

Family as Moral Agent, Evangelizer of Culture, and Partner with the Institutional Church
2010 ICCFM Presentation

Introductory remarks.

Thank you for inviting us to speak about Families as ... Thank Cyril and Carmen...

We are Gary and Kay...

First Lauri and John will speak about... They will tell you about themselves...

We are Lauri and John Przybysz from the United States. We are the Past Presidents of CFM-USA. It has been our pleasure to meet many ICCFM members in Mexico, Portugal, and Hungary. We have also built friendships with Spanish-speaking leaders of CFM in the U.S. We are happy to be with you now in Goa. We can work together in the mission of Jesus Christ to transform society in love.

Every Christian family is called to be a “moral agent.” To be an “agent” is to be active for change and growth, just as yeast is the rising agent for the bread. In the beginning, God our Father established a partnership between man and woman and himself. This partnership depended on men and women making the partnership with each other that we call the family. The Church calls the family “the first and vital cell of society.” Our families are called to be communities of love. Pope John Paul (in his apostolic exhortation on the Role of the Family) called on Christian families to be “the first school of the social virtues,” not only among its immediate members, but also with other families and to society. This is our divine vocation, which we embraced with our wedding vows and our baptismal promises, made for ourselves and on behalf of our children when they were born.

We are called to lead with wisdom. Our first duty is to raise our children to be disciples of Jesus. We are the first teachers of our children in the ways of faith. But our children have free will. They remain in charge of their own lives. They must grow to make their own choice.

Children do not develop responsibility when parents and teachers are too strict and controlling, nor do they develop responsibility when parents and teachers are permissive. Children learn responsibility when they have opportunities to learn in an atmosphere of kindness, firmness, dignity, and respect.

We are called to build a culture of life. Christian families find meaning in life, affirm the goodness of life, and trust in God. Modern life presents Christians with crucial choices. As in the time of Moses and the Hebrews in the desert, and in the time of the first Christians, we must decide to follow God in matters of life and death. We cannot just stay on the fence. The Church reminds us that our families are key actors in the cause of life. We are commissioned to make a difference in the world.

We are called to nurture new life. Bringing new life into the world, parents pass on the faith to the next generation. Children are born into diverse and unequal circumstances. Some children are the fruit of stable marriages. Many children enter family circumstances full of challenges. Not every married couple today wants children, and childbearing by unmarried women is rising. Many children do not know their fathers.

The responsibility of parenthood can be daunting. The joy a child brings to a family is matched by the challenges parenting brings. When exhaustion threatens to dim the joy of parenting, children themselves can restore their parents' hope and love. Families need God's grace to stay on course and stay alive.

We are called to protect life from beginning to end. Catholic teaching links pro-life issues under the belief in the dignity of the human person. Followers of Jesus must value every human life because each is made in God's image and likeness. However, in our society, not every life is valued and respected. Today, we experience "a profound crisis of culture" in which the dignity of human life is under attack. Scientific advances have tended to separate reproduction from marriage and threaten to make human embryos disposable "products". Also at risk today are people who are old, incurably ill or the dying. The Church calls us to have a consistent ethic of life, linking all life issues as a "seamless garment" (John 19:23).

We are especially called to stand up for fragile human life. As Pope John Paul II reminds us in *The Gospel of Life* (1995), "We face a kind of war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life style of those who are more favored tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated" (*Evangelium Vitae* 12).

So what are we called to do? In," Former CFM Executive Director Paul Leingang sums it up: "A pro-life stance is a stance of justice. The call for a Christian to give voice to the unborn is based in the same understanding that each of us has the same dignity as a child of God, a brother or a sister in Jesus Christ. The call of a Christian is to give voice to those who have no voice, no vote, no money" ("Working toward a Well-formed Conscience," *Taking the Time to Make a Difference*, February 23, 2007).

We are called to take Action beyond our doorsteps. Christian families care for and help the children of the Body of Christ. We must look beyond our own families and care for the whole human family. We

must open our hearts to all children around the world. Jesus sets them as an example to all those who wish to be his disciples. Jesus' words call upon us to see how children are treated in our families, in civil society and in the Church. They can remind us of the simplicity and trust we must cultivate in imitation of the Son of God, who shared the lot of the little ones and the poor.

Choosing to Act

Every day, Christians must look for ways to act with love to those who are alone and in trouble. Goodness has the power to change hearts. Indeed, kindness can change the world. True kindness is about actions -- doing works of mercy and relieving the pain of others, like the Samaritan in the gospel. Everyone benefits from kindness, not only the immediate recipient of the action. The effects of a kind action spread, because we are interconnected. We belong to one human family. We all have the same basic needs. We are one.

Families are called to take action for the good, to be moral agents. Those actions can be great or small, depending on the life-stage of the family and their means. But all Christian families can do something, to make a difference. As Mother Teresa said, "The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful."

Part 2: Family as Evangelizers

One year ago, we were in Rome with the Pontifical Council for the Family. The Vatican invited us to discuss "The family, subject of evangelization within its own society and the parish."

The purpose of the project was to identify concrete ways that a Christian family can be more than an object of evangelization. The family can be an active agent of evangelization. The Christian Family Movements contributed many reports of experiences around the world. Others who were invited with CFM to the seminar were representatives of Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Focolare, Renewal in the Holy Spirit and Catholic Action, as well as pastors and theologians.

The Church is looking for programs that work. We told the Pontifical Council that the Observe, Judge, Act method used by CFM effectively forms parents in their Christian vocation as leaders of the Domestic Church and builds strong and radiant families of faith.

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We told them about the mission of CFM: "to promote Christ-centered marriage and family life; to help individuals and their families to live the Christian faith in everyday life; and to improve society through actions of love, service, education and example."

Cardinal Joseph Cardijn taught us that lay people are not formed by "purely theoretical teaching or spoken lectures however magnificent," but they are formed, "first of all by the discovery of facts, followed by a Christian judgment, resulting in the actions they plan, the plans they carry into effect, the responsibilities they shoulder." From this understanding CFM-USA has taken as its motto: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." (James 1:22)

CFM families live the vocation described in *Familiaris Consortio*: "As a sharer in the life and mission of the Church, which listens to the word of God with reverence and proclaims it confidently, the Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God: it becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community." (#51)

CFM families strive to put into action the authentic mission of the Church to receive the Gospel and to transmit it to others. This takes place through the CFM process in prayerful observation, in discerning judgment, and in evangelizing action. This is an evangelical process that happens in the heart of the Domestic Church so that the Gospel is truly proclaimed within the home itself, in the parish community and in the society.

At the Rome meeting, we discussed with the other participants how the Christian family is prophetic in our day. The Evangelizing Family undertakes the mission of the prophet and the vocation of the teacher. As prophet, it proclaims the message of salvation. As teacher, it explains the deeper implications and fuller meaning of the Gospel message. Thus father and mother fulfill the command of Jesus, "Make disciples of all nations. Teach them to observe my commandments." (Matthew 28:19-20)

We received reports of evangelizing experiences from CFM members in the United States, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

- From the U.S., we reported on how CFM-USA gathers small groups in parishes to improve family life, organizes children's catechesis, operates a family camp for needy urban families, and provides leader training and formation for parents and grandparents to evangelize.

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- From Asia, Rolly & Josie Mesa of the Philippines reported on how CFM helps families who migrate to urban areas, away from their extended family system, to gain a supportive Christian community. From Sri Lanka, Susil & Shirani Gunaratna wrote about the Bible sharing groups that their CFM has formed. Mel & Emma Ricafrente reported on the 8th Continental Congress of CFM, held in Thailand in 2009 by delegates from the India, Sri Lanka, Singapore Philippines and Thailand.
- From Hungary, Balasz and Krisztina Menesi reported on how FIRES Engaged Encounters are strengthening couples and families in faith and love. The FIRES Encounters are held 12-14 times a year and CFM groups are growing from them. Father Gabriel Calvo and Father Donnon Murray sent us testimonies of how FIRES Encounters and CFM have blessed families around the world.
- European Presidents Tony & Lily Gauci wrote about how members in Malta are engaging in baptism, marriage and confirmation preparation in the parish. They also described how CFM has been renewed in Slovakia and other Eastern European nations.
- William and Isilda Cheng, ICCFM Presidents, sent a report to the Pontifical Council on the organizational structures that are succeeding so well in Latin America.

The Pontifical Council on the Family will continue this project in November 2010, inviting Church leaders to learn about the experiences that were submitted by the study group. Gary and Kay Aitchison have been invited to present their experience teaching grandparents to Observe, Judge, and Act to evangelize their grandchildren. We hope that other ICCFM members will also present their experiences at the meeting. *(We may not know who they are until we arrive in Goa.)*

As a result of this project, we hope as members of the Christian Family Movement to be able to join with other movements and associations and the Church as a whole in its variety of apostolic ministries to become a more effective Subject and Dynamic Agent of Evangelization transforming families, society and the parish community.

Now Gary and Kay will present further ideas of how CFM can collaborate with the institutional church in our joint mission....

Part 3: Partner with the Institutional Church.

GARY AND KAY DO THIS PART

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The Church recognizes Christian Families as indispensable co-workers in the Vineyard.

How can the church community assist parents in providing appropriate structure and nurturing at home?

Closing:

We pray that our Lord will make us instruments of His peace. Where there is hatred, may we sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; And where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Ideas for Questions:

1. What is the main virtue for parents to teach their children?
2. In your country, what parenting styles are present?
3. What important lessons did your own parents teach you and how did they do it?
4. How does CFM help build a culture of life?
5. How do you get more families involved in CFM's mission in your country?
6. What actions have you done that promote Christian principles?
7. What education do CFM members need to receive to become better evangelizers?
8. How can the church community in your country assist parents in providing appropriate structure and nurturing at home?
9. More

Gary and Kay, please select 4 questions from our suggestions and your own ideas.