

**WORLD ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN FAMILY MOVEMENTS
(ICCFM)**

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HERALDING THE FUTURE

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On the way to this meeting from Milan, I stopped in New York. I could not just come to the U.S. without going to pray and reflect on Ground Zero. I felt my heart beat and tears came down as I tried to relive the infernal tragedy of the 11th of September. At Ground Zero, I smelled and sensed the feeling of “*Thanatos*” (death). Those innocent victims who were people of various nations, colours and creeds are now in the home of the Father.

But for us who remain, one thing is certain. The world is not the same after 11 September. A series of events from the so-called “preventive war” in Iraq and Afghanistan, the perpetual fighting in the Middle East (the Holy Land) and the constant menace of international terrorism have generated a world of fear. In all this, religion has not given its dynamic force, for we have “a conflict of Civilizations” and “a war of Religions.”

Instead of turning to God, God and the Christian heritage of our civilization have not been taken into serious consideration. The European Constitution, contrary to the American Constitution and others, has, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “denied our Christian roots”. Yet the Pope stressed, “We cannot renounce our heritage.”

There are so many problems that beset us, in the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, “the anxieties, grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and the anguish of the followers of Christ as well.” (Art.1).

This Confederation, with its history of 50 years, has always been an authentic ecumenical follower of Christ – our “Way, Truth and Life”. As such, again in the words of Vatican II, “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts...united in Christ and guided by the Holy spirit, press onwards towards the Kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all”. This is the authentic identity and vision of our Confederation as a grassroots movement of

Christian families, always open and listening to “the signs of the times”, to the joys, the grief and the anguish of all people, especially of families who suffer and struggle with difficulties from within and without.

As we take a glance at the world we live in today, the life-style is to live for the present and to avoid undertaking commitments for the future. This means that many have lost the vision of hope for the future and are very short sighted of their destiny. Besides, the world is in the midst of hopelessness. They do not live the project of God. Still worse is the fact that many forces are at work to dismantle the domestic Church, i.e. Family. What we see are the wounded people, separated families, one-parent families and suffering children.

At this juncture, the world is in need of hope for a bright future and hopeful people who can herald and build up a better future. This is how we should look to the future and how we could be enlightened through the Holy Spirit to find a way so as to herald the future as part of a pilgrim Church.

1. **“Go, Teach and Heal”**

Just as the Son of God became incarnate into the world and assumed, we may say our **DNA**, so too our Confederation like the Church must evangelize the world in which we live. We have to be the salt, the light and the leaven of the world. We have, as Isaiah says, “to announce the good news and denounce the bad news.”

The future lies with Christ Jesus, in whom we have been baptized. Through the Baptism, we experience the Church as a community and a sacrament. At Baptism, the child is “welcomed with great joy. . .to receive the gift of new life from God who is Love.” We herald the future as baptized Christians, whose mission is to evangelize by building the Kingdom of God on earth. This is why we have “to seek firstly the Kingdom of God.” Furthermore, we receive the spirit and through us the Spirit overshadows the world. We become evangelized and in turn we become the instruments of evangelization. Christ’s mandate is, “Go, teach and heal” which means we have to outreach with love to the world, through our family to other families in a network of relationships, friendships and labour in God’s vineyard.

The Pope in his two-day visit to Switzerland in a simple message explained why he continues to travel despite his frailty: “It is the duty of announcing the Gospel of Christ that pushes me along the paths of the world, so I can offer it to the men and women of the third millennium, especially the new generations.”

2. **CFM = Small Christian Communities:**

This has been and should continue to be the mission of all the small Christian communities – which I prefer to the word groups – of the Christian Family Movement. “Go, teach and heal” starting from your ‘oikos’ which means the family closest to you in your neighbourhood and workplace to whom it is your duty to announce the Gospel. We cannot be closed communities, we have to be open and outreach towards other families. Christ commands us “to cast our nets deeper,” couples to couples, families to families in the parish which is the “family of the families”. This is how we herald the Gospel for the future, remembering the famous words of Protestant theologian **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** that Jesus is “the man for others.”

Today lay movements have spread all over the world. They are Christ-centered and are preaching from the rooftops. I will give only one example whom I think this Confederation should study and dialogue to see how we can renew our structure, ideals, methods and above all our spirituality.

These are the so-called **Parish cells**, no numbering 70 thousand. In Milan, at Sant’Eustorgio, Don Pigi Pierini has over one hundred calls and an outstanding example is Carcas, where Fr. Vincnet Mancino animates, one cell has multiplied to 1,500 cells. All started in the 70’s in Seoul, South Korea, within the Pentecostal Church of Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho. From there, it spread to St. Boniface in Pembroke Pines, Florida, through Fr. Michael Eivers.

I think it will help this Confederation to open up and to adopt the Cell method for its growth. Our Christian Family Groups from the early days were cell groups. The methodology to Observe, judge and act initiated by Card. Cardijn, and the YCW is pedagogic education towards evangelization.

Following are the 7 steps of the Cell groups in the process of evangelization: 1) **Prayer** with a weekly meeting of prayer in their own *oikos*, 2) **Service** or **Ministry**: “I have come not to be served but to serve.” 3) **Sharing** experiences on the place Christ has in our lives, 4) **Reflection** and **response** to difficulties and doubts in order to overcome obstacles, 5) **Trust and Mandate** to give one’s life to Christ and commitment for him, 6) **Entrance** into a cell and to be welcomed by the members and the pastor, 7) **Admission** into the community and role in the parish.

Card. Cormac Murphy O’Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, writing on small communities, in his book “At the Heart of the World” says, “what sort of small community we belong to, I am convinced that such groups are **the promise of the future**. They will be a source of new inspiration, new hope and new evangelization for

the Church. We need to experience community as a locus of healing where we can rediscover our faith in the humanizing experience of a group of people who share the same beliefs.”

This is what CFM and MFC have been since their early days, even before Vatican II. In this very country thousands convened for the annual meetings at Notre Dame, but then (as with many other experiences) ‘the wind of change’ brought a big drop in numbers. Many politicians, administrative officials, teachers and lay apostles were nursed in CFM, but then entered in new folds and groups. The pain of separation and diaspora to those who remained has been great. We may also ask what future has ICCFM. Where will it be in the ten years time? It is a question to think about NOW and to prepare NOW for the future.

3. **A Theology of Spirituality:**

In my humble opinion, all will depend on the theology of spirituality we give to the future of ICCFM. When the late Abbe Caffarel pioneered the Notre Dame Foyer, he started the review “Annou d’Oor” and laid the theological basis of marriage spirituality. Perhaps the orientation in the past of ICCFM was more sociological and pragmatic. We now need to deepen our theological orientation through family spirituality of all our communities by becoming more Christ-centered. It is He who heralds and guarantees the future of the family of ICCFM. We have to renew our Confederation through **Christ, who is our Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (St. Paul).**

We need to be committed in the daily life of our couples to God’s Word, to prayer, the Eucharist and the Rosary. If these become our CFM concrete actions and if we have them as our foundation, then we can definitely grow in Christ, and say with Paul: “It is not I that lives, but Christ lives in us (our marriage)” – Gal:2:20

4. **Jesus Alive in Marriage:**

The saddest reality is that people have failed and continue to fail to encounter Christ in the sacrament of matrimony. Our spirituality should generate through the presence of Jesus in the marriage of every couple. It is Jesus who through his divine grace nourishes, strengthens, heals and enriches the relationship of husband-wife-children. Only if Jesus is alive within the family, can the home become “a domestic Church.”

We find Jesus in the Eucharist, which is why the Pope has dedicated next year as the year of the Eucharist. In his encyclical, “**The Church and the Eucharist**”, he

reminds us of the reality of “the gift of excellence of Jesus as a Real Person”. In the Eucharist “not only do we receive Christ but also Christ receives each one of us”.(22) Christ receives each one of us as we are and He embraces our humanity, joys, failures, sins, feelings and hopes. He accompanies each family, and ICCFM, in our journey through life by “becoming a living seed of hope in the daily dedication of each one to live their mission” (20).

At this meeting I hope the Holy spirit will enlighten our leaders to respond concretely to the Pope’s invitation for the Year of the Eucharist. Only if we anchor our Confederation to the Eucharist can we hope to herald the future.

Through the Eucharist we become **One in Christ**. Christ’s words in John 17:21-23 go to the very heart of the meaning of marriage. It is the “**oneness**” in Christ with the Father through the sacrament, which enriches marriage. “May they (in the sense of the spouses) all be one, just as Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe it is you who sent me.”.

This is how we could evangelize couples before and after marriage, as it shows the depth of the unity in marriage, which exceeds every legal interpretation or norm. Love is supreme for the Father, the Son and the Holy spirit and Likewise it should be for every married couple for “God is Love” (Jn:4:7-8). The family has to be the school of love, of relationships, values and mutual trust. It has to be a seminary. The book of Sirach says in 25/1, “My soul takes pleasure in three things and they are beautiful in the sight of the Lord and of men: **agreement between brothers, friendship between neighbors, and a wife and a husband who live in harmony.**”

5. Healing and Forgiveness:

One final consideration is on God’s mercy and healing. Repentance and forgiveness are the words which are becoming increasingly unfamiliar to many in our society. Yet we cannot lose sight of the fact of God’s unconditional love, forgiveness and healing. We all need the touch of Christ to heal us. So many families need sustenance and healing, for they live their marriage amidst tensions and difficulties.

The crisis has been abounding in marriage; especially the broken marriages of those separated or divorced couples who have remarried and the countless one parent families. Their number in the Catholic Church are ever increasing and one feels we are failing to deal with these couples. It is painful for us priests and for you married couples to see so many families, who as time goes on drift away from the Church. It is true that they are still part of the Church, but do they feel and live in the Church? However, we

must make them understand that God’s mercy has no limits. That we believe in the faithfulness of Christ to each one of us. He promised to be with us until the end of time. Christ does not abandon anyone.

Remember the words during Mass when we ask God “to look not upon our sins, but on the faith of your Church”. In this prayer, we are asking for courage not to trust in ourselves, but in God and God alone. The Church, like Christ with His miracles, offers healing, mercy and forgiveness to all those who because of their condition feel they are set aside by the Church.

6. Authentic discipleship demands Jesus-experience:

To bring the good news into the world, the authentic discipleship demands being with Jesus, having Jesus-experience in oneself. We could witness this in the very life of Jesus, as being alone with the Father in prayer and thus strengthened to overcome the difficulties in the way fulfilling the Father’s will. Moreover the authentic discipleship demands dedication, utmost commitment, an authentic life enshrined with the Kingdom values – all these are to be supported by the true spiritual life. The life of the disciple of Christ consists in **not only comforting the disturbed but also disturb the comfort** – to show the world that it bears counter-witness to Jesus.

YHWH – the God of the Old Testament, when he saw the plight of the people and heard their groaning, said, “Whom shall I send?” We have heard and read by ourselves as Prophet Isaiah saying, “Here I am Lord”. And when our world faces misery and tribulations, the same God asks, “Whom shall I send?” And he is happy to see such enthusiastic, energetic, committed people in you who are ready to herald a better future of the world and instill hope in the people of our times.

I wish to close with the striking words of the **Father Timothy Radcliff, O.P.**, in his book, **“I call you Friends”**. If we wish to bring the good news,

“we have to be with people,
enter their homes,
enjoy their friendship
We have to understand
How they see the world.
Learn what they have to teach us,
See through their eyes,
Grow in mutual trust.
God’s friendship with the human race

Is the very heart of the gospel.”

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