

# **ICCFM**

## **10th World Assembly**

## **14th General Assembly**

### **Christian Family Movement, Malta**

It is with great pleasure and honour to be participating in this world assembly of ICCFM in Fatima, Portugal. We come from the small island of Malta in the Mediterranean. As a couple we have been members of CFM (Malta) for the last 35 years. Although participating in a CFM World Assembly is somewhat new to us, we participated in the European CFM Conference held in Valencia last year. This was a very positive and enlightening experience for us as a couple as well as for us as CFM members.

The Christian Family Movement has been in Malta for the last 36 years. It is made up of 60 groups in different localities in Malta and Gozo. There are around 600 couple members of different ages. The groups are divided into 5 regions with a couple members serving as a link with the national committee. The groups meetings are also held once a month with a few groups opting to meet twice monthly. The national committee meets once a month or as often as needed. The national committee is made up of a chaplain, a president couple and 6 couple members. These couples are in their turn in charge of different sub-committees which cater for different aspects of the members' spiritual formation and social activities. At least once a year, besides an Annual General Meeting, the national committee holds separate regional meetings.

## **Overview**

### **1.1 Investigative research**

An activity which CFM (Malta) has deemed to be very important and has worked upon this year was a research work on the situation of CFM (Malta). This was a very much needed self examining activity with two aims namely:

1. the aim of analyzing the actual situation of CFM (Malta) at the present time

2. an exercise of improving this family movement vis a vis the situation, concerns and needs of the families in Malta.

With this intention in mind the CFM national committee appointed a sub-committee. There followed a comprehensive study of the regulations and of the present situation of the movement in Malta. One of the tools used by this committee was the sending out of a questionnaire to a sample number of couple members and chaplains. A final report was then presented to the CFM national committee. The resulting study was discussed and examined at CFM national committee level. It was decided to present this report to our member couples in all the localities of Malta for consideration. This was a decision which involved the study and reflection on the results among the individual groups in their next monthly meeting. The couple members were encouraged to send in their comments and suggestions. With the aim of clarifying and explaining any difficulties which might have arisen when the report was being studied in the groups, two regional meetings were held. This initiative gave our members the opportunity to discuss with the sub-committee in charge of this research, the full contents of the report as well as to propose any amendments they deemed appropriate. At the moment plans are in hand for the final report to be presented and approved in an extraordinary general meeting to be held next October.

## **1.2 Annual General Meeting**

One of the activities which CFM (Malta) organizes every year is the Annual General Meeting. This year it had a special meaning for us as we had as a guest speaker the newly ordained bishop of Gozo, our sister island. This has made our AGM meeting an extra special one which was attended by the great majority of our couple members. In his address the bishop discussed the situation of the family in Malta and gave us some of the models the Christian family should follow. He also reminded us that we have a duty to speak out in favour of marriage as an institution in which we firmly believe.

## **1.3 Visits of groups**

As President Couple one of the activities we are trying to follow, together with our national chaplain, when this is possible, is to visit each and every group during their monthly meetings. In the past year we have visited quite a number of groups and found out that this is a very fruitful activity. We are very happy to get to know our members more closely and in such an informal and friendly atmosphere. Besides getting to know each other on an individual basis, it is also an opportunity for the members to put forward their suggestions and recommendations to the national committee more freely and on an

individual/personal basis. One can appreciate that this is a great opportunity for us to find out how we as president couple and as a committee, can give a better service. These visits are also a great opportunity and occasions for creating a sense of belonging among each and every member of CFM. We are very happy to say that although this activity has started out of a sense of duty for us, it has turned out to be an extremely pleasant occasion in which on the one hand we are getting to feel closer to the member couples while on the other hand it is giving us a much needed ‘feeling’ of the pulse of the movement. As a result the CFM committee has been getting a lot of positive feedback from the couple members themselves and our visits are being well appreciated. Of course we appreciate the fact that these visits to each and every group seems to be a gargantuan undertaking but one must keep in mind that these group visits are only possible for us because Malta is such a small island.

#### **1.4 Increasing of Group membership**

In our efforts to increase the number of members and groups in CFM (Malta) we are in continuous contact with the parish priests to be able to start new CFM groups in their parishes. There are good prospects of starting new groups in three or four new parishes this year. Our main target is to try to attract younger couples to form new CFM groups, as we appreciate the fact that these couples need the support and encouragement and spiritual formation that Christian groups like CFM can offer. On the other hand we are continuously faced with the fact that these young married couples – as in any other country - have so many other commitments that they normally find it very difficult to commit themselves to participating in these meetings. Of course this does not mean that we are in any way discouraged by all this and we are all trying our best to find ways in which we can encourage these couples to attend. One example is that members of other groups are offering to baby sit for these families so that they can then attend the group meetings.. In trying to promote these CFM groups to these young couples we have found out through experience that the best way is for other young CFM couple members to use the personal contact approach although an encouraging word from the local parish priest is also a great help.

#### **1.5 Our programme booklet**

An important part of CFM (Malta) is the programme booklet which is the spiritual and practical guide used by our members during their monthly or twice monthly meetings. This year we had the great opportunity of ‘using’ in the best sense of the word Pope Benedict’s encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. Marriage being an institution based on love, this encyclical God is Love was the ideal literature and basis for our programme booklets. We appreciate that into each heart God places

a profound hunger for the experience of being loved and loving others. It is a fact in which we firmly believe that this hunger can only be satisfied by God's total and all-encompassing love.

As the Pope wrote:

*We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction<sup>1</sup>.*

Of course, Christian married couples need to find this horizon, this direction together in the sacrament of marriage which is their specific source and original means of sanctification and which is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life.<sup>2</sup>

Manifestations of God's love are mirrored or experienced within the daily moments of human respect, care, consideration and concern which are especially evident in our families.

The decision was therefore taken by CFM (Malta) to study, learn more about and reflect upon the real meaning of love as it was ably presented by Pope Benedict. This proved to be very beneficial for all our members as the first part of the Encyclical, that is the more speculative part, clarified some essential facts concerning - the reality of human love - but most importantly highlighted most ably the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man. This is the part that made us reflect on the different kinds of love which the modern world presents to us and ponder deeply on the intrinsic link between this infinite love of God and the reality of human love. The second part which is the more concrete part of the Encyclical helped us reflect in depth on the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbour.<sup>3</sup> In short we were reminded once more of all that we had learned in our catechism lessons that: Where genuine love is, we always find God because God is love

On the whole the feedback we have been getting from our members on these 'lessons' seems to be quite positive.

## **1.6 Spirituality**

We appreciate that family spirituality is the spiritual dimension of everything that the family does to be a family. Christian family members recognize that their daily life together as a family offers wonderful opportunities to deepen their relationship with God. We as Christian couples, but more so as members of the CFM, need to witness God's presence amongst us. We firmly believe that partners in marriage should consciously endeavour to experience this constant

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<sup>1</sup> Deus Caritas Est , Introduction

<sup>2</sup> Familiaris Consortio 56

<sup>3</sup> Deus Caritas Est, Introduction

presence in their lives and relationships. It is our conviction that spirituality in the family is best thought of as incorporating family life itself. It encompasses everything alive in the family. It thrives in the caring relationships between the couple and indeed among all the other family members. God is particularly attuned to family living because, in a sense, God lives in a family, the Holy Trinity. CFM (Malta) therefore felt it of the utmost importance to give the spirituality of the family as a whole, the honoured position of being in the first part of our monthly ‘lessons’. The title of this part of our lessons therefore is: Discovering Jesus in our lives as married couples. This is further enhanced by keeping to the model adopted by CFM (Malta) last year that is the model of the Family of Nazareth.

## **1.7 Prayer and shared activities**

Prayer is the key to the heart of God. Prayer is the only way to a real and personal relationship with God. We find intimacy with God through communicating with Him in prayer. We go to Him in faith, knowing that He hears and answers all our prayers. It is well known that the ‘family that prays together stays together’ and the Bible tells us to “pray without ceasing” and “in everything give thanks to the Lord.” When we choose to have a positive attitude, we realize we have received many blessings for which to give God praise. In all our activities an emphasis is laid on the fact that the family can awaken itself to God’s loving presence through prayer, both individual and communal, through shared activities, both religious and human, and through the countless efforts given to the care and support of each other. The family is like a cell in a larger living body. In the Church the family is rightly described as a domestic church, a church of the home, a household of faith.

## **1.8 Other regular activities**

Other regular activities held are the following:

- Yearly regional meetings for all couple members
- An Annual General Meeting
- Forums and talks and workshops on the subject of the spirituality of married couples
- Paschal celebrations for various members of CFM
- Marriage Encounters – at least 4 marriage encounters are organized throughout the year
- Spiritual retreats for members
- Contemplative praying sessions of the Scriptures (Lectio Divina) with the aim of enabling the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union

of our members with God. For this purpose we have been using the house we have designated as a house of prayer and spirituality.

## **1.9 On the national level**

On a national level we also form part of a national Forum for all the Catholic organizations in Malta, which helps to co-ordinate the work of all these organizations. We also represent CFM (Malta) on a national Church Family Commission, besides representing CFM also on a national basis of all the NGO's working with the family. An important aspect of this organization was the preparation of a family policy which was discussed with all the political parties prior to these presenting their electoral programme for the coming elections.

An occasion for spiritual discernment happens, when CFM (Malta) has had occasion to be invited to participate, along with other regional and national groups and movements, in national celebrations as for example in the Pentecostal vigil. Last year the occasion was celebrated with a lively spiritual celebration dedicated to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, where the charisms of all the different Christian groups in Malta – among them CFM were highlighted and animated in dynamic and symbolical representations. The CFM (Malta) presentation covered the highlighting of ‘the fruits of the Holy Spirit’ namely love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Christian couples asked the Holy Spirit to deepen these qualities in their love for each other. The Holy Spirit was really amongst us on that day!

Furthermore, CFM (Malta) feels the need to tackle the tension between keeping the relationship between husband and wife strong, and being open to serve others in community. One of the actions which members of CFM (Malta) are committed to is the organization and running of marriage preparation courses throughout the year. This is for most of us a year long commitment as these pre-marriage sessions include the continuous training of the leader couples, who facilitate the groups of engaged couples. Regular courses for going steady couples are also being organized in some localities. Other members are committed to holding baptism preparation sessions for parents and godparents. A new project, which is still in the infant stage, is that member couples of CFM (Malta) are helping out their parish priest during regular family visits being held throughout the year.

Moreover, a good number of member couples give service in their own parishes by serving as ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, as catechists, and organizing spiritual gatherings

To consolidate the above we would very much like to organise a course leading to the better formation of our group leaders. We would like the emphasis to be on

the deepening of our spiritual formation both as individuals and as married couples, first and foremost, but also on the training in group interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. However, we have encountered some difficulties as to professional staff to run these courses as well as to difficulties in finding enough funds to run this course.

## **2.1 Cana Movement Malta**

The Christian Family Movement is a branch of the Cana Movement of Malta. Last year the Cana Movement celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The seeds sown 50 years ago by numerous generous individuals, who together with the founder Mons Charles Vella decided to commit themselves to the development of initiatives in support of the Maltese family, have resulted in a dynamic movement with different sections working towards the good of the married couples and their families. CFM members in fact form the majority of the Cana Movement volunteers working for good of families in Malta.

## **2.2 Social Activities**

On a lighter note, we believe that social activities are necessary and of the utmost importance in order to consolidate the sense of belonging of all groups and movements. On a regular basis CFM (Malta) therefore organizes whole day and half day outings for all the family. These outings which always start out with the celebration of the Eucharist as one big family are both cultural and entertaining. For example: we organize a yearly visit to our sister island of Gozo, cultural tours in our historic cities, barbecues, family feast days etc. We visit interesting historical sights, organize games for all the family. Lunch is of course always included in the programme. One unforgettable experience was when all the children of the member couples present were asked to go up to the altar and were asked to improvise prayers for their families. Not surprisingly some of the prayers of these children were not what we were expecting and surprised the members present but most of all the parents of these children.

## **2.3 Keeping in contact**

To maintain an ongoing link among all the members of CFM (Malta), we make it a point to issue a quarterly newsletter which includes news of our activities, letters of suggestions, as well as short spiritual readings. We are grateful to the members of one of the CFM groups who kindly offered to compile this newsletter and make it possible to be published on time.

Other means of keeping contact with our members used by the CFM (Malta) committee are the sending of circulars, information leaflets and some of the times by the use of the telephone/email.

We are also in the process of compiling a CFM (Malta) website to serve as a connecting link with all the members and hopefully with other websites of CFM members in other countries. The possibility of creating a continuous network between the members of CFM not only in Malta but also with other member groups working towards the good of the family in fact has priority in our plans for the future.

## **2.4 Other plans for the future**

With the aim of encouraging each and every one of the CFM members to serve as witnesses that God is at work through our community of love and life, we as Christian couples, but more so as members of CFM, feel the need to radiate the joy of experiencing God's presence among us to all whom we come in contact with.

We are, of course not isolated from the world around us. Christians cannot regard marriage and family as a purely private affair. We need to be conscious of our solidarity with all men and women. On the one hand we are aware of the negative pressures on the family which continually arise amongst us, silently enticing and influencing us to give in to the temptation to conform to other people's material values, yet on the other hand we are also aware of those families around the world who are daily striving to live out their Christian values.

We all appreciate that Christians must unite for the growth of marriage and family life and a better society. The Christian family seeks to build on what is good in society and the world. We are not living an ideal cut off from other men and women. It is often not uncommon for us to discover God in the good people around us. We realize this needs reflecting on.

Therefore, part of our planning for the coming years is planning how CFM (Malta) can be of further service to families who are in dire need of our prayers first but also of our help and our support. This means that we can never rest or congratulate ourselves on jobs well done but we must keep constantly on the lookout and conscious of the fact that there is a lot more that we can do among the families around us. We also appreciate that in this we as president couple need the close support and help of the CFM committee, our chaplain and of all the CFM members in Malta and why not of the members in the rest of the world.

This of course falls under the Christian Family Movement heading **Act**.

**Thank you**

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