Small Christian Communities can play an important role in this regard. The communitarian dimension is not abolished but, insofar as it is necessary or suitable, it gives another focus. Even then, the Church considers that, ultimately, what makes marriage Christian is its consecration by the spouses themselves.

### **Marriage is brought about by a dynamic process in successive stages**

In African tradition, marriage was not celebrated as a punctual event in just one ceremony. Something as important as this could not be done in a few minutes: it took time to get married, sometimes even years. In some traditions, the spouses were not considered fully married until after the birth of the first child and this was not just a matter of waiting to make sure that children would be born. Various ceremonies had to be performed, not just one. A full marriage could be said to exist only when they all had taken place. Different customs existed in this regard. But underlying them, a common structure can often be recognized: progressively, larger sections of society became involved and had to somehow participate in the event. At first, only the couple and their immediate family were brought together, then the larger family or the clan, then the neighbourhood or the village and finally also the ancestors. From the very beginning, a bond was supposed to exist but this bond was progressively strengthened and made more intricate, as more people were invited to join and sometimes to take part very actively, for example, by contributing to the bridewealth and by entertaining visitors, or just by being there. These practices all took time but they also ensured that no obstacles could arise between the two families, which could later cause friction within the household.

In the Christian celebration, as it is known today, marriage is very different: the bride and bridegroom go to church, exchange their consent and from that moment on, they are married forever and always. Before the ceremony, they were not; afterwards, they are, whatever may happen or be discovered concerning themselves or their families – except for some rare cases where something is found which invalidates the marriage. Such a

punctual celebration of marriage does not make much sense within the African perspective: it does not do justice to the importance of the event and does not allow the families concerned to become fully involved.

Indeed, the objection is well taken. But it must be considered that this form of marriage does not really represent what the Church has wanted marriage to be. In former times, there used to be more ceremonies some private, some public according to the customs that prevailed in the various countries where the Church had become implanted. The Church was not always involved, but sometimes it was; and certainly it recognized the validity and importance of these ceremonies.

One description, by Pope Nicholas the Great, in 866 C.E., describes the following stages: there was first a betrothal (*sponsalia*), a promise of alliance in which both the partners and "those in whose power they are" gave their consent; then there was the transfer (*desponsatio* and *traditio*) in which the bride was handed over to the groom; he gave her a ring; a contract was made and wedding gifts exchanged; later, there were liturgical ceremonies, including an offering, a blessing, and a veiling and finally, there was the entry into the new home. Most of these ceremonies have now become part of the one ritual of marriage. But, at the time, they were distinct celebrations, which were spread out over a period of time and they involved more people than just the bride and the groom. It is now difficult to make out what their social significance was, but marriage was certainly not a punctual event.

But all these ceremonies had one disadvantage: they were costly. And the Church, therefore, ruled that if people could not afford all these ceremonies, only one was really essential, namely the exchange of consent. This rule, in turn, led to problems because people could give their consent in private; an individual could have secret marriages in different places. When faced with many abuses, the Council of Trent in 1563 stipulated that marriage had to take place in church with the parish priest (or a priest duly delegated) as a witness and this remains the rule today. But, even then, this rule did not eliminate the other stages: they remained important even when the Church was not directly involved in their celebration. In the Code of Canon Law which remained valid up to 1983, there was still a rule which called voiding a valid engagement without good reason a grievous sin; to do so entailed compensation for damage if any had arisen (can 1017, §3). But by then another factor was influencing the celebration of marriage: civil authorities had become involved. They had organized their own

ceremonies, often in defiance of the Church's own practices. Reacting against these ways of celebrating marriage, the Church came to emphasize that only one ceremony, its own, really made the marriage; all other ceremonies should be disregarded since they do not make the marriage.

The evangelization of Africa took place during this period and the rules made to deal with situations in the West were transposed to Africa, so that many people came to think that the Church did not recognize the validity of African marriage ceremonies. This was not, in fact, the position of the Church: a marriage celebrated according to local customs, by which two unbaptized people were getting married, was considered legitimate and enjoyed the protection of the law. Christians, however, were in a different situation: they had to get married according to the rules of the Church as these rules existed elsewhere. It is in this context that Christian marriage came to be perceived as a punctual event, which disregarded the value of traditional ceremonies.

So, again, what makes marriage Christian here? The ceremony in Church? God certainly does not consider just this one moment. The ceremony is important, because it tells us that God has ratified what the spouses have done, not only right then, but all through the whole process which has brought them to the ceremony. But God has been with them at all stages and it is to be hoped that the bride and groom have involved him through their prayers and their common reflections, by which they progressively established the bond between them. It can well be that this should be more properly organized again, often by the Small Christian Communities.

### **Marriage is in view of Childbearing**

In African tradition, this aspect of marriage was often considered so important that it was taken as an absolute requirement. Therefore, without children there would be no marriage. This aspect considers marriage as a means to an end: marriage is not for its own sake, but for the children. This approach raises many difficult questions because the partner appears to be valued not for his or her own sake but for the children. Indeed, what would be the point of getting a partner if it was not for this? Companionship and friendship? These are provided by friends and age-mates, with whom we often have more in common than with our partner of the other sex: we go out with friends more easily than with our spouse. Friendship is found outside marriage.

African tradition saw childbearing as an obligation towards the family: through childbearing, the spouses were giving continuing life to their ancestors. There were other motivations, too. The woman confirms her status as mother and secures her access to goods which the husband should provide; she serves the interests of the lineage, acquires labour services and makes her old age secure. The man similarly reinforces his status and prestige in the community; he acquires wealth and security. Children are supposed to strengthen the bond between the partners; because both are interested in the growth and education of their children, it gives them a common concern and area of activity. But it does not always work out as it should. In traditional society, children did not equally belong to the family of either their father or mother and, therefore, different interests were involved. Sometimes also, different people were involved in decision-making concerning the children. And different perceptions existed as to the roles of man and woman in bringing up the children. Instead of bringing their parents together and strengthening the bond between them, children could in fact separate them.

Christian doctrine has always emphasized the importance of childbearing, which it considered as a response to God's command: "Go forth and multiply." At the same time, however, it praised virginity and continence. Eternal life no longer depends on the continuation of the family but is found in Christ. It is in Christ that our ancestors continue to live and find permanence. This does lead to a different sensitivity concerning childbearing. For the Church, even if the woman proves to be barren, the marriage cannot be dissolved: it remains valid and binding.

So, again, what makes marriage Christian? Childbearing? Indeed, this is how it used to be seen. Good Christian families were supposed to be families with many children. Christians who had many children expressed in this way their confidence in God: he would provide. In rural areas, when land was plentiful, this could indeed work. But today, with the increasing cost of education and land scarcity, it would be irresponsible to continue in the same way. The Church has recognized this and is today very involved in the promotion of responsible Parenthood. It is a different attitude; but, underlying it, there is the same basic conviction that conjugal love should be expanded to parental love. Love must be shared: if it remains closed upon itself it dries up, denying itself, never becoming what it should be. Husband and wife should not perpetuate their honeymoon but take up their responsibilities and share the gift of each other, as they have received

it, with their children and, beyond them, with their communities. Childbearing, in other words, does not stand by itself. It is not a matter of increasing the number of people on earth, or later, those in heaven. Childbearing is a response to the demands of love and should bring the spouses to greater love. Love for whom? The obvious answer is for the child. But it should also be for the partner and for God. And this is certainly not an automatic development of childbearing. It always remains a challenge, which has to be taken up time and again. The presence of the child does not, by itself, increase the presence of love. But it is certainly an opportunity for greater love and self-denial. This is all the more difficult because it is so easily assumed that our children are there for us. It usually dawns upon the parents, after a while, that it is the other way around: parents are there for their children. Thus, childbearing is found to be one of God's ways to make us discover the demands of love: we are not there for ourselves, but for others. This is, of course, a very basic Christian teaching but one that we never stop learning.

## **Conclusion**

So what makes marriage Christian? We have considered marriage in its communitarian dimension, as brought about through a process and as directed towards procreation. Each of these three aspects, we have found, is part of African tradition. Each also has solid roots in Christian doctrine, though in today's teaching of the Church, for various reasons, they are not all equally emphasized. So, are they what is needed to make marriage Christian?

As the Bishops reflect upon them, they call them "fundamental aspects of marriage," and this is how they should be understood: these are aspects, not makers of marriage. They provide a kind of framework in which marriage is lived and understood. But only a framework, which could be changed, as indeed it has been changed in the course of history and is being changed in today's ongoing process of transformation.

Yet, it is unlikely that these three aspects will disappear: they are too fundamental to the common understanding of marriage in Africa, and probably, in humankind. But they can be understood in different ways and refitted into different systems of marriage, either by people individually or by our societies today. They are indeed fundamental; that is, they lay the foundations upon which successful human marriages are built.

Does any of this change when we try to come to a Christian marriage? Obviously, these aspects of marriage are the common heritage of humankind. They cannot be abandoned, much less rejected. But how then can we make our marriage Christian? The answer to this question is quite simple: only Christ can make a marriage Christian. This means that to make our marriage Christian, we should live it in Christ in all its aspects. Let me explain this further.

To live all aspects of marriage in Christ means that we take them up, those described here and probably others as well, and make sense of them in a Christian perspective. To live the communitarian dimension of marriage in a Christian way means, essentially, that marriage must indeed be a deepening of love for the partner and a widening of love with the two families and with God's family, the Church. As a process, marriage will not be a state of life to which a church ceremony has given access, but a challenge to growth in communion with a chosen partner, as both also grow in communion with others and with God. Childbearing will be seen as the normal fruitfulness of a love that refuses to remain closed upon itself, and thus becomes a participation and sharing in God's creation, for its own and for his sake rather than for ourselves. The ceremony in Church is a sign of this internal reality and should not be separated from this reality.

To live marriage in all the aspects of Jesus' life means that marriage constitutes a specific context in which the common Christian vocation should be lived out, from incarnation to resurrection, passing through the way of the cross. All this is part of marriage. Marriage constitutes a privileged experience of God's love as given to us and accompanying us in the joys and pains of our daily life. What characterized the life of Jesus? That His whole life was lived in love. A love that nothing could disrupt. In marriage this is translated in the requirement of faithfulness. A love that also accepts the other as he/she is, as Christ loved his disciples despite all their failings. The very first quality of love, as Paul describes it, is patience (1 Cor 13:4). We tend to see it as passionate, as joyful, as uplifting; and it should be all this. But luckily for us, when God loves us, he is first of all patient. His love is absolute, not made conditional upon people's enduring qualities. And so should married love be. In the Church's teaching, this is translated in the requirement of uniqueness. It is all these that make marriage Christian.

# Toward A Spirituality For Parents

By Daniel J. Fitzpatrick, S.J.

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When young people get married, they think that they are about to enter into Paradise. They will be like Adam and Eve in the Garden; they will live in harmony with one another and with the world. As the *Book of Genesis* says, they will be able to be "*naked and unashamed*", something everyone hopes for. Every person longs to find a place and a person where he/she can be open and vulnerable and weak without a feeling of shame of who they are. And part of a couple's dream of Paradise includes the wish that, when they become parents, the family will all live together in harmony and love.

This image of Paradise is a powerful one. Indeed, it is one that all the slick marriage magazines capitalize on and reinforce. Nevertheless, shortly after marriage reality has a way of impinging itself upon a newly married couple. In living life they come to realize that they have not entered the Garden of Eden. Sooner or later one finds that the spouse can disappoint, the children do not always act like the joy they are supposed to be. Sorrow comes into every life; pain, hurt and even at times death make their way to the doorstep of the longed-for Paradise. Life and reality force people to let go of their romantic notion of family life as Paradise and to look for a more realistic symbol or image. Paradise is outside time and history. People need an image that speaks to them where they are in time and history.

In an article on the spirituality of community, Parker J. Palmer uses the image of Jesus and His apostles at the Last Supper as a model of what a true Christian community might look like (Parker J. Palmer, "*On Staying at the Table: A Spirituality of Christian Community*"; Page 15, 1984). I would like to use the image that Parker suggests and propose it as an image for family life and for a spirituality for parents.

The image of Jesus staying at table with His apostles affords us a much more realistic model for family life; it is an image, unlike that of Paradise which is an image of reality before time began, that has its foundation in



time and therefore conforms more readily to the reality of our everyday family life. Some prayer and reflection on the events of Jesus' last meal with His friends before He dies make this clear. Jesus has longed to eat this festive Paschal meal with His friends. "*I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you.*" He is about to give them His Body and Blood as Eucharist. He is about to ordain them His first priests. He is about to entrust to them the mission He has received from the Father, to bring the good news of God's love to all, to build and spread His Kingdom. What a picture-perfect moment! What an ideal!

But, what is the reality? Just like parents in a family, Jesus has to let go of His romantic ideal and deal with life as it is and not as He would wish it. This is the greatest moment in His life, the moment all the rest of His life has prepared Him for! And what happens? Jesus and His Apostles are there sharing table fellowship together - a symbol of friendship and love, of family, openness and hospitality — and the conversation turns from joy of being together to betrayal. "*Not I,*" they all claim. Yet one is indeed about to betray Him; another is about to deny Him, and all will scatter to the four corners when the pressure is put on them! Instead of giving Him support, they are in a rather heated argument about who is the greatest among them!

It is at that dramatic moment that Jesus stands up from the table. Silence comes over the room. This is a crucial moment. All eyes are on Jesus. What is He about to do? Is He about to walk out on them? Has even His frustration reached its limits? For three years they have been together day in and day out. For three years He has been teaching and instructing them in the ways of the Father's love. And they still haven't caught the message! Any reasonable person could come to the conclusion that enough is enough. Why doesn't Jesus just get up from the table and walk out the door. It's over; it's done! Enough!

Instead of throwing in the towel, however, Jesus picks up a towel, takes off His outer garment and kneels before them and starts to wash their feet! Not only does Jesus not walk out but also He gives Himself and entrusts Himself to His Apostles. He washes their feet and goes back to the table where He continues to pass the bread and the cup. "*This is my Body — This is the cup of my Blood.*" Jesus washes their feet and gives them the Eucharist as a sign that He is willing to give all for them. He will allow that the bread of His life be broken on the cross that He might give them the

Bread of Life. The seed must fall into the ground and die for it to give life. Jesus must be lifted up and thus draw all to Himself.

At the very moment when it would be reasonable for Jesus to give up, instead He stays at table with them and calls out the best that is in them. He encourages them and prays over them. *"Love one another as I have loved you."* *"I am the Vine, you are the branches."* *"Remain in me — make your home in me and I in you."* *"I no longer call you servants, I call you friends."* *"Father may they be one as you and I are one."* These are words of joy, hope and consolation.

Let's now transpose that scene of Jesus and the Apostles at table. Jesus takes the role of parent in that scene. Instead of Jesus, see yourself; instead of the apostles, see your family. The table of the Upper Room has now become your table.

Recall how often you have had the same desire as Jesus — to have the perfect meal with your loved ones. Maybe it was Christmas, or some other special feast; maybe it was a special birthday. And recall how it got all messed up — something got spilt, or burnt, or someone had a fight with someone else and the whole atmosphere at table was very cool. And yet, like Jesus, you stayed at table.

Or think of the ordinary meals in your home. So often parents are breaking up fights between siblings, trying to keep the peace when the children are giddy, or teasing one another, or nasty, or unkind. One child is upset because another got a bigger piece of meat or cake. Another child is upset because someone got more rice in their bowl. The examples are legion. And yet, as a parent there you are each night, staying at table.

We are looking here for a spirituality for parents. The image we are concentrating on is Jesus staying at table. It is a powerful image and I hope a consoling image for those of you who are parents. If you need someone to turn to, Jesus is there and knows your feelings, your frustration, your need for encouragement and strength. Turn to Him in prayer.

When parents pray over Jesus and His apostles at the Last Supper, they will find in it, depths of meaning and consolation that they never realized before. It is in prayer that parents can come to the Lord and truly ask for the grace to be able to stay at table. As Ignatius encourages us in all our

contemplation, we have to continually ask for the grace to trust in God rather than in ourselves. To be a Christian parent means to try and love as Jesus Himself loved. To be a Christian parent means to try and live out Christ's teaching in everyday life.

A member of my own Jesuit community once suggested to me that, if you read over the beatitudes, you could almost take them as a job description for parents:

***Blessed are the poor.*** If you are a parent these days, you can almost guarantee that you never seem to have enough to make ends meet. In addition, how poor in spirit parents can feel in the face of the great challenges that face them in raising their children in a world of contradictory values and changing ideals. The reality of being a parent brings with it the grace of humility.

***Blessed are the sorrowing.*** How often does a parent have to deal with the sorrows that life brings? These may be large or small, but they are the stuff of everyday life.

***Blessed are they who show mercy.*** A parent must be a forgiving person, over and over again. "*Not seven times, but seventy times seven times*". One of the great gifts that parents can give their children is to teach them how to forgive.

***Blessed are the single-hearted.*** Parents have to keep their eye single — to help their children come to maturity — so that they are able to stand on their own feet and take their place in society. Again, a daunting task in a rapidly changing world.

***Blessed are the peacemakers.*** How many fights and arguments have you broken up or tried to avert in your life as a parent? Parents spend half their time just trying to bring calm to troubled waters.

***Blessed are the persecuted; rejoice when insulted.*** How often do parents truly feel the pressure to conform from their children? This is especially true when dealing with teen-age children. Beneath every conversation/argument is the tacit assumption on the part of the child, especially the teen-ager, that the parent is preventing the child from doing what he/she wants to do or what

he/she sees others doing and wishes to do so as well. Parents might not call it persecution. Nevertheless, the pressure of being harassed is there.

To be a Christian parent, then, means that, precisely as a parent, you enter into the Paschal Mystery. By staying at table parents join with Jesus in His Passion, Death and Resurrection. Jesus calls us all in different ways to enter into and participate in the Paschal Mystery. By staying at table, by trying to be a good parent, parents are called to participate in the mystery of the Lord's dying and rising. Being a parent from the very outset is a combination of both sorrow and joy. When a woman is in labor, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world.

The birth process is a paradigm for life. To be a parent means pain, sorrow and a letting go - death of some sort. But it also means tremendous joy, hope, resurrection and life. The Lord calls parents to share the joy of His Resurrection as well as the sorrow of the Cross. It is in participating in this Paschal Mystery that parents get the grace to be the parents they are called to be. For, the result of the Paschal Mystery is that Jesus rises in new power, that He is Life itself and He shares that power and life with all by sending His Spirit. The Spirit transformed the apostles. That same Spirit is transforming us.

Up to this point in our consideration of Christian parenthood we have said nothing about Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Clearly this is an important consideration for us as members of Christian Life Community. Mary is not merely our intercessor but also our model (GP 9). In our consideration of Mary as parent one sentence suffices. No parent ever participated more fully in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection than His own mother, Mary.

A word of caution. Being a parent is not the only role you have to play in life. People need to put these words about being a parent in balance with the rest of their lives. There are other roles both within the home and beyond the home in the world of work and city or village life that must be attended to. One special role for many is that they are not only parents; they are also daughters and sons. For some, then, that well may mean taking care of their parents as well as their children. If the image/symbol

of Jesus staying at table at the Last Supper, has spoken to you, then I might suggest that you see the call to be a parent in a sacramental light. In this regard the sacraments of Matrimony and Eucharist are most important. One of the great graces of the sacrament of Matrimony is precisely the ability, the courage, and the grace to be able to keep staying at table. Amid all the difficulties and challenges that family life brings, the Spirit comes in the sacrament of Matrimony to help people stay faithful. Truly the Spirit encourages parents even in weakness; truly the Spirit allows parents to see the joys and graces their children bring to them. Truly it is the Spirit of hope given in the sacrament of Matrimony that encourages parents to fight off weariness and discouragement and to be able to stay at the table.

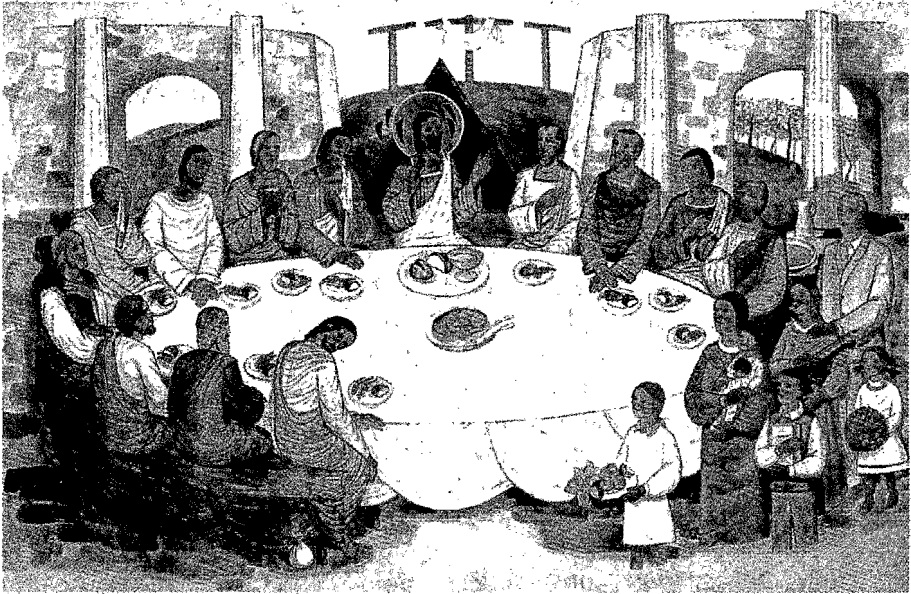
It is the hope of the Church that the Eucharist becomes the center of our lives. As CLC members we have taken this hope of the Church seriously. We are called to live the Eucharist in our everyday lives (GP 5 & 7). At the Eucharist, in a unique way, we are one with Christ and enter into the mystery of His Passion, Death and Resurrection. In the breaking of the bread, Jesus comes to us and gives us Himself as the Bread of Life that we, too, might be giving people who break the bread of our lives to give life to others. The Eucharist and the washing of the feet are intimately connected. Eucharist and service go together. And so, Eucharist and parenting go together. Being a parent is one beautiful way Christians have of living out the Eucharist in their daily routine. Because they come to the table of the Lord, parents have the grace to stay at the table of their lives and family. In the Eucharist Jesus nourishes them. In the Eucharist Jesus brings them the life of His Spirit, that Holy Spirit who bestows on them His gifts: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentle strength, perseverance. All the very things parents pray for themselves and for their children. All the very things parents need to be able to stay at table.

As members of CLC, we believe that "*Christ has sent us on mission ...to be His witnesses before all by our attitudes, words and actions.*" (GP 8) This mission can find no greater outlet than for parents who try each day to create a loving home where children can feel secure and grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God's love. It is a mission that the Lord gives to parents; it is a call to help prepare children to become caring, loving and Christ-like adults in a world that badly needs them.

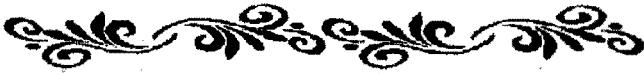
## For Further Reflection

As a parent, how do I participate in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' dying and rising:

- a) What are the joys I experience as a parent?
- b) What are the difficulties I experience as a parent?
- c) Do I find in the Eucharist a way to ground my parenting in the person of Jesus?



CLC RESPONSES to  
FAMILY LIFE and MISSION



*From* ARGENTINA

By María del Carmen Witry de Zingoni

*Lord, You called me  
to heal the broken-hearted,  
to cry out in the midst of the market-place  
that Love lives,  
to shake the dreamers from their slumber,  
to free the captive.  
I am soft wax in Your fingers,  
Do what You will with me.*

A hymn from LAUDES

The spirituality to which Our Lord has led me has been the essence and the mainstay of my life. From a distance of fifty years, I can look back with great clarity of vision and see how He, whose name is Holy, has been preparing a way for me, my way, and how He has poured out signs along this way, signs which today show His hand working! Praise God!

It seems rather strange that at ten years of age, I should have had a conscious acceptance of the path that I was undertaking. But, if I remember correctly, I did realise that I had a choice to make and that if I wanted to enter a Marian Congregation, the initial step before being able to do so would involve a commitment. I lived this out in a serious way and

it supported me and gave me a clear perspective on my life: the Lord was inviting me to a "common mission" and His mission would be mine and my mission would belong entirely to Him.

At the school chosen by my parents, the Sisters, who followed the Ignatian rule, used to offer us three days of Spiritual Exercises when we turned eleven and at the age of fifteen, these became residential. I made these Spiritual Exercises without missing any of them. When I was fourteen, my parents were killed in an accident. That same year, although I was a few months away from the official age for entry, I formally joined the Marian Congregation, first the one at school and then the alumnae one. This, then, became my way, the way that would give me light, support and courage for the fateful years that lay ahead of me. Together with the sudden and unexpected absence of both my parents, at one and the same time, there were added financial difficulties, family problems, and difficulties about housing, schooling and administrators. Two of my younger brothers were the main source of my worries and anxieties.

During the last years of my secondary education and in the years that followed it, I participated actively in the leading of the Marian Congregation. At the same time, the Lord showed Himself to me in a whole multitude of different faces, in hospitals, old people's homes, shelters, social clubs, and in "Lower Belgrano", a district which brought together all those who worked with horses in the city because it was so close to the racetrack, where we had a small dispensary and a recreation centre. Today we would call the latter group a true community. I still have really close female friends who are part of my home life and of my family.

I was always aware that I wanted a family of my own and I waited with trust that the Lord would show me, in His own time, my companion for life's journey. When I met Horacio, I had just finished the Spiritual Exercises and he experienced, through me, all that the Marian Congregation meant in the fifties. He knew that I was firmly attached to that particular "tree", and one which he "adopted" right from the very beginning.



He left his profession and we went to live some 300 km. from Buenos Aires in order to try to continue what the death of my parents had interrupted. A home had to be made for my brothers and sisters and things had to be arranged for their future. It was a difficult task. The house started to fill up with our own four oldest children: Sunday Mass, when time allowed, and letters were the only means we had to find out about how life in the Church was going. Whenever I went to Buenos Aires, I used to visit my girlfriends from the Marian Congregation, but my married life, my children and looking after my brothers and sisters who were still young, became my main priority; the time had come to live in the warmth of a home and to sow the seeds there.

In the seventies, we came back to live in Buenos Aires, once these commitments had been fulfilled. Vatican 11 had renewed our Church. We devoted ourselves to supporting the work of the schools in which our children were being educated; I was the one who did most of this, since Horacio's work meant that he had to spend some weekdays away from the city.

In the Argentina of those years, CLC had its patches of light and patches of darkness and my contact with the CLC nearest to me was limited to Marian Feasts and afternoons of Spiritual Exercises during Lent. In the nineties, CLC became more visible and started to develop with great vigour.

Horacio has lived through this journey with me and has shared all my experiences, bringing to them the invaluable male point of view which enriches my feminine one so much. He did not, however, believe that the CLC was his path in life. But, that has not prevented us from visiting together, on request, pre-communities of married couples and it has not stopped us from taking part in the meetings of the Communities in the Spirituality Centre where we gather together.

Four of my five children are married and we have eleven grandchildren, increasing to thirteen by the end of the year. Not one of them lives near us and so travelling many kilometres to see them and to share in their lives has become our new routine.



*Horacio, Carmen and two of their grandchildren*

I believe, and I say this in a true spirit of self-criticism. In our attempts to increase the growth and the formation of the communities, we have immersed ourselves in theology, biblical study and in the new interpretations of Ignatian Spirituality. We have not really served families, as far as matters, which really present a challenge to us, are concerned or could help, when ever-increasing crises have to be faced. Yes, I do believe that the communities, which meet together in the Spirituality Centre, have a profound sense of dialogue and experience in the meeting of generations. There are young people, young and old married couples, younger and much older women who share their faith and their lives. They are members of various groups and are supported by the prayers of all. We have tackled and more than just sporadically, those topics, which deeply concern families, who want some light to be shed on them in their moments of darkness and who also want to walk, supported by their groups, towards an encounter with the Lord of all history.

The invitation by "Progressio" to reflect upon these matters has brought to the surface a number of possibilities that once those have been shared, will lead us to future endeavours to solve them in a more concrete manner. Thanks for having made me aware of them!

## *From* CANADA

### A sacred space that helps chart life's course

By Shanti Zachariah



While gathering my thoughts about this piece on Christian Life Community (CLC), I ended up talking with my dad, Kuruvila Zachariah, about a seemingly unrelated scientific concept called “emergent properties.”

“Water; for example,” my dad says, “has hundreds of properties that are emergent properties of oxygen and hydrogen: its wetness; its beauty; its physiological rôle in our bodies. The two combinè to form something new.”

My father continues, “CLC has many emergent properties, as well, that we’re trying to understand and describe.”

I myself am an emergent property of our CLC group, and the vibrant, sometimes-rocky spiritual path it first set me on. To write of the spirituality CLC fostered in me seems to require a new language; it requires a new paradigm from that of the institutional church - or the rediscovery of a much older one.

I grew up a paint-by-numbers Catholic kid. I went to church every Sunday, received all the sacraments; I went to Catholic schools, said my prayers, and wore the uniform. I have grown to have a deep appreciation for the ritual and history of the church, but my faith has had to grow beyond the sometimes narrow and dogmatic institution, and that “home away from home” became our CLC group. CLC usually consists of small faith-sharing groups that use Ignatian theology, and in Canada, it was started by John English, a Jesuit priest, in the mid-1970s.

Of course I didn’t always feel this way. When three families and the Jesuit priest that make up our group came together - my family, the Zachariahs,

along with the Pelesos, the Sullivans and John English - I was 12 years old, and in a permanent state of crankiness, thanks to puberty. I wasn't open to this new development and remember feeling forced to have to go to the meetings and tolerate the rag-tag group of children there, the youngest being six-years-old. Over the next year or so, I slowly opened up to the group. I was becoming close friends with the other two girls in the group, and I was realizing our meetings held a particular warmth and liveliness; they seemed less and less like meetings to me and more like a simple gathering of good friends.

The uniqueness of our CLC group is the determination of the parents to involve the children in the faith-sharing process. All of us, adults and children, were to be spiritual brethren in this group.

It has only been recently, in the last couple of years, that I have come to understand that CLC has been a primal experience in my life; it is an experience that has caused a tectonic shift in my life. I have learned that one comes to adulthood through many paths, and CLC was a place where I began, as St. Paul writes, "to put away childish things."

As a young woman, a teenager, CLC became crucial for me. It became an important way for me to explore my faith, and to come to God, as I increasingly began to break away from the institutional church. In my mid-teens, I became aware of feminism, primarily through educating myself on the long history of sexism in the church.

I remember one particular meeting during this time. It was a holiday meeting, and we were all up at Loyola House retreat centre, in Guelph, Ontario. One afternoon we were sitting and talking in the main meeting room. I was railing against the church, its fathers and their misogyny. I was earnest and full of righteous anger, but how little I understood at the time of church history, doctrine and of feminism itself.

What I am thankful for is the calm with which my group accepted my awkward anger. They sat there with great patience and attentiveness, not necessarily in agreement of all I was saying, but in support of the important process that was happening for me. I was struggling, stumbling along towards some sort of intellectual maturity, and CLC provided both a foundation and a space for the process to flourish.

I am not the only one in the group who has come to depend upon our community. To me, my CLC group has become my adopted clan, my extended family. Families have become so mobile, especially in the New World, that such a clan can be rare. There is an inherent instability in the isolated nuclear family, as Camille Paglia, author of *Vamps and Tramps* points out: "Two parents alone cannot transmit all the wisdom of life to a child. Clan elders - grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins performed this function once." I've seen what such instability can do to some families of my friends and peers.



*Shanti and her CLC family*

In CLC, we too have had to face life head-on, and all the limitations of our nature. Perhaps the most painful period for our group occurred when Chris and John Sullivan separated and their marriage was threatened. Chris and John brought all their anger and confusion to the meetings, which for them as well, became a crucial space to work out their struggle. Both of them have said our group's support and stability aided them in their reconciliation. They were not alone in their struggle.

If prayer can be said to be a time when, through ritual, meditation and certain gestures, one invokes God in their lives - where one both invites God into their lives and implores God to intervene in some way, then our prayer times took on many forms. This came from the organic, inclusive flow of our meetings. We shared the Eucharist and formal prayers; but

even the most routine of activities became part of our faith sharing. It was in CLC that I first began to live the Ignatian maxim, "God is in everything." As I wrote earlier, if one thinks only within the paradigm a Sunday once-a-week sermon practice, this might seem strange. But to me, CLC gave me a spirituality rooted in the heart of Christianity. Christ himself ate, sang and danced with his friends; he wept with them in their tragedies, and celebrated heartily with them in their fortunes and good times. He partook fully in all the things we do upon this earth.

CLC gave me such a vital and earthy spirituality, one that grows out of all the experiences we as humans have on this earth - eating, playing, growing up in a family, friendship, intellectual training, falling in love, having babies, working - everything. It is an artery that feeds into all aspects of being, and has helped to chart my life course.

I didn't see it at the time, but my experience of CLC influenced even my leaving of it, where I went and why. For two years after high school, I was with the Jesuit Volunteers of Canada, a choice indicative of the faith and consciousness I grew to in CLC, which compelled me to be completely engaged in the world around me.

In the last few years I haven't seen much of our group, which itself has gone through a major shift with all of the children growing up and moving out. In the last six months, however, we've been trying to meet more regularly.

I understand a bit now, how important CLC was to John and Chris during their break-up and reconciliation. My own boyfriend and I will be dealing with some big changes in our relationship, and CLC has become a great foundation for me, in trying to gather strength and courage to meet the demands of such a love the best way I can. Now I, and some of the other children come to the group as adults, with many concerns that echo those of our parents. To me, it is a great thing that after all these years, I am still coming together with these people, and that we are still providing for each other that rare space of reflection, challenge and spiritual equality.

## *From* CHILE

### The Lay Person's Mission within the Family



*Carolina and Pablo*

One of the key questions that puzzle us human beings, whatever our origin, culture or creed, and that has been the philosophers' preoccupation for thousands of years is: why are we here, in this world?

Finding an answer to this question can never be overemphasized. Life has to have some deep meaning that will respond to why and what for. We know we are distinct and superior to other living forms that we know and our intuition tells us we transcend our stay on Earth. We wouldn't be capable of accepting seriously, without risking a depression or even madness, that our life was to have no meaning and serve no purpose whatsoever.

Yet, this seal of transcendence that we all carry indelibly imprinted deep down in our souls seems to fade into the rust of every-day life. The dictates of our present society and so many other aspects of modern times make us forget such a primary question.

If, as we say, every man and woman has a profound sense of mission within that is inherent to human beings, we have it all the more when we recognize ourselves as blessed by Faith. When we proclaim that we are the sons and daughters of our God, we become the heirs of His son Jesus

Christ and home to the Holy Spirit. Yet, life drives us away from the very special choice that God has made in us and for which we were called into this world.

What are we here for? We have been sent! This is the same as saying that we are in mission. Sometimes we are not fully aware of how fundamental this missionary attitude is. We even think that "being in mission" is an option, that we may accept or turn down, that it is more or less fashionable, that we may take or postpone it depending on the circumstances. It is worth questioning oneself... "What are we here for? What about our efforts, our tasks, our decisions, our sorrows and our successes? What moves them and what for?"

They cannot be left in the void, with no direction or purpose. Seemingly some of this happens when we stop wondering: what are we here for? Our life seems to lose its projection and meaning, as if life were only about feeling the moment and letting the days drift by. Some of this is present when we respond: "I'm the same old me".

Seriously speaking, there is no way out. We are here on this planet, in this country, in this city for a reason. It is to leave something for our human society, to leave a trace that is distinguishable together with those of all the People of God.

### ***Testimony***

I am Carolina Puga. I grew up with my 7 siblings within a family of harmony and stability, where I learned to share and tolerate. My family was my first school and marked many aspects of my life. It taught me to care and to not have prejudices towards other people. I studied in an all-girls school.

I stayed briefly in the School of Agronomics because I wanted to work on the farm and be a missionary outside Santiago. I found it was not my real vocation and became a schoolteacher instead. I began working in a small poor school where I felt very fulfilled because it gave me the chance to be in close contact with children who were hungry for love and dedication. Their modest families saw the schoolteacher as their model and advisor. I taught in many other schools, but I began to feel the need for a change in my life. Teaching was too time-consuming for a young mother. I had to



adjust my schedule to attend to my own family, especially in educating and accompanying my own children, so I took a new job.

I worked for a few years for the magazine "Mensaje" and then went to work for an association called Friends of the Luis Calvo Mackenna Children's Hospital (AMICAM). Although all my jobs have been linked to institutions with some social objective, it wasn't enough for me. So I sought, in the few hours I manage to put together without affecting my own family, to do some backup work for schools in underprivileged areas.

In this work, that poses so many contradictions, I discovered a world filled with drama and violence, so different from where I came from. I have seen the tremendous hardships of children who have received so little from our society. Beside all the pain and love that I experience, I am aware of all the gifts that I have received in my life, and it is because God needs me to be involved in building His reign here on earth. I have always been seeking the meaning of my life. My desire to give has been great but it has often encountered my lack of perseverance, my fears and my reluctance to give up my comfort. I have always prayed to God to help me become more generous and to give more to others especially to those in need.

### ***Testimony***

My name is Pablo Coloma. I grew up in a family of 5 brothers. I have very good memories of my childhood and I believe it gave me my first feelings of confidence in life. Of all the education I received in my family I am especially grateful for the warmth, the protection, the education in the faith and, most particularly, the respect for everybody. This education, based on my parents' example, taught me the immense dignity of human beings, which is so often stepped on by absurd racial and social discrimination. It always shocked and irritated me whenever other kids my age would speak demeaning of others, especially of the poorer.

The 12 years that I attended the San Ignacio School imprinted a very profound seal on me. There I had my earliest mature religious experiences and began learning, within the community I shared with my friends, the imperative of serving my brothers and sisters. After graduating from high school, I went on to engineering school without really knowing why or

what for. At that point, I certainly hadn't developed the sense of mission in my life and, like many youngsters, I just chose the career that looked less boring.

A few years later in a mission experience through Christian Life Community, it suddenly hit me: my life must have been created to serve others and this is where I should put my best efforts, and in every area. That revelation spurred my career. I decided to specialize in what seemed to provide the best possibilities for service. You cannot imagine how I dreamed and pictured myself, together with Carolina, in missions, living among the poor, sharing their fates. I don't know if I lacked the courage, or maybe it wasn't my real call. Those dreams would not come true in the way I had thought they might. However, this experience has been the basis of my vocation and my need to serve.

Today I work in a Savings & Loans cooperative that is exclusively dedicated to provide funding to very small business units. I also devote some time to CLC that has been one of my passions ever since my high school years.

When Carolina and I decided to marry, the Lord gave us His blessing with a deep unrest that translated into the question, so often asked: what does the Lord want from us as a couple? We had no doubt that our married life was destined to be something special. No accident had brought us together to just grow old and raise some children. There was something to be discovered, some opportunity, a clear awareness that the Lord was, in a way, creating a team to work for a purpose: Carola is stronger with Pablo than without him; Pablo is stronger with Carola than without her. To this day, whenever we prepare couples for their married lives we ask them, "Why are you getting married? Why does the Lord want you to be together? What are His projects with you?"

These questions have been the foundation of our marriage. We still recall them often and we strive, with all our flaws, to respond them. Our life together has been filled with changes, pain, successes, and hard decisions but believe us, all considered, that original question has always been present, sometimes as a burning flame, at times confirming and comforting. Here are some of the answers we have found thanks to our experiences.

As lay people forming a family, the mission that we have received is made up of a number of aspects. One big challenge has been to bring them all together and put them to work in one same direction.

One first reflection we wish to make is that we have always felt that forming a family is one enormous challenge that takes much hard work and perseverance. Fortunately we are always given the necessary grace to undertake the mission. However, we believe that it is important to be aware of the **mission-like nature of forming the family**. We say this because sometimes we feel that getting married and starting a family has become a kind of an obvious step to take in life at some pre-defined age, which deprives it of its nature of profound choice that must be founded on solid ground. Starting a family is not a spontaneous act that comes with time. Quite the contrary, it takes hard work, making decisions, choosing, giving up, being creative, and so forth. In our days, this serious option for the family is, in a way, against our culture. How often do we see today, for example, a man quitting his job to go find another one that will not interfere with his life as a parent and as a husband, at the expense of losing part of his salary and prestige? I believe it should be more common than it is, but the tendency is the opposite: many parents give up their family lives in order to meet the demands of their professions.

One of the greatest challenges in this family mission refers to the children. It is a multifaceted challenge that demands a lot of attention and insight and those we learn as we go along. Here are some of the aspects that have been most significant for us.

As parents we are entrusted with the mission to prepare our children for tomorrow. We dream of leaving a mark on them that will manifest itself when they become adults...like a seed that was planted with love and that carries a part of us. One aspect that is most important for us is to educate our kids in the faith and teaching them to pray seriously, grasping the true meaning of praying that goes beyond repeating some routines. We have tried to teach them to share in their prayers the things that are important in their lives and to incorporate, inasmuch as they can in their very young minds, the things for which every Christian must pray for: those who suffer, those who are living in error, solutions for the problems of the world, overcoming injustice, and so on. We have always conveyed to them that praying is a serious matter and for that we must show that it is a serious matter for us. We have seen them as children, with their little

children's spirits, how they have been able to establish a very deep relationship with the Lord. This is something that must be recognized.

Part of this formation in faith has consisted in transmitting the Gospels to them that we received for the first time from our own parents. We talk to them about Jesus our Lord, trying to link the Gospels' teachings with real life, especially with their own children's world: their school life, with all their conflicts, joys and doubts. A related passage can always be found that shows the Lord's approach to a comparable situation. In one way or another, the question so frequently asked by our Padre Hurtado comes up, "What would Jesus Christ do in my place?" We feel there can be no greater satisfaction than that of passing on our faith to our children and see how they receive it with their eyes wide open without missing one detail. It is a sacred task.

We most strongly stress with our children, Jesus' attitudes of love and generosity to everyone. We wish for them to see others as creations of God just like themselves, particularly those who seem so distant: people of other races, those who look different, the poorer, the ones who steal, those who harm others, and so on. All of them are people who deserve their dignity, our admiration, understanding, care, preoccupation and prayers. We desire that our children learn to be tolerant from early childhood and that they not cultivate prejudices that are so common in our society. We want them to feel that they were born to be happy by being generous to others.

We have also tried to give them a realistic image of the world around them, adequate for their little minds, but still real. We have told them of the world where people suffer, live in conflict, where injustices exist but is still a beautiful world filled with wonderful things. We feel that it is good to prepare them to live in a world that truly needs them to right so many wrongs. It is only natural for us as parents to protect our kids from danger and to provide them with a world where they can feel confident. But there is the risk of shutting them out and denying them the possibility to open up to multiple realities that they must get to know little by little. We feel that some risk has to be taken and try to show them that some situations that seem threatening conceal an opportunity to discover new and good things.

One concrete example of this is the fear that we feel when our kids are in contact with realities of social poverty. We are afraid that something bad

will happen to them but generally it is nothing but our prejudices, our insecurities and distrust talking. We must fight those attitudes that may create prejudices in them only because of ignorance.

All of the above, if not backed by our good example may be of no good or even is damaging. It is no easy task because we are weak and flawed, and children are very perceptive. But it is important, because we believe that throughout their lives children will embrace their parent's honest attitudes. If we put our mouths in one place and our lives in another, they will most likely obey but they will not trust. This is a way of teaching them to lie, to not speak out their feelings, to create false images out of convenience, to be dishonest. For example, if we say that violence is no good and they see violent attitudes in us, they will be confused. If we lecture them on the importance of being respectful with everybody regardless of their condition, but at the same time we are rude to the nanny, and overlook their rude behavior towards her, they will not believe us. If we speak of tolerance but we speak with irreconcilable hatred of our adversaries, they will not trust us. The list of examples can go on and on, as each one of you must know well.

We feel our family is a community. It is one that does not exist for and by itself but as a source of good to give to others. We, as parents, as we've already mentioned, have our own jobs and activities outside the home and these are a way of being of service. We become enriched as individuals and in a way we respond to the question of why we have been placed in the world. We believe in the importance of living our mission in an integrated way: the mission and all the good we can give are not to be limited either to our family or to the outside, but they must cover each and every aspect of our lives.

Our experience as lay people and formers of a family has been a wonderful one, and we also wish to give testimony of the joy we feel with it. The Lord has blessed us abundantly along the way. We strongly believe in the family and its enormous capacity to irradiate the goodness and faithfulness of God and to form men and women that are open to the world and eager to work towards making it a better place.

## *From* EGYPT

### Between two "YESES".

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My name is Madeleine and, with my husband, have been a member of CLC Egypt for 17 years, having joined in the same year as our marriage. In fact, our love story had begun three years before our marriage. We were not from the same region, but from the same country. I had completed my studies in French language and literature and had started to work at a tourist agency. He was in his final year at a polytechnical school and worked during the summer holidays so that we could save some money and get married. As soon as we were married, he began his military service.

Despite help from our parents, initially our financial situation was very weak. We had to rent an apartment in a working-class area. It was on the fourth floor, without a lift, a place that the sun never found its way in to. The house was not well built and the noise from the street was incessant. The worst thing was that running water was only available between 9.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. Every day we had to make sure we had stored enough water to get us through until the following day. We had three children in the first four years of our marriage, due primarily to my confidence in the Billings method of ovulation, whereas my husband insisted that I use artificial methods. In the east, young married couples are impatient because they do not know one another beforehand. After the birth of our second child, a boy, I had to resign from work. It was very difficult to leave the children for someone else to look after and I was too sensitive to put them in a day-care when they were so young.

At that time my husband had just completed his military service and had been taken on at a construction site as a mechanical engineer. He did not earn very much and his working hours were long. He came home late every day except when he had a day off. Of course, when he came in he was very tired and found the apartment in a mess. The children had upset everything and there was a pile of dirty washing in the bathroom, which was too small. We couldn't buy disposable nappies for the children every

day, so I used cotton nappies that are cheap and washable, but it was very tiring. I didn't have an automatic washing machine, just a manual one. I couldn't manage to prepare a fresh meal for him every day because the children took all my energy and all my time and I ended up tired and torn between two sets of demands. I remembered the line from scripture "*The Son of Man had nowhere to lay his head*".

My husband, who dreamed of a quiet life, a tidy apartment, a meal ready for him and a loving wife waiting for him, was shocked. His love for me seemed conditioned by these things. There is an Egyptian proverb that says, "*When misery comes through the door, love flies out of the window*". We live in a multi-cultural society, with a majority of Muslims and Christians of every denomination. At work, my husband was virtually the only Christian and his colleagues easily influenced him in negative ways. I began to feel abandoned. I experienced so much pain, so much obscurity, so much suffering that sometimes I doubted, I despaired of myself and lost awareness of myself. Who am I?

A year later my husband suggested leaving for one of the countries in the Arab Gulf. Perhaps, he would find a better-paid job there. I became pregnant for the third time. A few months after he left, he called me to ask me to choose between him and the new baby. This was a blow I hadn't expected. I poured out my warmest tears to Jesus, asking him with all my strength to spare me this temptation. And Jesus was good to me. The day that I felt myself being carried along towards abortion, my husband called his parents to ask for news. His mother spoke to him, telling him that every family can go through difficult times and they, themselves, had experienced that once. But, that had not prevented them from being well brought up and from becoming highly cultivated, doctors, engineers and teachers, and that it is the Good Lord who feeds His children and not people. Her words persuaded him to abandon his decision.

I would like to stress here the importance of being in a group of CLC and having the same spiritual guide as my husband, who also happened to be our group guide. The group played a fundamental support role in our lives and, during this phase even though it was a little reserved it existed. At this time, I did not have a spiritual guide and, as I am not the type of person

who can complain even to my parents, I was living a life of solitude and disappointment.

A few months later, my husband found he would no longer stand the atmosphere where he was and he returned home. In September, when my sister got married in Paris, France, we went. It also coincided with the 9<sup>th</sup> International Congress of the Family. During the Congress, a film about abortion was shown. I saw in my husband's eyes a feeling of remorse and thanks to God for not having abandoned us to this temptation. We also visited Lourdes where I had a desire to wash my soul and throw off my burdens and thank God for the evil we had been spared. I went down into the water blessed by the Virgin and I baptised by third baby before it was born and asked for the grace of confidence and courage.

Just before Christmas, the baby was born in the car on the way to the hospital. At that moment my husband found himself in front of the clinic of his doctor friend whom he had not seen for a long time and who had come by chance to fetch some books for the Congress he was attending. My husband only realised that day that he was a gynaecologist. The Good Lord really did give us a sign of His presence and His extraordinary love, to put our confidence in him.

After five years, with the help of the family, my husband started up a private project in the field of water purification. We imported a machine for this, and consequently our financial situation began to improve. We moved to a modern district. The price of this apartment was amazing compared with those in the same building and to this day we still do not know what it was other than Providence. That was the same year that our eldest child was to start school. So that she could go to the Catholic school we had planned for her, we had to live in the same zone as the school. This was precisely the zone where our new apartment was.

The difficulties weren't over yet. On the contrary things got worse, and it was the children who helped me bear all sorts of heavy burdens. I can call this first phase of our life 'the seven lean cows'. During this time, I prayed little but I talked to Jesus a lot, sometimes out loud and when I couldn't do one or the other, I listened to songs that consoled me.



In nine years I hadn't been on a single retreat and it was time. My spiritual guide advised me to do it. I began my retreat, weighed down by care, seeking a panacea, unable to pray or meditate. So I slept for a whole day and then I began wearily. The days that followed were better and I felt that I was part of Jesus' sufferings in His love for ungrateful humanity. Jesus consoled me, reassured me and showed me His tenderness, looking neither at my weaknesses or my sins, but loving me. I came away from the retreat improved and was able to take up my life again more calmly.

There were many disagreements between my husband and I about how to bring up the children, each of us wanting to do it our own way. The children were growing up and beginning to understand and to ask questions. They sensed the slightest misunderstanding, even if we tried to conceal it, but I only ever had indirect answers that did not convince them.

In one of the following years, we attended a Training Course for Guides in Cairo where we followed psychological methodological exercises to get to know others and ourselves better. I was surprised when I compared my replies with those of my husband and I couldn't find any points in common. The only one was faith in God, and here too, there was a difference. This discovery of annoying differences between our two characters was a two-edged sword. Was I going to live the rest of my life like this? Neither of us is better than the other but our characters have absolutely nothing in common. That was a fact and we had to accept it but this did not bring me peace of mind. On the contrary, each time I was hurt, I thought that this was going to last all my life, and I began to turn against God, asking Him what I had done to pay so dearly. Often, I felt that our spiritual guide suffered because of our attitudes but he never wearied. On the contrary, he followed us very closely and asked us to accept ourselves as we are, praying for us a great deal.

The time for the retreat arrived and, to tell the truth, I was awaiting it impatiently because it was my only remedy. This time I asked God to put an end to my suffering and to take the cup away from me. This was Jesus' reply, tenderly given, *"No, I will give you the power to accept your Cross but say 'yes', as my mother did, so that I can become incarnate in your life."* My reply to Jesus was bitter tears. What else did He have in store for me? I gave

in to His dear request with a weary "YES", despite my reticence. I began to understand that I had to accept crucifixion myself, as a servant no greater than Jesus. What grief to accept the cross voluntarily, but in exchange Jesus gave me courage and serenity. From then on He and I became intimate friends. I became accustomed to telling Him everything. I prayed every day, I meditated and from time to time, I examined my conscience and I set aside a longer period once a week to spend with Him, as if someone dear was going to visit me. Gradually, I felt that I was starting out along a new path with Him. Jesus gave me the grace to look at things differently and not to see things from a sentimental point of view, but from an intellectual point of view, as that makes judgement and reactions more balanced. I began to change and to accept things as they are without living in a dream. My attitude towards the vicissitudes of life changed.

After this retreat, I doubled my preliminary commitment. A surprise appeared on the horizon and nine years after my third child was born, that is in the twelfth year of marriage, I was pregnant again. This time we experienced a new sensation, the joy of expecting a baby! Our three children were very enthusiastic and I had not believed that after all this time I would be able to start bringing up a baby again. It was a gift from Jesus and Mary and we called her Marie. She was as quiet as an angel and she brought happiness with her. A new life was born among us. We helped one another, we spoke softly so that she wouldn't wake up and an unexpected sense of family union appeared spontaneously. We all waited for her to wake up and rushed to look after her. It was an indescribable joy to watch her take her first steps, to see her first teeth come through and to hear her first words. A little later, she surprised us as we saw her reconcile sorrow or chide the one who was in the wrong with her gentle words. We were ashamed to say nasty things to one another in front of her or to treat one another badly. In fact, we had the feeling that it was the little Jesus who had come to live among us and if we forgot to pray before eating she reminded us, reciting the prayer. Her smile aroused in us the tenderness that slumbered beneath the ashes of habit. She made our hearts grow and in that sense she taught us. We felt that she played the part of a prophet.

Three years later I attended the 13th World Assembly of CLC in Brazil, where I experienced the grace of the disciples of Jesus. I felt the Spirit that

pervaded everyone and guided us towards one goal. I tasted the joy of living in a group united by prayer even though we did not know one another beforehand. We understood one another, indicative of the presence of Jesus who was the centre and the heart of this Assembly.

Two years later I went on my fourth retreat. I loved a song that went: "*My heart is in haste to see you, Oh! Face of Jesus, will I see you?*" Jesus taught me that to see Him I have to turn and look at my neighbour. It is not enough simply to pray or meditate. The important thing is to go and meet other people, starting with those closest to us. And there, I was questioned. I discovered that loving is the most difficult commandment. I had to overcome my egoism and set aside my carefully constructed dignity and that requires true humility.

On the other hand, my husband had set out along a spiritual path with the help of our guide who encouraged him a great deal, and that had changed him a lot. He didn't go on retreats at the same time as me because of the need to care for the children. As he was head of the Episcopal Committee of Catholic Youth, he was always busy with the preparations for each year's congress. That gave him a tremendous spiritual ardour.

I would like to refer to one very important thing, and that is the fact of temptations from the evil one as regards to people who are struggling spiritually. He does not leave them in peace, but tries with all his strength to distance them from their source of grace that is Jesus. That is what happened with us. He pushed us towards a vicious circle, choosing just the right moments, using our weak points to destroy any action of grace. The time when I was thirsting for love, feeling loneliness and indifference, the spirit of evil brought before me a friend whom I had esteemed in the past and who followed me everywhere to tempt me. I ran to my guide and unfortunately he was away and I had to deal with the experience alone. I was panic-stricken and at the same time frightened. It was too hard to resist and I cried a lot, not knowing what to do. I had learned, on Ignatian retreats, that it is important to keep an eye on the intrigues of the spirit and that helped me not to allow myself to be carried away by illusions. Jesus was there as usual and He gave me the strength to resist and say "no" to sin. A little later my guide returned and supported me enormously.

It was not an easy year, bringing torments and separation. But the victory was a thousand times sweeter than a passing caprice that could have destroyed my entire life. At my fifth retreat last year, Jesus was the Lord for me. Right from the first day He taught me not to forecast consequences but not to remain passive, not to be afraid to love even if there is a risk and always to trust Him, particularly at the darkest moments. However, the main thing was not to keep anything to myself and to live from day to day. I did not want to understand this last request and I did as the rich man did. I left, sad, and that upset me a lot.

Reading the life of the Young Saints helped me a great deal to live this retreat and encouraged me to firmly make the decision to follow the path of Jesus to the end, giving myself up to His will and His all-embracing love. Another feeling arose, that of praying for everyone, for all those who I have known in my life, from the furthest away to the closest, and even for those who have no one to pray for them. I want to say that I am not the type of person who usually does that. I pray, yes, but my memory is not good enough to pray for everyone and I lack the patience. Yet, I have a spontaneous feeling of responsibility towards all of humanity, particularly homes and children.

As I have already mentioned, my husband had Episcopal responsibilities and I was able to help him with the preparations for the celebrations organised for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, which took place before last Christmas. Last February, when Pope John Paul II visited Egypt, my husband was again responsible for arrangements and meetings with others. We were chosen to read the universal prayer for married couples and the family at the formal mass. Even though we are a poor example to present this, God asked us, a weak couple, living in flesh and blood, forgiven sinners, to be the sign of His love for the family in particular.

To reply to the great love of Jesus, last March I made my permanent commitment and I said my second "Yes", but this time with total conviction in His power that I cannot deny. I have perceived His goodwill throughout my life and see that my life is not made for me to remain enclosed within the narrow horizons of my concerns, but to tell everyone that Jesus is alive and living among us. He is not a character in stories of days gone by, but here, now, close to us in the events of our daily life. He

has ears that listen to the slightest groans. He has a heart that burns with love. He has hands that are tirelessly tender. He is love. He is our strength, our support and our hope.

Consequently, I will come to the third point in **Our Common Mission**: *We are committed to living marriage and family life in a discerning way in order to integrate them with our faith so as to live these dimensions fully as a vocation of the Lord in the church.*

I now come to my most recent retreat, which was in September. The Good Lord gave me a sign of His love and asked me to pass it on to everyone, this humble love that does not judge and does not wait for a response. This love is full of goodness and forgiveness. "*Learn from me. I am gentle and humble of heart,*" Jesus said because he wants love and not sacrifice. I want to conclude that where there is suffering, grace abounds. The lack of conjugal love has not deprived us of the love of Jesus. On the contrary, it has doubled it. With His support, we have been able to accept the sacrifices that have arisen in our lives. They took on new values and, despite all our faults, we were supremely rewarded in having four children. These children, who came into the world without preparation, and by chance, are without doubt the most marvellous gift of our marriage and it is God who wanted them before us, but through our weaknesses. It is they who today contribute towards our happiness, who reveal to us the capacity we have in us to love.

What joy it is to talk to them, to teach them life, to pass on to them the love of Jesus, to answer their questions, to give them a good education by following them every day in the formation of all the virtues, instilling in them fundamental values such as strength of mind, to teach them a sense of modesty, chastity and austerity and to make them recognise the value that is in us so that we can use it properly later on, to make them aware of the problems of the world and to fight against the injustices of their society now. Since their childhood, we have brought them to church with us. They have become accustomed to attending Mass on Sunday, because we have insisted on being present as a family. This has united us to one another and brings a special grace

I thank Jesus who has brought me thus far, because without Him I do not know what I could be.

## *From* EGYPT

### The Holy Families

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We have named our CLC group the Holy Families, because we are five married couples who did not know one another before. Lucy, secretary at Air France, and Raouf, professor of Science, were the first to start; they have been members for 20 years now. Then Salva, secretary at the British Embassy, and Makram, architectural engineer joined (for 18 years — they immigrated to Canada about 10 years ago). Their departure shook us at the beginning but we overcame that by prayer and the encouragement of our guide. Next to join us were Madeleine, assistant salesperson at Bayer, and Kamil, mechanical engineer (17 years). Others include Dina, pharmacist, and Raafat, agricultural engineer, (16 years), Samira, mother, and Wafik, professor of Math (15 years) and finally Georgette, professor of English, and Nadi, assistant to the director general of TITE computer sector, who joined us three years ago.

In between, there were some couples who joined and left because they felt that CLC was not their vocation. Lastly, we had a divorced member with a child. At first we hesitated to accept her because we were all couples and there was no common denominator. However, at her insistence she was accepted and that encouraged her and sustained her during her difficulties. Once the subject of reconciliation came up; she refused to consider it and left the group after having been a part of it for three years.

Our ages, social life and culture are fairly similar. We are Catholics of different rites and orthodoxies and live in the same area. Most of us belonged to different spiritual movements before joining CLC but none of us belonged to MEJ (Mouvement Eucharistique Jeunesse). At present Georgette, Raouf and Kamil work in the Catholic Episcopal Committee carrying out various activities. Father Fadel Sidarous, a Jesuit priest, has been our spiritual guide since the beginning but unfortunately, he had to withdraw from this task this year since, after a heart operation his cardiologist counseled him to lessen his activities.

Our meetings have always been held monthly because we all have many family and professional responsibilities but we are committed to being present at each meeting. We take turns hosting the meetings. Our children were born in the same years. When they were smaller, we brought them to the meetings with us and they also made up a junior group without realizing it. Now they are in MEJ in their schools.

Our meetings begin with a short prayer or a spontaneous song. The subject is often chosen according to our needs and prepared in advance. Otherwise, we find that the reunion does not succeed and turns into just idle chatter. When a couple want to share something special — conjugal problems, problems with a child, problems of choice or something else — they ask to do so. We allow time during the meeting to bring up the subject and the following meeting becomes a time of discernment. When the problem is serious, it is necessary that we follow through by telephone calls between the two meetings, or we go to visit. This can continue for one or two meetings depending on the need. At times, it is not the couple that asks but the group that presents the needs of the couple, then a suggestion of mediation is proposed to the couple and in general is accepted.

We study before coming to the meeting so that we can more clearly share our reflections, our ideas and also our life, always by means of an extract from the gospel or from a spiritual article. Sometimes after the period of sharing, Fr. Fadel explains extracts from Ignatian spirituality. Then it is time for Mass. We bring in the children to participate with us. Fr. Fadel encourages them to share their prayers, thanksgivings, requests, praise etc. This will be useful later in their life in MEJ.

We feel that we are privileged because the sharing of the Eucharist has an important effect on our lives and our mutual relationships. After mass it is the “agape”: our evening ends with supper. Each couple brings food so that there are not too many preparations for the couple in whose home the meeting is held, especially being that we are a large number when we count all the children. We celebrate as we eat together: we share our stories of the month just passed, our news and our projects. It is a great joy for us and that gives sense and a deep feeling of our CLC family life.

Two presidents of the National CLC came from our group: Makram (who emigrated) and Raouf. It has also provided a vice-president, Kamil, and two spiritual guides: Raouf and Madeleine who were also delegates of CLC Egypt to the 13th CLC World Assembly in Itaici.

During our first years we elected the animator. Now either we take turns animating or whoever is most available animates. Ordinarily we take notes on the meetings so that we can make a real evaluation at the end of the year. At present only four couples meet as a fifth couple is going through some difficulties but we have continued our relationship with them up to the present. We hope that they will return again one day.

As for our spiritual life, our group makes retreats together and as we are the oldest we help in the sessions of the formation of guides. We have noted that the young CLC members often consider us as models, so much so that at one of the Congresses we held a meeting in front of the other members to show them how we discuss a given subject.

Last year, on the feast of St. Ignatius and in the presence of Fr. Kolvenbach, who was visiting Cairo, about 20 members of the National CLC made their preliminary commitment. Among those was Raouf, for the third time, Kamil for the second time and Georgette and Nadi for the first time. These latter years, our group has felt a kind of slowness and monotony, and needs to find new means for renewal in order to move on.

The CLC helps us to live the challenges that exist in Egypt: first of all, although Christianity is in the minority, it is divided into numerous rites; we are working for ecumenism. Secondly, we live in a hostile Moslem milieu that pushes us to deepen our witness. Thirdly, we are plunged into materialism, above all in Cairo, and CLC gives us a new dimension for putting our principles into practice.



## *From* FRANCE

### Marrying and Having a Family, A Wonderful 'Adventure'

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*Pierre is 53 years old. He was born in Bordeaux, into a family of lawyers with two children. He studied engineering. After holding several positions, Pierre took over a small business manufacturing special machines for the wine-producing industry.*

*Claire, who is 51 years of age, was born in Reims into a farming family with six children and trained as a social worker. After having several positions in social services and training, Claire took up the responsibility for an association providing home assistance for the elderly and disabled people.*

At the request of the CLC France, we are sharing with you part, albeit an incomplete and modest part, of our family life over the past thirty years. During our last holidays we attempted to do this, with humility to look back over our experience and the fruit of our particular reality. This reviewing of our life, this time spent together, this time that was given, has enabled us to give thanks for the graces received. Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

We have been married since 1972 and we have six children:

- The eldest, Marie, was still born.
- Timothée, aged 26, spent two years in Warsaw and now works as a production engineer
- Caroline, aged 23, spent one academic year in Scotland and is now completing her 6<sup>th</sup> year of architecture.
- Baptiste, aged 20, is in Helsinki for his Law degree.
- Pauline, aged 16, is in first year.
- Foucauld, aged 13, is in third year.

In order to share with you our joys, our difficulties and the choices we have made, we are going to follow the various contexts of our life. This corresponds to the document from the Christian Life Community, "Our Common Mission".

## ***Television - Communication***

It is clear that it is not possible in the modern world, to effectively function without a personal computer and modern communication means (the Internet, etc.). For parents and children alike, television is the prime example of being confronted with freedom of choice. It is a communication tool that offers:

- Extraordinary contributions
- Passive reception of degrading images
- Relaxation
- Programmes serving as a basis for family discussions
- Communication and opening up to different worlds.

There is nothing but long explanations on platitudes and the artificial side of soap operas with stereotyped developments that go on forever! Often we view families who engage in nothing but quarrels and bad moods. But I believe that the thought that goes into making this choice of what to view is of paramount importance both for children and parents.

I have often asked my family and myself these questions:

- Does this make you grow up?
- Does this enable you to think, to develop?
- What does this have to offer you?
- How do you feel about this?
- Are you satisfied interiorly with your choice?

But there is much pleasure in watching together, as a family, a serious programme that can serve as a base for a good exchange or a relaxing film that puts everyone in a good mood.

Finally, I believe it is important to stress writing down and expressing your feelings, to be able to detail the positive or negative points in a choice that is to be made.

## ***Family life and the Christian Life Community***

It is important to explain to the entire family what CLC is and what it has to offer us. I always remember the lack of explanations from my mother, on

what she got from and could bring to others, from her role and responsibilities in a Catholic Action movement. Similarly, my father never told us why he did not take part in it.

For us, the CLC gave us the opportunity to open our family to the universal dimension by means of various regional and national meetings that have marked our path. Despite the costs and the additional burden of such events, we have always attached great importance to the need of the children taking part in regional weekends, retreats or training sessions. This gives them the chance to experience quiet time, praying, meeting others and sharing with others, as well.

### ***Spirituality – Prayer***

How can you set aside time for prayer and quiet in a family, social and professional life that includes five children? This regularly compels us to make choices, to free ourselves to follow our mission, to choose between relationships with friends, commitments, professional activities, family, relaxation, etc. One has to be careful not to be exclusive, and to keep in mind the need to be available and for spontaneity.

Personally, during my working day, I try to set aside a time for quiet prayer and recollection during the lunch hour. Claire is more at ease in the morning when she first awakes, before her day begins. We regularly try to take time for a longer silence, either alone or as a couple, without the children, at home or outside of the home.

We share our faith and our questioning with our children. That seems natural to us. Our older children have moved away somewhat from the regular Sunday Eucharist and sacraments. They like to gather together with others, to have places of sharing. There is an urgent need for us as a Church to develop other means of celebrating and proclaiming the Gospel that will enable young people to find their place.

### ***Grandparents***

For over twenty years now, we have been lucky enough to live close to my parents. Pierre's parents lived in a different town and they died at a much younger age. The closeness with my parents meant that we quickly had to establish our position as adults regarding parenting and fully assume our responsibilities. This self-affirmation did not prevent in-depth exchanges.

It is a blessing for our children, who receive from their grandparents an experience of life that differs from our own. When they were small, there was a good deal of affection and tenderness from their grandparents. As they moved into adolescence and grew older, they exchanged views and questions a great deal. This closeness has created genuine relationships and enabled the children to integrate into the continuity of the family.

The grandparents do not bear the material cost of the children, nor are they responsible for them, but they enjoy the good side. Unexpected visits, shared meals and a welcome from people with diverse views give the children additional options.

### ***Testimony of François, Claire's father***

We have 21 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. My wife died peacefully a year after we had celebrated our sixtieth wedding anniversary on 12 July 1998. Today I would like to talk just about my grandchildren, who have been very close to us. For the past twenty years they have lived 40 metres from our home. It is impossible to talk about all of them here, but we love them all, as we love our own children.

Such closeness requires a great deal of effort on both sides in being sensitive, being tactful and being considerate, respecting the lifestyle of each individual. Even bearing in minds the inevitable occasional clashes and in which we come to say: "every day, I begin again", the results are surprisingly positive.

This family, of parents and five children, has given us a great deal. Everyone feels at home with them. The exchanges, conversations, books, newspaper articles, were the object of calm interchange with each one. Grandparents have time ... more time than parents, who have to cope with their working lives. I believe, that in addition to the happiness that these five grandchildren have brought us, perhaps we have given them something. I believe this because, when my wife died, they all showed their great attachment to her and since I have been alone they understand my sorrow. Yes, I believe that if we really seek to love, if we look especially only at the good in everyone, it is possible to live with grandparents, parents and grandchildren, all are very close together, and that is a great blessing.

## *Unemployment*

Our family went through a difficult period when we experienced a long period of unemployment in the early 1990s. Two years had passed between the end of my contract with the company I had left and the taking over of the company I now run. It was a period of uncertainty, doubt, choices, questioning and resentment. Even if it is a difficult thing to do and demands a good dose of humility, I tried to clearly explain my professional situation with everyone that I met. It is a sign of success when one is able to bounce back later on in life. Support, information and communication between couples and among families are even more important at times like these. It was a time when I prayed a lot and benefited from spiritual support.

Among other things, just after I was made redundant, a Jesuit friend asked us to help with a youth camp at Pied Barret in Ardèche. We went with the two youngest children. It was a break that gave me the opportunity to get on my feet again.

## *Economy*

We are both aware that we are privileged in today's world because we were born into a family that is relatively financially comfortable, because of the education we received and because of our social situation.

Being responsible for ensuring that a company employing 45 people goes well and given the uncertainties of the future, I find I am becoming more cautious and sometimes stricter regarding wage claims from the staff. My aim is not to earn as much money as possible, but to ensure the future of the company, to ensure a paid salary to all staff members and the usual remuneration for the risk taken by the shareholders.

From a more general point of view, I am convinced that everyone must have a fair wage to live on. This is gradually being done and maybe has taken place in the richer countries. In other countries it is being achieved thanks to family solidarity. I am convinced that a person's wages should be adequate so as to enable each man and each woman to find their place in our developed societies. Everyone must be able to continue to play a role in society and in the family, to educate and to pass on the fundamental values of life.

We talk about this in our family.

### ***Women's work***

Since our engagement, the question of my work has come up regularly in the light of various events that have caused us to question our married and family life. Each time that this issue has been discerned (on seven or eight occasions), it has always seemed clear to me that my first duty was to Pierre and the children, but also that I had a mission in the world through my professional life.

My work as a social worker covers a variety of areas: the family, elderly people, the sick and the disabled. All this has given the family an opening through which to view society and the questions that have arisen from them. It has given them the opportunity to come into contact with various social milieus, with different people who help us to personally grow.

On several occasions I have called upon my family to help by welcoming others in our home, by baby-sitting, by helping people to move, by helping with schoolwork, etc. I must say that the response to my various appeals has always been positive, both from Pierre and the children.

The issue of the work of women, of mothers, comes up regularly. For thirty years, I have always worked more or less full or part-time. When the children were younger, an appropriate organisation taking in their age, number of children, and our various commitments made it possible for us to balance family life and professional life fairly easily.

Today, doing social work that carries responsibility is extremely demanding and so the balance is more fragile. Adolescent and adult children are demanding and being present to the moment: they ask for things, needing our immediate attention. We have to be available to them. So, when you come home from work after a busy day spent in an atmosphere of difficult relationships and a child asks your opinion on a choice being considered, or questions you, it is impossible to put it off until later. Or the children are there, on holiday, with friends, with the house all topsy-turvy and nothing is ready – my somewhat unyielding nature makes it difficult for me to be welcoming and good humoured all the time. Parents have their limits ...

## ***Family and married life***

At the moment our family ranges in age from 13 to 26, so you have to 'juggle' a lot. It is fascinating and exhausting. Mutually they have things to offer but they do disrupt us. The young ones find it difficult to stop for a while, to think or to take time. They are swept along by events. They live for the moment. Our concern is to help them to live, to affirm that they are loved, to make decisions, large or small, calmly to give them a taste of life.

Humour, distance, cheerfulness, dialogue, pardon, reconciliation ... all these are needed. You have to adjust constantly and to talk as a couple. Learning when to keep silent and when to talk, when to take risks, when and how to trust that the Lord is present. There is no recipe. It's complex. Family life is an adventure, a wonderful adventure and we, as parents, have our limits and the children know this. As a married couple, there is a need to experience an intimacy that will allow each person to develop their individual qualities and have their own position in relation to the children. Our spiritual and physical union creates fulfilment from which our children benefit immediately.

Ours is a living family in which joys and sorrows, tears and laughter, fatigue and relaxation, clashes and reconciliation are all intermingle. We thank the Lord for the graces received and all that has been given to us to live as a family. We thank all those who have accompanied us along our way and accompany us every day.

## ***Conclusion***

This is our experience. We remain convinced that you have to constantly work at the development of families where everyone can find his or her place, in keeping with their calling (vocation) truthfully and freely chosen. Nothing is automatically achieved. Let us try, every day, to make the words of the prayer, " Our Father " our own.

***We love life***

## **Family and the Word of God**

By Tony Martyris

There are many challenges that family life faces. With special reference to India there are issues of the joint family system with its curbs on the couple's freedom; the dowry system treating women as commodities; inter-faith marriages and ritualistic trauma; cramped housing; long hours of uncomfortable travel; the working wife unable to please both husband and boss; corruption especially in education and the fierce entry-level competition that ensues; growing consumerism fuelled by the media; globalisation that strikes hardest at the poor and the defenceless; neglect of family prayer etc.

When we contemplate solutions, we usually think of curative and reactive measures and not pro-active and preventive ones. This can range from adding one alteration after another to the mechanism of marriage e.g. separation, living together; let's enjoy ourselves and not have children; contract marriages etc.... up to useful reactive steps such as family cells, counselling etc.

Here's a story in a lighter vein. An alcoholic had reached the stage where his boss had fired him, his money spent, his wife and children gone, his home lost. At last, he decides to do something about the problem, so – he reaches for the bottle!

The pro-active and hopeful way is for us to proclaim and reassert the divine standard from God's Word and live it out in our family lives. The confusion comes when people try to fit the Bible's teaching into the framework of "worldly contemporary wisdom". None of their experiments work, so the solution like the alcoholic I mentioned; is to abandon marriage as an institution altogether!

In my Pre-CLC group in Vashi and in the Formation Group of the Small Christian Communities where I am Guide, we provide formation to couples and others on the distinctive biblical roles in marriage and how to



use them in to-day's times. One such programme was on "Building Better Homes" covering both biblical-spiritual and psychological/human aspects of married life.

In August 2000, along with the Diocesan Family Commission we organized a Family Renewal Day, which covered the biblical roles in Marriage, challenges of family life in Mumbai and how to set up a Family Cell in the parish. About 40 couples attended each of the above sessions.

We also carry out monthly programmes such as "Putting Gospel Values to Work in daily living" e.g. in relationships, income/wealth etc. This is because family life cannot be segregated from the rest of life. Gospel values must permeate every aspect of our being and doing, if we are to be true disciples. Where appropriate, I integrate meditations of the Spiritual Exercises such as the Principle and Foundation as well as sections of the General Principles. Aspects of individual, group and common mission are included along with other human and psychological topics such as communication (most essential in marriage) as a means of building interpersonal relationships, integrating family and work life etc.

We wish to make our Formation sessions as practical and integrated as possible. People want guidelines on how to handle inter-faith marriages; how a wife should respond to a physically abusive husband; should a wife be employed outside the home; what about a woman who wants to work at home, but whose husband insists that she work on an outside job; how can parents know the right way to bring up their children; what makes a marriage strong etc. A blend of Scripture and a lived experience of the CLC way help provide information and methodology on these issues though it is for each person to discern his/her path with the Lord.

It is hoped that the Family Cell, when formed, will keep contact with the families in need of counsel and help. What can this Cell be concerned with? My CLC friend from yesteryears, Josefina Errazuriz, a co-worker with me on the World ExCo for 4 years, provides food for mind and soul in the article, "*A Chilean CLC Family*" (Supplement No. 22, December 1983). It tells us not merely how to help married CLC members to live their commitment but also how to open the riches of married life in CLC to all members of our World Community:

- a) The need for a simple life for the greater service of the Church, putting an end to consumerism, not wanting to compete for things for which the world competes.
- b) A home, a hearth that is exceptionally receptive and warm.
- c) Balance in the distribution of activities of husband, wife and children inside and outside the home. "Dialogue between us and our children is our true wealth, our great savings. We talk about everything and we make decisions together. Within our family we live CLC."
- d) Learning how to "carry our Cross".
- e) The integration of Formation and Action – making the Spiritual Exercises once a year and sharing life in the weekly meetings "to order things in our lives".
- f) Involvement in the parish in baptismal catechesis, the preparation of spouses for marriage, involvement too with the poor (the best catechesis we have been able to give to the children), all this fruit of discernment.
- g) "That in the measure one cares for others, one ceases to be pre-occupied with oneself." (*Fr. Hurtado*)

One of the cultural traits in India is that of "arranged marriages". In the past, the parents selected the bride. This continues in rural areas: Today the parents offer delectable choices of candidates to the boy or girl and the latter make their choice after meeting them over a period of time. "Love-marriages", like in the West, are increasingly surfacing now. As to which of them is better is a matter of considerable debate, scorn or laughter. The fact of the matter however is that there is no 'rule of thumb' that will always work. There are successes and failures in all the above methods. The feeling that people call love is not what the Bible means by love at all. According to Scripture, love is not a feeling; love is a way of acting. True love is a way of treating other people. "Love is patient; love is kind; it is not self-seeking; it does not keep record of wrongs; it always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:4-7). Creative love means that each party preserves the fullness of their own personalities in relationship to one another. It does not melt in a molten lump of humanity that makes cooing sounds of togetherness, but

rather it is the SHARING of the persons of the lovers, in gifting themselves fully to each other sacrificially and not in the calculation of pleasure-seeking. If two complete strangers meet and treat each other according to 1 Cor. 13, after a while the feeling of love will also come.

On the other hand, no matter how "crazy head-over-heels" in love you have fallen with someone, romantic love eventually may fly out of the window – and so will the feeling. I am not trying to justify "arranged marriages", nor decry the feeling of love, but I am saying that romantic love has little to do with a successful marriage relationship. Doing good – that is what LOVE is all about. A rose is not a delightful aroma. A rose is a flower that produces a fragrance. But the aroma is not the flower. How then can we experience love? One of the fruits of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22). If the partners in marriage seek God with all their heart and ask Him to fill them with His spirit of love, a miracle will occur in their marriage.

One such miracle in my life has been the role of my wife Doreen. Though not in CLC, she has always been a tower of strength and understanding love that enabled me to serve the Lord in CLC all these years while she lovingly nurtured home and children and provided selfless service in the Jesuit school where she is head-teacher. Could it be that because my wife has always taught in Jesuit schools, she imbibed Ignatian Pedagogy? There is little doubt however that if both husband and wife (and children) are in CLC together, the relationship would be even richer. As a CLC friend wrote, "*I came to realize the truth that to love one's spouse totally is the way to love God totally – one loves God as much as one loves one's spouse*". The realization of this truth is the foundation of my CLC vocation.

Crisis occasions however may arise when one of the partners is not in CLC because we may not be able to share all the areas of our lives – to pray together, to make a retreat together, to cherish vigorously a common rhythm or a common approach to life. The deeper he or she becomes committed, the larger the area becomes in which the two cannot share. It is like a boat where one uses only one oar. In such circumstances, the two of them need really to try hard in some other way to share that precious part of their lives which is not being experienced together. Doreen and I do this by spending time together sharing our different experiences, helping and supporting each other and praying together. Times of crises, as my friend noted, need to be handled by one of the two at least taking the position of

defenceless and unconditional love to his/her partner and not trying the convenient, but disastrous road of "escape".

One final point, that is somewhat intriguing. Jesus seems to say precious little about the family, though He does demonstrate His concern for families as seen in the passages concerning the Wedding at Cana, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, Peter's mother-in-law etc. In fact at times, He appears to challenge the concept of family, shocking to the culture of His time. "*Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*" Yet Jesus spent 30 years with His family and at His resurrection, He appeared first to His mother whom He had bequeathed to the loving care of John. It is clear that Jesus means no disrespect to the family. I think what Jesus is saying is – extend the meaning of family. It is not only blood that makes family; it's trust, union, commitment.

Family is also the universal family of love. Joshua, as head of the family said, "*But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord*" (Joshua 24:15). Notice that he does not say, "We will serve ourselves". A popular song states, "*We'll build a sweet little nest, somewhere out in the west and let the rest of the world roll by*". We disagree. The family cannot be a 'closed unit'. Its members are also called to "*go out into the vineyards and marketplaces of the world to preach and witness the good news to the nations*" (Mt 28:19).

In a 1995 article in *St. Anthony's Messenger* titled "A Mother's Perspective on the Eucharist", Kathy Coffey writes, "*Into every child I parent, every student I teach and every 'broken' neighbour, I pour something of myself. Sometimes I empty myself into the heart-breaks revealed only to the closest friends – the lost loves, the tragic betrayals, the spouses and children who disappoint – from the shared sorrow emerges a new strength*". She has recognised the Body and Blood of Christ.

Sometimes Jesus will call on family members to take greater risks. He called James and John, the sons of Zebedee, "*...and at once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed*" (Mt. 4, 18-22). Finding one's soul is always leaving one's comfort zone, letting go and going to a bigger place when God calls you. It may involve sometimes leaving your family physically, spiritually and psychologically, or looking at the family values critically and forming your own with spiritual maturity (a necessary part of

growing up). Leaving our “father and our nets” may also involve questioning our career choices, our family prejudices and our class perspective. No wonder Ignatius gives us so much on ‘discernment’ and ‘seeking and finding God and His will in all things’.

The family is important in the plan of God. The success of the family is a priority for every Christian. We cannot allow the world to press us into its mold of division and delinquency. If we cannot change the world, the world will change us. If Christians do not have families that stay together, children who are raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, parents who love each other and homes that are centred on Christ, we can never reach the world with the gospel.

On the other hand, if we cultivate those things and pursue them wholeheartedly, the world will sit up and take notice of us and of our Christ. ***“One cannot fail to stress the evangelising role of the family. In a family conscious of the mission, all the members evangelise and are evangelised. The parents communicate the gospel to the children, but also receive the same gospel from their children as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelisers of many other families in the neighbourhood”*** (*Evangelisation in the Modern World* – Paul VI).

## ***From* PARAGUAY**

### **FAMILY LIFE**

#### ***Making visible God's Reign of Love***

We are Victoria Rivelli and Sergio Oddone and we have belonged to CLC for 3 years. Our core community is called Ñemity, which in the Guaraní language means to sow, and it is made up of couples with children, who are all more or less the same age. At present Victoria belongs to the National Executive Council and she is in charge of publishing a bulletin that comes out twice a month; she is also in charge of international correspondence.

We have been married for 8 years and have three children. Marcelo is six, Mónica is two and our third child will be born in November. We started to talk about the time we would devote to our children during our engagement and even at that time too we also used to discuss how we would guide and plan the development of our family life. It may well be that the kind of home life each of us had experienced played a part in this: we had both known a simple, affectionate and generous style of family life, and our mothers had given all their time to creating a home. All this past experience gave us and still gives us a clarity of vision when it comes to making decisions about our own activities; everything for us hinges upon our firm conviction that our children are of supreme importance. The time, which we allocate to them, is part of our responsibility.

It is the commitment which we take on with their lives because we, their parents, are the ones who must show them an example to follow and we must pass on to them our beliefs. We take on all of this in a natural way and so it is an extremely joyful experience. It is one that we enjoy fully from the moment of their conception, or even before that, right from the very time that we want to have them. We know very well that the time to give them a firm foundation in life cannot be repeated and we are aware that this is the time to write on the pages of their lives while they are still blank. What we want most of all is to bring them up with love; we believe that this is the basic "food" which creates happy people.

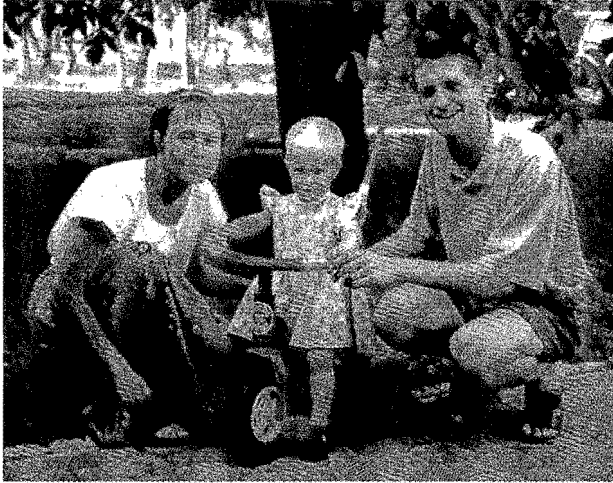
We are both University graduates; Sergio is a chemical engineer with a speciality in environmental engineering. He concentrates on trying to introduce technology into our country that will not pollute the environment. As for me, above all, I have been able to combine my family vocation with my other passion that is, being able to devote half of my working day as a doctor in a public hospital to the "outcasts" of society. There exists in our country, and in a very prominent way, the practice of private medicine and this gives great prestige and economic gain. It is relevant to mention this because I am always being asked why I have not gone in for this. I am forever being told that I am letting my opportunities slip but it is just in this area where I have received great and clear support from CLC, especially through the Spiritual Exercises which I have done in daily life, during part of the time I was expecting Mónica and her birth. During these exercises, not only did each of my vocations receive additional confirmation but I been absolutely certain that I should offer the world my testimony of love through my dedication to my children.

We also received the confirmation that the home is like a school not only for spiritual formation, but also for social formation. As we are, in addition, fully aware of the problems that surround us in our daily social reality, we also devote time and effort to other activities that relate directly to these problems. We put into practice our commitment to try to change the reality of injustice, poverty and hopelessness that so destroys our country. Thus our children experience with us the wonderful joy of making visible God's reign of love. Living this out simply day by day is the way we are bringing up our children in the Lord, trying to make them aware of His grace and making them realise that His reign is not something ethereal belonging to another world, but that our active participation is necessary.

Our home, therefore, does not isolate us from the world in which we live but quite the opposite. We believe that our home motivates us and drives us forward and we want our children to learn from our home to look on the world with eyes of love so that they can then, in turn, respond with solidarity. We believe that, in the measure that they are loved, they, in turn, will know how to love and how to give themselves to others in a spontaneous way.

## *From SLOVENIA*

**“As for me and my household we will serve the Lord!” (Jos 24,15)**



*Nika and Izidor Golob and their daughter*

Most people today are faced with new challenges daily: we are not an exception. However, we do have some particularities. In 1991, Slovenia became independent after a 10-day war that many of us believe was a miracle. Specifically because later we saw how the same army that was defeated in Slovenia destroyed whole cities and regions in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Later we saw the horrible things that happen in Kosovo.

It is true that practically all the Slovenians wanted out of Yugoslavia because of different and reasonable reasons, but we had shared the same roof for almost 50 years. We still remember the airplanes' voices heading to Kosovo and passing over our cities daily in 1998. No matter who and why were they bombing, they were on a mission to destroy and kill. All we could do was pray.

Since independency democracy has grown rapidly, but in fact the former communists still have the power to control a lot of organizations including the media and the most profitable companies. People are now faced with



new challenges they had never thought of before: unemployment, lack of social security, etc. Of course, the Church had to adjust her role, too: It is not a surprise that the freedom of religion caused an inflation of new sects in our area.

In spite of the communist regime, we personally were blessed with the great possibility of experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as we were raised in a Jesuit parish in Maribor. In fact, there was a parish group of about 30 youth where we grew up together. Later in 1993, some of us joined the Slovenian CLC. CLC here is a young community with a lot of young families from all over Slovenia.

The Christian Life Community, both the persons and the means offered, helped us in a great way to grow up spiritually and intellectually before our own celebration of the sacrament of marriage in 1997. We found a great comfort in the way of life that CLC recommends. It was through international CLC meetings, that we experienced separately, that confirmed this CLC vocation for us.

The majority of events organized by the Slovenian CLC take place in Ljubljana, the Slovenian capitol. However, probably the biggest project is a 7-day pilgrimage on foot with its key word of "peace". It is a great place to experience the others, to get some comfort, to pray and simply to live together. The community has also its own Hyde-Park: it is *Plameni*, a newsletter published monthly. With a broad range of topics, everyone has a chance to share and critique what he/she is living.

One of the most supported events and, as far as we can see also one of the most important, is the way the Slovenian CLC supports and organizes the Spiritual Exercises. Each member is strongly invited to make the Spiritual Exercises once a year. There are always Spiritual Exercises organized especially for young families with baby-sitting opportunities. We think this is a great privilege to be able to stay in silence for a couple of days and to listen to the Lord. We usually make the Spiritual Exercises during a summer break that charges our batteries for the year to come.

As a nation, as a CLC community and as a family, we were renewed during and after the Pope's visits to Slovenia. He came to "confirm us in faith". Indeed, the celebration of his birthday with the youth was an unbeatable success. The atmosphere there was something we have never experienced

before in Slovenia. The whole visit gave the Church in Slovenia a new boost. The Pope's second one-day visit to Slovenia was in 1999 when he officially beatified the first bishop of Maribor, Anton Martin Slomsek. Bishop Slomsek is the first Slovenian to be beatified. Now, our family daily asks him for help during our evening prayers.

We all experience how the modern way of living has affected our family life. As CLC members, our family tries to live the CLC way of life. We have to admit that it is sometimes really hard especially after we had a child and it is do doubt we would have been living differently if we didn't know the CLC way. We can easily find comfort when we see other CLCers and say, "Hey, there are also other people living the same way as we do!"

