



International Confederation of Christian Family Movements



BY OUR ROOTS WE KNOW OURSELVES: AN ICCFM HISTORY

by
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Jesus said "By their fruits you will know them," but often it is by our roots that we know ourselves. The "fruits" of the International Confederation of Christian Family Movements (ICCFM) are the thousands of families educated and empowered by it. The Confederation is perhaps the first and only example of the worldwide domestic church, working to embody the hands and heart of Christ on all continents of the planet Earth.

But what about the roots? Where did ICCFM come from and what is its story? This narrative, written originally in 1992 and revised in 1995, attempts to answer, and is in itself a part of the history. This is so because---other than bits and pieces that appeared in newsletters and reports---the entire history of ICCFM has never been written down before.

PART I: THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

The Second World War dealt families a tremendous blow to the heart. The pain and chaos produced by the war convinced many of the necessity of returning both to God and to a supernatural vision of life in order to recover what had been lost. The ground had been burned clean, and everywhere it waited for the seed. Separate groups of men and women, then later of couples, met to search for something they could not easily define, not even realizing other groups like theirs were springing up all over the globe.

"Among the oldest of these groups," reported the Pontifical Council of the Laity "are the Teams of Our Lady in France and the Christian Family Movement in the United States. Both have made their influence felt beyond their frontiers and have been the inspiration for most of the other groups. In 1940 Abbe Caffarel started the Teams of Our Lady in Paris, and by the mid-forties Pat and Patty Crowley were coordinating action groups in Chicago. By the end of 1948, ACT, later to become the US Christian Family Movement's newsletter, reported that Catholic men and women working on the family apostolate had grouped together in twenty cities. One year later, For Happier Families, the first program book based on Cardinal Josef Cardijn's "observe, judge, and act" dynamic, was published. In June of 1949 eleven delegations from all over the country gathered to establish the first national coordinating committee. They chose the name "Christian Family Movement" and Pat and Patty Crowley were the first chairpersons.

Meanwhile, in Argentina, Fr. Peter Richards had gathered some couples together in the Buenos Aires home of Saturnino and Elena Llorente on November 25, 1948. Two years later, again on the initiative of Fr. Richards, similar groups arose in Montevideo, Uruguay, and by 1955 the Christian Family Movement (Movimiento Familiar Cristiano or MFC in Spanish), was a fact in six countries of South America. In 1957 The first MFC South American assembly (or encuentro) was held in Montevideo, with representatives from Argentina, Brazil, Chili, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Here was organized the Secretariat for Latin America (Secretariado para Latino America del MFC, or SPLA), with Federico and Hortensia Soneira as presidents.

During this time, the Crowleys "had been host to many foreign visitors, some of whom returned to their countries to start units of CFM. In January, 1956, the Crowleys set out to do internationally by plane what they had done nationally by station wagon just a few years before--visit as many CFM couples and recruit as many newcomers as possible." In six weeks they visited groups in Tokyo, organized three groups in Manila, stopped in Bombay, met the Pope in Rome, and talked with Teams of Our Lady members in Paris. Saddened by the poor and blind in Saigon, and noting pockets of poverty all over the world, the Crowleys were sharpening that global social justice perspective that was later to characterize ICCFM so strongly.

The seeds were being sown, taking root and growing quietly at kitchen tables and in living rooms around the world as various national family groups developed, found a structure, and matured. It was only a matter of time before the Body of Christ so growing was to become conscious of itself as a global phenomenon. This happened on September 7, 1966, in Caracas, Venezuela, when the first grassroots global family network was born---the International Confederation of Christian Family Movements.



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That year the fourth Latin American Encounter in Caracas spoke to The Social Mission of the Family. There the Mexican delegation proposed that an international group be formed to exchange information between the continents, an idea originated a year earlier by Jose and Luzma Alvarez-Icaza at the CFM convention in Notre Dame, Indiana. Meeting to discuss this proposal after the Encounter was over were thirteen couples and clergy from Latin American MFC, nine couples and clergy from the United States CFM (including an Episcopalian couple), and one couple and a priest representing two Spanish groups which later joined to become MFC---Equipos Pio XII and Obra Apostolica Familias. Two couples remembered even today by English and Spanish-speaking CFMers were there---Pat and Patty Crowley, and Jose and Luz, SPLA presidents from Mexico City. Both couples had served on two of Pope Paul VI's historical projects: the Crowleys were one of only three married couples who were part of the special study group on population and birth control and the Alvarez-Icazas were the only couple in the world to be "lay auditors" of the Second Vatican Council.

When these twenty-five CFMers met in Caracas in 1966, they agreed to form "The Confederation of Christian Family Movements," an organization that would exist on a trial basis, "as an experiment," for one year, after which the group would meet again to decide on the future.

But even though they weren't sure of the duration of the confederation, all were sure why it was needed. "The purpose of this conference," they agreed, "shall be the exchange of information and mutual help of CFMers throughout the world." The first elected General Secretaries were Luz and Jose, and the first office was established in Mexico City.

The next year---in October of 1967---a group of forty people, including many of the original twenty-five, gathered in Madrid. The role of General Secretary passed to Pat and Patty Crowley. At this meeting the group forged three points as integral to the character of the newly-born world organization, and the Confederation became more than just an experiment. The group realized that promoting and establishing communication between CFM groups across the globe must be a priority. "Right now we have contact with about fifty countries," the Crowleys said. "How can the conference reach them?"

The second priority was to keep the Confederation service-oriented. "The Confederation does not intend to be a superstructure," they agreed, but would exist to facilitate "unity, exchange of experiences, and mutual assistance" of its families worldwide.

The third point stressed the ecumenical character of the Confederation. "In the United States," the Crowleys reported, "interfaith activity is increasing every day. CFM has just released its first ecumenical program book, approved by different faiths for use by interfaith family groups, and we are in contact with leaders from the Family Life Program of the National Council of Churches in New York. What more can be done to encourage this sort of ecumenism at the international level?" Jose Alvarez-Icaza later reported that "the Pope was pleased with this [ecumenical] aspect of the Confederation."

At the Madrid meeting the group also decided that the Confederation board would consist of three couples from Spain, three from Latin America, and three from North America. To take care of their first priority of communication, the Crowleys began publishing an international newsletter, and volume 1, number 1 of the International Confederation Bulletin came out in December of 1967. It was published in English only, even though most of the Confederation was Spanish-speaking. MFC was indeed growing rapidly in Latin America. When SPLA called its sixth Latin American encounter in Buenos Aires in 1967, seventeen countries were there: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

The next year, 1968, saw the fledgling Confederation host its first, although modest, international seminar. Jose Alvarez-Icaza, believing that the Confederation, like the local groups, should be doing "observes" on an international level, stressed the need for gathering information about the family from a number of specialists. The leadership therefore took its "first opportunity to make a contribution to the Church and to the world" by sponsoring a conference at Lake Cuoma, Italy. "The meeting will be small," said the Bulletin, "private and without publicity." Twenty-five family experts and hierarchy attended, as well as the Crowleys and Alvarez-Icazas, to hear Professor John Noonan speak on education for responsible parenthood.



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And so, as the Confederation approached its second year, Pat and Patty Crowley were cautiously hopeful. "We think the work of MFC and CFM is just beginning, but we must find new and better ways of packaging the product. we must follow closely the new developments of the world. We must look forward and share in a theology of hope. We must not limit the family to conjugal communication, but rather communication and education between the family and the world. We have great hope, but we must be continually refining our approaches and distilling our plans."

PART II: GLOBAL THINKING BEFORE ITS TIME

In 1968, the Confederation of Christian Family Movements---as ICCFM was known back then---was only two years old, a mere baby, but already it was thinking globally, something many governments and corporations can't do even today. US CFMers Dan and Rose Lucey, for example, presented an idea for an international family year. "If we could work through the United Nations as sponsors, this would be great. No one is stepping forward with positive support and formation for families today. Maybe this will be CFM's major contribution. There is great need to put the family out in the forefront where it belongs." Dan died before this dream came true, but in 1974, six years after the Luceys first proposed it, the UN held its first International Year of the Family.

The Confederation, however, didn't wait for others to catch up with its vision, and kept on thinking globally. The international office moved to Chicago and in August a group of MFCers from Spain came to the United States to introduce something new---the Marriage Encounter. Marriage Encounter (Encuentro Conyugal in Spanish) was founded in 1962 in Barcelona by Fr. Gabriel Calvo and Mercedes and Jaime Ferrer. . It spread rapidly throughout Spain to Mexico and in 1968, at the invitation of the Confederation, a group of 52 couples and 26 priests of the Spanish MFC brought the Encounter to several cities in the United States. "The reactions have been most favorable," said the Bulletin, "and the work is progressing rapidly in the US." So rapidly, in fact, that Marriage Encounter eventually became an independent organization in the United States, and spread to every country in both North and South America.

In 1968 the Confederation moved for the first time into the Eastern hemisphere when Japan and the Philippines became new members. The next year presented another great milestone: in 1969 the Confederation held its first General Assembly of Families. Fifteen couples, representing thirty countries, came to Notre Dame University in the United States.

By now, MFC (the Spanish-speaking branch of CFM) was formed in the United States; the Foundation for International Cooperation (instituted by the US CFM in 1960) was busy helping families form friendships through its study tours; and India, England, and New Zealand were part of the Confederation. CFM had begun in New Zealand in the early sixties. Its founders were the married members of the old Catholic Youth Movement there, which swept the country immediately after the war years. Early CFM couples busy there were John and Audrey Stevenson, Des and Margaret Nolan, Don and Jackie Betner, and Mike and Helen Ryan.

The Confederation began doing it's "observes" now on a much larger scale. In 1969, at only three years of age, the group initiated a research project covering six topics, which was disseminated to couples in six countries. The topics were: responsible parenthood, human sexuality, socio-economic development, family life education, marriage encounters, and the birth-baptism event.

The Confederation opened a new decade---1970---with a full executive committee meeting in New Zealand. That September all the continents except Africa were represented: Des and Margaret Nolan for Oceania, Antonio and Cristina Alcocer for Latin America, Jose and Margarita Pich-Botey for Europe, Dan and Rose Lucey and Patty Crowley for North America, and Sony and Sito Sison for Asia.

Global thinking abounded at this meeting. "We would like," said the Luceys, "to suggest we include the subject of the world problem of pollution, and also the role of families in working for peace." Jose and Margarita, of Spain, suggested a questionnaire study of "how the families of the richer countries could help families in the poorer countries. In other words, how in the Confederation we could actualize [Pope Paul VI's encyclical] *Populorum Progresso*."



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The Philippine leadership was also anticipating the future. They reported issuing in their nation a magnificent manifesto called We Can No Longer Watch and Wait. Discussed at great length with Imelda Marcos, whose husband Ferdinand was president of the country, was the Philippine CFM's deep concern with the "social, political, economic, and religious ills of our country. We believe that if purposive Christian action is not undertaken NOW, our country may be engulfed in a violent revolution." But even as CFMers were looking into the future, they were also trying to change it. "We believe in demonstrations as a means of seeking reforms. However, we appeal to our people and the authorities to desist from violence in their confrontations." Two decades later came the largely peaceful revolution that began a new regime and new reforms in the Philippines.

PART III: A TIME OF MANY "FIRSTS"

The next fall, in October of 1971, representatives from twenty countries came to Ireland for the Second General Assembly. Rolly and Isabelle Leroux, who were later to become Confederation presidents, remember it as featuring many "firsts." "It was the first we attended," the couple remembered. "This assembly was also the first one set up somewhat as we know it today, but there were no microphones or translators for the speakers. We just had to do the best we could to understand our different languages. For the first time the World Council of Churches was present, and Leslie and Mona Clements were added to the executive committee representing its Family Education Unit." Belgium, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore, and Australia also became members. And Ghana and Cameroon brought Confederation membership to the African continent for the first time.

As part of its Five Year Plan, and in response to the presentation of Lola Vidal of Venezuela, the Assembly included a new focus on single-parent families. "CFM," said Reggie Weissert from the US, "should include more than just 'neat families.' We should reach out to one-parent families, divorced people, and married clergy."

Because the term "general secretary" no longer described the job, the Crowleys were re-elected as "president couple" and the organization they headed was now beginning to be referred to as ICCFM.

Ernesto Cardinal, the Jesuit from Nicaragua who was jailed for his "revolutionary activities," did a moving liturgy at the Irish Assembly that was based on his re-reading of the Book of Psalms. Called "one of the most formidable Latin American poets," by the Luceys, Fr. Cardenal presented "songs of a very modern world, not about a faraway people of long ago but about murder and brutality today." He made a great impression on the Assembly, the Luceys remembered. "It is an indication to both young and old that in the struggle for freedom for all people, in every age, the God of Israel is with them."

God continued to be with ICCFM as well, as it proceeded through its second decade. "As I see it," said the world-renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead, "CFM is providing a wider context by which husbands and wives can develop into a pair that can do all sorts of wonderful things, because they understand each other and because they can work in CFM as a team."

Margaret Mead had addressed these words to the ICCFM executive committee when she, along with a host of other experts, met with them in Tarrytown, New York. It was 1972 and the Confederation was just entering its sixth year. "This was one of the most enthusiastic, encouraging, and inspiring meetings in the history of ICCFM," said presidents Pat and Patty Crowley. The business meeting followed a three-day session with internationally-known experts such as Margaret Mead, Massachusetts Institute of Technology sociologist Thomas Cottle, psychiatrist Stanislau Grof, Ladonna Harris from Americans for Indian Opportunity, and theologian Ed Dufresne. "We asked them to tell us about the role of the family and were delighted to find them so pleased with the role of CFM-MFC in the world."

The movement was being noticed in other quarters as well. Fr. Charles Vella of Malta was in contact with the United Nations through Mr. Rafel Salas. "The UN," reported Fr. Vella, "is anxious to have the participation of CFMers in its World Population Year and would be willing to contribute funds as well." Fr. Vella also sent a letter on behalf of the Confederation to the Vatican, suggesting that, if the next Synod of Bishops were to consider the family, the movement would be happy to help plan and execute it. Unfortunately, this synod did not occur until eight years later, and the laity was not asked to participate in its planning. But, as usual, CFM was looking ahead!



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The next year, 1973, the Confederation sponsored another of its long history of "firsts"—the first international Marriage Encounter Seminar in Barcelona, Spain. That meeting brought more than eighty representatives from twenty-four countries back to the nation that first originated Marriage Encounter. The event was somewhat shadowed, however, by a difference of opinion between two ME expressions that had arisen. "It was a very difficult and painful meeting," Fr. Vella remembered, "but the Crowleys gave a Christian example of love and goodwill." Some followed Fr. Calvo in the belief that Marriage Encounter, founded as it had been by MFCers, should be an ecumenical action of CFM; others, like Fr. Charles Gallagher from New York, believed ME should be a service for Catholics only, and apart from CFM.. Both Fr. Gallagher and Fr. Calvo were present at Barcelona. After some discussion, "a good understanding was reached and ways to cooperate were agreed to. Generally, Marriage Encounter is part of CFM and adapts itself to indigenous ways."

After the Barcelona Assembly, at the request of Fr. Calvo and the Pich-Boteys, ICCFM applied for and was granted a US Patent and Trademark Office Service Mark number 967989 for the name "Marriage Encounter." ICCFM was now in a position to grant licenses to other groups for the use of the service mark "Marriage Encounter." Jose and Margarita and Fr. Gabriel coordinated at the international level, and none of them realized that the Marriage Encounter problem was still far from solved.

1973 also brought good news from Rome after Fr. Vella and the Crowleys visited there. The Secretariat of Christian Unity was very much impressed by the ecumenical structure of ICCFM and encouraged it to continue working in this direction. At that time communications between the Confederation and the Vatican were handled by the Christian Unity Office.

The future looked bright, therefore, as the Confederation became involved with yet another "first"—a World Assembly of Families, to be jointly sponsored by ICCFM and the Office of Family Education of the World Council of Churches. The proposed place was Tanzania, Africa, and the date was June of 1974. ICCFM received a grant from the United Nations to study the possibilities of holding such a meeting in Africa. Because of its unique experiment in village socialism, and its imaginative attempt to build on the African experience of the extended family in rural areas, Tanzania was approved. The president of the country was Julius Nyerere, who had been hosted by the Crowleys when he was a student in Chicago. He welcomed the idea, supported it, and agreed to open the Assembly.

The idea of families gathering from all over the world was an exciting one, featuring several fresh techniques in methodology. "Perhaps the freshest," said the Assembly prospectus, "is its confidence in the people. This is not a meeting of experts: it is to be a meeting of those who live out the day-to-day problems of the family in a world of minor and major conflict. Can it be an instrument of teaching us more about what people feel and hope and want?"

Fr. Vella remembered all the work involved. "I went to work as executive director in Tanzania for three months ahead. There was a great shortage of goods for some months and we were on the verge of canceling the Assembly. Only our determination and the encouragement of Rev. Les Clemens of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and the Crowleys made it happen."

Familia '74 was held at the University of Dar-es-Salaam on June 16-30 and featured a program in which participants actually lived for three days in the Ujamaa villages. This was an opportunity to experience President Nyere's experiment to have Tanzanians cling to communal life through extended family living...something families of the developed world were moving away from. "They made bricks," Patty Crowley remembered "graded and packed tobacco, gathered wheat, and planted tomatoes. They exchanged songs with their hosts, witnessed school children in drills and posed questions through interpreters to village chiefs."

Rose Lucey, who was present at this assembly, remembered that 1974 was also the United Nation's Year of the Family. "While professionals were gathered in the big cities of Europe and America consulting with each other about family life, CFM families and World Council of Church's families from fifty-one countries went to East Africa to work with the people in a sign of solidarity. When the appeal came at the University for donations of blood for the freedom fighters in Mozambique, it was CFMers from around the world who responded with thirty pints of blood. I believe there is still too wide a chasm between families and church professionals who believe



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the 'laity' are to be taught. I say 'no, we are not to be taught.' We are to pray and study the Scripture and the world around us to learn together, and then be willing to risk the actions needed to build a just society."

For Pat Crowley, in particular, Familia '74 was, according to his wife, "the climax of his life. Never before had he brought together, in soul as well as in body, so many people of so many colors from so many places on earth."

Familia '74 was in so many ways a great success, but problems were evident under the surface. For several years Pat Crowley was able, through private funding sources, to ease the financial burden of ICCFM. But less and less money was coming from dues. At the third General Assembly business meetings squeezed between Familia '74 programs, Pat had to report that ICCFM was in the red by \$25,000. He believed the World Council of Churches had brought more participants to Tanzania than had been agreed upon and billed them for the excess amount. Subsequently the Director of the WCC Office of Family Education was replaced and no one from the organization met with ICCFM for several years.

At the same time another rift began developing between MFC and the Crowleys. "In our business meetings during Familia '74 there was no translation provided for Spanish-speaking MFCers," said Rolly and Isabelle Leroux, CFM Canadian presidents. "All business was conducted in English and the Latin Americans felt the pressure." Reflecting on this years later, Patty said she was unaware of any real problem. "We just didn't have enough money to provide translation," she said. "in those days it wasn't as available as it is today."

Although Pat and Patty were elected for a third term, tensions were growing within the movement. "I think, "Fr. Vella said later, "these were the difficulties one finds in every growing international organization. What was needed perhaps was a new style of management, more collegial, and less personal."

PART IV: GATEWAYS AND BRIDGES

The years after the Tanzania assembly were in many ways difficult ones for ICCFM. On November 20, only a few months after the Crowleys had been re-elected as ICCFM presidents, Pat Crowley died of cancer. Pat and Patty had been part of the national and international leadership of the movement for over a decade, and now Patty was alone. She resolved to carry on until elections could be held at the next General Assembly.

Patty continued efforts to get the Pontifical Council of the Laity to enter the Confederation in its register of members, and continued to worry about funds. Although ICCFM member countries were assessed modest dues (countries with 100 to 10,000 member couples were asked for \$50 US, and those over 10,000 for \$100 US), little was actually collected.

On other fronts, the Solo Parents group in New Zealand, begun only a year before, had grown to include seventy-four parents and 182 children. The US Department of Health, Education and Welfare had for the first time funded the US CFM to develop the Families Involved in Nurturing and Development program, a family-based drug awareness program.

The Tanzania Assembly, meanwhile, was deeply affecting the movement. Fr. John Curnow, ICCFM's chaplain from New Zealand, continued its challenge. "He constantly pointed out that CFM families had to become aware of the conditions in which three-fourths of the world's families lived," said Isabelle Leroux. "He hoped these observes would lead us to judge that we in the developed world had unconsciously contributed to this through our lifestyles. At least he hoped we would ask WHY and then act!" Tony and Teresa Nieva, who started CFM in the Philippines in 1956, also joined in this challenge. "Membership in CFM," said Teresa, "has always meant membership in the human family. It is impossible to be in CFM and to lock the world outside the front door." The ICCFM leadership was listening. In their planning for the Fourth General Assembly in Manila from November 24 to December 2, they asked the National Social Action Secretariat for the Philippine bishops to plan an "exposure program." Now a feature of every World Assembly, the exposure program was then the first opening of the "gateway to the poor" that had been built in Tanzania. It literally changed people's lives as seventy delegates from twenty-two countries came to the General Assembly and saw first-hand the plight of the poor in Manila in 1977.



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For two days the group visited the squatter areas and resettlement projects. The delegates were divided into eight groups and went with a facilitator to listen to leaders from the areas visited. "It was the most moving experience of my life," said Isabelle. She and Rolly had been to Tanzania, but had never seen such terrible living conditions before.

"CFM couples," Fr. Curnow told the delegates, "should be aware that they share a world with millions of families who are unable to realize their God-given potential. So while we work for the fullness of family life in our own society, we must never close ourselves off from a caring relationship with the poor. National boundaries are not meant to be fences closing us off, but rather they are gateways to the concerns of the whole human family."

Fr. Arthur McCormack, Director of the Population and Development Office in Rome, agreed. "Poverty as we have seen it was never intended by Christ. He was not poor. He was an artisan who worked for a living. For CFM I have a great vision, that it will be part of a great Christian crusade to remedy the situation which Pope Paul once described as 'an insult flung in the face of God and man.'"

"For most," read an ICCFM press release issued November 30, the Manila assembly "was an awakening experience. In reporting on it later, delegates realized that such conditions also existed in their own countries, and the 'exposure tour' was a strong reminder of this." From that point on, an exposure tour that kept the world's poor before the eyes of ICCFM was part of every World Assembly.

The 1977 conference also saw the inevitable change in leadership. To the surprise of many (including themselves), Rolly and Isabelle Leroux were elected the next ICCFM presidents. "We were eating lunch," Isabelle said, "when they came down and told us." The couple had just moved from Montreal to Ottawa, leaving their support group behind, and knew of the problems within ICCFM. "We were keenly aware," the couple said after the election, "that we undertake an awesome burden. This burden must be a shared one. Manila cannot be a turning point unless all of you, those who were there and those who could not come, make it a turning point.. You must pass the message of Manila on to the couples of your countries. We in turn will devote ourselves to the international level."

At the Assembly, Fr. Gabriel Calvo again brought up the Marriage Encounter issue from four years before. He told the delegates that he was upset that some organizations using the Marriage Encounter name were not following the group's original purposes or spirit. "For many delegates," said Jerome Fraser, who was then the US CFM chaplain, "the facts revealed regarding ICCFM's responsibility for the development of Marriage Encounter came as a surprise." Marriage Encounter had become immensely popular, and not many realized its roots lay in CFM. In the United States, the movement had two "expressions"---Worldwide ME and National ME. Referring to the former, Fr. Calvo said that the purpose of the group he founded was "not to renew the Catholic Church or the world. It is for the renewal of the couple, to help them rediscover each other through dialogue and to make them realize God's plan in their marriage, so they can serve the families of the world. If a group wants to do something else, they should change the name, and not call it Marriage Encounter. I approve the ME that is within the Confederation and no other." The Assembly responded to Fr. Calvo by appointing two committees, one to work out the legal ramifications and another to plan guidelines for the ICCFM-ME licensing relationship.

Rolly and Isabelle also inherited other problems on the international level. "We felt saddled with three rifts:" Isabelle said, "the problem of the World Council of Churches after Tanzania; the feeling of some Spanish-speaking leaders that they were overlooked during the Crowley years; and the resentment from Rome over Pat Crowley's public opposition to the results of the birth control commission. Our goal was to bring peace." They began the long process of bridging all three rifts.

Without the private funding sources of the Crowleys, ICCFM could not afford to bring its secretariat together for several years. Yet the Leroux managed at their own expense to attend two MFC Latin American General Assembly meetings---one in Panama in 1979 and the other in Peru in 1982. No official translation was provided, but someone who knew English whispered what was being said to the Leroux.



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The rift with the Vatican was lessened somewhat in 1978 when the Leroux traveled to Europe to speak on the tenth anniversary of *Humanae Vitae* in Milan. Forty-two countries took part at the meeting organized by the International Center for Family Studies, of which Fr. Vella was the director. "There we met the future pope, John Paul II," Rolly said, "and got some good exposure for ICCFM."

Going on to Rome, the Leroux recalled, "we attended the Papal audience, and it was a stirring event. After lunch we met with Bishop Edgar Gagnon of the Council for the Family. He quickly pointed out that his committee made many studies related to family life, but that direct contact with family organizations was the responsibility of the Council for the Laity. He personally drove us across Rome to meet with Bishop Lucas Neves."

Further bridges were built in Rome when the Leroux lunched with the head of the Office of Family Education of the World Council of Churches. Later, Masamba Ma M'Polo, director of that office, agreed to be part of the ICCFM executive board with his wife. From Rome, Rolly and Isabelle met with CFMers in Malta, Sicily, and Ireland.

In Africa and Asia, CFM was also growing. Angela and Godfrey Ukaifo, the young CFM presidents in Nigeria, reported that their group of a dozen met every week, plus brought food to the lepers at a nearby colony. The leader couple in Uganda, Thomas and Jane Musoke, were on a committee that visited every single parish in the country and were involved with the World Council of Churches in a family research project. Malawi, Ghana, and Cameroon also had CFM families engaged in pre-marriage programs, self-help projects, education for illiterate women and girls, education for men regarding the dignity of women, and marriage counseling—particularly where second wives or concubines were involved.

In Korea, CFM had grown to 35 action groups; in Japan a CFM program was translated into Japanese and was sold out, with a second being published and a third being printed. Joe and Margaret D'Silva and Fr. Anthony D'Souza from India headed up an extensive CFM program of family life education, natural family planning, marriage preparation and leadership training. The CFM National Board in India decided to develop its own program materials, while CFM in the Philippines was awarded the Ozanam Award by the Ateneo de Manila University for the "task of building and supporting the Filipino family at a period in history when it is under siege from many quarters." This award, the university's highest giving public recognition and honor to Christian laypersons, was the first ever given to an organization. In Thailand, Nop and Elma Muangkroot were working with the Bangkok archdiocese and ICCFM to produce a Thai translation of CFM materials. Sito and Sony Sisson, meanwhile, were conducting Marriage Encounter weekends for Malaysia and Singapore couples.

The Leroux were happy to report, in their Winter 1979 edition of the ICCFM Newsbulletin, the welcome news that one of the female delegates to the famous Puebla Conference in Mexico, during which the Pope reaffirmed the preferential option for the poor, was Stella de Cinfuentes, a member of Colombia's MFC. Only 19 of the 356 delegates were women.

In January of 1980 the Leroux, Lino and Cetinna Zahra (European Continental Presidents), and Fr. Charles Vella (European Chaplain), attended a world family assembly sponsored by the WCC's Office of Family Education in Oaxtepec, Mexico.

So the movement ended its second decade with stronger bridges and wider gateways, with healed relationships and a greater compassion for the poor. With new strength and resolve, ICCFM turned its eyes once more to Rome. At long last, the Bishops were holding a synod on the family.

PART V: FAITH HOPE, LOVE AND BRAVERY: CFM IN ROME

For years it had been rumored that the pope would be holding a world bishops' meeting on the family, and finally, in November of 1980, it happened. ICCFM "was the first international group to respond" said the Confederation's presidents, Rolly and Isabelle Leroux. "We don't know if that was an act of faith, hope, love—or bravery."

ICCFM responded to the synod by planning its second World Assembly and fifth General Assembly immediately after the synod's closing ceremonies in Rome. "At first," said Rolly, "we were planning to hold our assembly



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during the synod, but we were advised that it might be viewed as a counter-synod." There was, Fr. Vella recalled, "considerable opposition from some quarters in the Vatican, due mainly to not knowing ICCFM." Attending the assembly for the first time were area leaders Wayne and Sue Hamilton of the United States, who some nine years later were to become presidents of the worldwide movement.

Mindful of their experiences of the past, the Leroux made sure translators were provided at both assemblies, the first time this had been done. In another unprecedented action, (and in recognition of the Confederation having re-scheduled the assembly until after the synod), Bishop Josef Tomko, Secretary General of the Synod, graciously provided copies of the final documents to ICCFM as soon as they were ready. "This is a first," ICCFM chaplain Fr. Jerry Fraser explained. "Generally the documents are received only by bishops."

But in spite of these hopeful events, the synod was, for some, a disappointment in many ways. Upon reading the final documents, the Leroux "were disturbed to see familiar entrenched phrases, such as 'frailty,' 'human weakness,' and 'unequal to the task' used in describing some Christian couple's response. We know far too many persons who are struggling with themselves and with their consciences. Those words are so far from the reality. What is an international, but primarily Catholic, ecumenical organization like ICCFM to do with our couples in Japan where mixed marriages are increasing? We cannot send them to the Office for Christian Unity for solutions to marital problems. We cannot just take our family situations and fit them into our faith. We must also take our faith and fit it into family situations."

The ICCFM leadership prepared a statement that was read to the pope. In general, the couples affirmed the fact that the Bishops met to address the subject of family. "We were overjoyed to read that the family is reiterated as the domestic church within the larger community," the Leroux said in the US CFM newsletter ACT. "We commented negatively, however," said North American Continental Couple Bob and Irene Toronto, "on the Bishops' controversial treatment of the divorced and remarried and the whole area of birth control. It is our hope this synod is not an end of the Bishops' concern with families, but a beginning of a dialogue that will enrich us both."

"Our strategy," said Rolly and Isabelle, "was to set a tone of open and loving dialogue. We wanted the Assembly to identify those occasions which saddened us and those in which we rejoiced. The lesson learned is the need for continuous and open dialogue between bishops and grassroots people. We are couples who love and work for their church and who will continue to love and work for it. We are the domestic church."

"What we seemed to hear the synod saying," Wayne and Sue wrote in their area report, "was that families should model themselves after the church. We don't believe that. The church should model itself after the family."

Remarks like these, reflecting the experience and democratic tradition of North America, came out of love for the church and faith in its people. But they frightened some bishops into believing that ICCFM as a whole was a dangerous force aligned against church teachings. They remembered Pope Paul VI's Birth Control Commission of the sixties, in which Pat and Patty Crowley were part of the majority who urged the pope to reform the Church's position on contraception. After the pope rejected his own commission's advice and wrote Humane Vitae, the Crowleys became respectful, but public, opponents of his decision. The bridge with the Vatican that the Leroux had worked so hard to repair was again weakened.

But there was still cause for hope. Pope John Paul II formed a new Council for the Family, and in 1981 US CFM presidents Gary and Kay Aitchison met the consultant to the Council, Bishop Paul Cordes at a Washington, DC, meeting. "The Holy Father," Bishop Cordes said, "is interested in making the Council for the Family work. If we do not push family ministry forward now, we will be guilty before society and the Church. This comes from the pope's inner heart."

Meanwhile, some progress had been made regarding relations with Marriage Encounter. "We have tried to go with what Gabriel seems to want," Rolly and Isabelle wrote to their two ME committees in September of 1982. The couple had sent out a questionnaire to all twelve members of the committees to get their opinions regarding licensing, monitoring, and structure of the group that would oversee the first two functions. In the five years



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since the Manila Assembly, Fr. Calvo had become "firmly convinced---especially after my trips to Spain, Philippines, Japan, and Venezuela---of the necessity for the ICCFM to retain ownership of the Marriage Encounter trademark, and for continuing the practice of licensing to all who request it." He did, however, hope those requesting licenses would "want to move according to the original [Marriage Encounter] experience, but according to their local needs and values and the signs of the times. The ideal is that ME be identified nationally, like ME Canada, ME USA, ME Spain, ME Japan..." Saying that the ME problem was primarily an American one, the Leroux took the position that ICCFM should continue to offer licensing "in good faith, send material re the Calvo method, and trust in the Lord."

So plans went forward relatively hopefully for the World Assembly in 1983. For the first time since ICCFM began, the assembly site was returning to Latin America---to Guadalajara, Mexico. The largest CFM membership in the world was in Latin America, and holding the assembly there was another opportunity to strengthen the bridge between English and Spanish-speaking members of the Confederation. "In addition," said the Leroux, "the Latin American MFC was holding an assembly at the same time, so we felt this was an opportunity to expose ICCFM to many Latin American MFCers. Usually only a small delegation attended ICCFM assemblies."

But some Vatican officials still remembered ICCFM's post-synod attempt to dialogue with Rome's position on birth control and mixed marriage. "Our contact couple in Guadalajara," the Leroux said, "received a call from their auxiliary bishop, Adolfo Hernandez Hurtado. He advised them to have a talk with Cardinal Jose Salazar of Guadalajara, who had some concerns centered on what authority ICCFM could exercise over the national MFC and what participation the World Council of Churches would have in the assembly liturgies. Our contact couple agreed that the WCC would not conduct any liturgy and assured the Cardinal that any decisions made at the ICCFM level were not binding on the Latin American MFC."

So instead of relations with Latin American MFC being strengthened by the planned assembly, tensions began growing. The second bridge the Leroux had built, with the WCC, was also weakened. The Mexican WCC minister, who had a liturgy planned for the assembly, was understandably upset when he could not conduct it.

Most of the membership, however, was not aware of these activities behind the scenes. Many remember the assembly as a time when ICCFM first visited with Latin American base communities and reflected on the idea of evangelical poverty. It was the first assembly for US CFMers Tom and Vernie Dale, who were later to become the editors of the international newsletter LINK. "At Guadalajara," Vernie wrote, "I first lifted up my eyes from my own country and began to see the world. Struggling as it is with the human condition, the universal domestic church can still work miracles. The blind saw a bigger world, the deaf heard the call of the Spirit, and the lame rose up together in action."

At the executive meeting, however, it was felt that the movement's power-center must go to where the membership was---and to where questioning of church authority wasn't---Latin America. At what European presidents Basil and Clare Clancy called a "terrible meeting," during which some people shed tears, the South American MFC threatened to withdraw from ICCFM. Embarrassed at what happened before the assembly, the continental leadership group of SPLA wanted some assurance that the movement's decisions wouldn't reflect poorly on them in the eyes of the church hierarchy. The leadership elected Manuel and Cecelia Samaniego, of Venezuela, as the new ICCFM presidents, with Bob and Irene Tomonto as vice-presidents.

As the first Latin American presidents of ICCFM since its beginning, the Samaniegos vowed to bring new structure to the movement.

PART VI: WAY TO RUN A REVOLUTION

At Guadalajara in 1983 the new ICCFM presidents began reorganizing the structure of the movement. Their first action was to set up a committee to formulate ICCFM's first constitution. Members were the Tomontos, past presidents Rolly and Isabelle Leroux, Latin American presidents Helio and Selma Amorim, ICCFM chaplain Fr. Nicholas Bermudez, European chaplain Fr. Charles Vella, and Latin American chaplain Fr. Dalton Parros.



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Only three months after the Guadalajara meeting, and after having sent a questionnaire to every national CFM president, the group met for the first time in Caracas. At that meeting a draft of the new constitution and by-laws were written and sent to ICCFM leaders throughout the world for comments and suggestions.

The process, however, proved too much for Bob and Irene Tomonto of the United States. The ecumenical-minded couple resigned from the team when what they viewed as a rigid constitution specified that the international chaplain must be a Roman Catholic priest. Wayne and Sue Hamilton, US CFM vice-presidents, were named as replacing members.

In August of 1984, after having received input from all over the world, the committee met again in Caracas to work on the final draft. "There was much talk," said Manuel, "and during two days each input was weighed, accepting some and rejecting others." Finally an official version was adopted and a copy in both English and Spanish was sent to all ICCFM leaders.

The new constitution clarified types of members and voting rights, established the General Assembly as the governing body of ICCFM (replacing the executive committee), and created the executive secretariat as the group that helped the President Team in their day-to-day work. "We believe," the Hamiltons said, "that the final constitution reflects the consultative process. It is our perception that the committee was sensitive to our concerns as well as those expressed by others around the world."

The Samaniegos also established ICCFM's first bilingual newsletter. The international newsletter begun by the Crowleys had appeared regularly since December of 1967---but only in English. The Leroux put out four more English issues. But in the first quarter of 1985, the Samaniegos published "Year I - Number 1" of LINK (LAZO in Spanish), in both English and Spanish. "You and your local CFM groups," the first edition proclaimed, "are not alone in the world. There are many groups like yours and thousands, yes, thousands of couples, solo parents, and young persons that live and work for the family in the forty-six countries where CFM exists." The Samaniegos published three issues of the newsletter in two years, the last in 1987.

The year 1986 didn't start well for ICCFM when, just six months before the World Assembly was planned to open in Washington, DC, its chaircouple----unable to garner local support---abruptly quit. The leadership in Chicago, however, came to the rescue and the assembly was held in the city that was CFM's cradle forty years before.

One part of ICCFM that had not changed was its focus on the marginalized persons in society: the theme was Families: the Voice of the Poor and Suffering. "Changing the meeting site from Washington, DC--home of government handouts---to Chicago was the best move they could have made," reported ACT. "The delegates saw emergency shelters and food programs that were started without government money or interference."

Antonio and Teresa Nieva, Asian Continental Couple, impressed the assembly with their video tape of Way to Run a Revolution. Part of the group that worked for the free elections that set Corazon Aquino as president of the Philippines, the couple were proud of the unarmed clergy and lay people that knelt in front of tanks and convinced young soldiers not to attack the liberation headquarters. "Eight of the members of that citizen's movement are CFMers," said ACT. "Talk about observe, judge and act!"

Present at the World Assembly in Chicago was a rabbi, a representative from the Pontifical Council for the Family, and Rafael Salas, director of the UN Fund for Population Activities. Only ICCFM could provide such a harmonious umbrella for such diverse groups!

The Samaniegos were re-elected ICCFM presidents in Chicago, but had to deal with another old problem that had again arisen. Mr. Salas, the UNFPA director who had been so impressed with the World Assembly, and who had hoped to get \$25,000 to fund it, suddenly died. The movement was left with many unpaid bills.

But the Samaniegos and Fr. Bermudez continued the traditional work of the ICCFM leadership---building bridges. Following the path originally marked out by the Crowleys, the team traveled to Rome to try to obtain formal recognition by the Pontifical Councils for the Family and for the Laity. On the way back, the ICCFM presidents



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stopped at Dublin and stayed with Basil and Claire Clancy, the European presidents. Memories of the painful Guadalajara meeting in 1983 were healed. "We were very impressed by the people," the Samaniegos said, "and their wonderful hospitality."

Other good things were happening as well. Godfrey and Angela Ukairo, African Continental Couple, were writing to the African bishops to introduce them to CFM; five couples and their chaplain from Thailand brought Marriage Encounter training from the Philippines; Italy applied for ICCFM membership; and four regional assemblies were held in South America on the theme Ecclesial Base Communities. In addition, Bishop Edward Gaines invited US presidents Wayne and Sue Hamilton and US CFM Executive Directors Gary and Kay Aitchison to visit his country of New Zealand and discuss the possibility of reviving CFM couples' groups there. As a result, pockets of CFM began to re-establish themselves throughout the country, with groups in Auckland and deep in the South Island. Bishop Gaines, enthused by the message of the Synod on the Family, had formed a Family Commission in Hamilton Diocese and appointed Mike Ryan its first chairperson.

In non-Christian Asia, CFM had made great strides in seeking to articulate its role in fulfilling its mission among predominately Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu families. In 1988, President couple Noppadon and Elma Muangkroot convened Asia's first Continental Assembly. Its theme, The Christian Family in Asia: Its Evangelical Mission, set the tone which Asian CFM has continued to this day.

Because of the financial crunch on the secretariat level, however, no more team meetings were held; but, funded personally by the Samaniegos, one more issue of LINK appeared. Lack of money did not stop progress, however. Two goals the movement had been working toward almost since the beginning were at last achieved. On June 23, 1989 ICCFM was recognized by the Pontifical Council of the Laity as an international association of lay people in accordance with Canon Law. The Leroux and Samaniegos were able to get less than half of the grant promised them by the United Nations, but ICCFM was finally recognized by them as a non-governmental agency. The Confederation was granted Consultative Status (Category II) by the UN Economic and Social Council in New York. A quiet "revolution" had changed the movement into a more structured organization, with the beginning of bilingual communication, and recognized on an international level by the church and the UN.

PART VII: MYSTERY AND REALITY

In 1989 the World Assembly---ICCFM's fourth---returned after many years to Europe. Called Families: Mystery and Reality, Hope of the Third Millennium, the assembly was held in Avila, Spain in September. The theme reflected ICCFM's history of light in dark, its struggle with finances, language differences, and recognition by the church while still holding fast to its ideals of international communication and family outreach to the powerless.

In Avila, home of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, ICCFM became conscious of itself as a manifestation of the worldwide domestic church. "We assume as our own the mission of the Church," said the Declaration of Avila, "to announce and to cooperate in the construction of the Kingdom of God through the promotion of justice, brotherhood and peace. For these reasons, we proclaim that the family is the Domestic Church."

Dealing with family realities, representatives from each continent reported the results of a questionnaire mailed out a year before. Over 9800 CFMers from nineteen countries, both married couples and solo parents, responded. Asked which of nine factors was the essence of family life, CFMers listed the top three: love, a committed married couple, and children. The biggest social pressures facing these families were listed as those involving the workplace, housing, and materialism.

The General Assembly saw a dramatic session during which the leadership, after many votes, finally returned the international presidency to North America as Wayne and Sue Hamilton from the USA were elected over Brazil's Helio and Selma Amorim. The Hamiltons appointed Rev. Samuel Palmer as chaplain and Helio and Selma as vice-presidents.

The Hamiltons main goal was to improve international communication. For the first time in the Confederation's history, a couple was appointed to the secretariat whose main duty was to publish the international newsletter..



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The appointment of Tom and Vernie Dale reflected the importance given by the Hamiltons to frequent communication, and it was decided that LINK should appear regularly three times a year. Fifteen bi-lingual issues of LINK were published from 1990 to early 1995, more issues than at any time in the Confederation's history. The Hamiltons used home and portable computers and fax machines to keep in almost constant touch with leader couples throughout the world, and the US CFM headquarters in Ames, Iowa doubled as an office for ICCFM as well. Taking advantage of links already forged, the couple appointed the Leroux as United Nations liaisons in New York and European presidents Jacinto and Pilar Gonzalez as UN liaisons in Vienna. ICCFM, through the Gonzalez, also became part of the European Confederation of Catholic Family Associations.

In 1990 the second Asian Continental convention was held in the Philippines, making that continent the only one besides South America (which held ten!) to hold a continental meeting at all. There the Hamiltons met Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila, and Philippine President Corazon Aquino. In May of 1992, Wayne and Sue traveled to Malta, receiving national press coverage there. They were warmly received by Tony and Lily Gauci, national presidents of a small island-nation with sixty CFM groups. The Hamiltons then went on to Rome to meet with the president of the Pontifical Council of the Laity. Because of the astonishing dissolution of the Soviet Union earlier in the year, part of their agenda was to discuss Christian communities in post-Communist countries. The Hamiltons were met by newly-elected Italian MFC presidents Roberto and Luisa Bovio. Forty MFC groups, spreading from across the water in Malta, had sprung up there since 1980.

People living in the nineties experienced a world much changed in only a few years. Even as the Soviet Union was breaking apart, the European community was drawing closer together. More and more, nations saw that they had to work together for the economic good of all. East-West tensions had eased, but North-South tensions were increasing. First-world industrialized countries were beginning to heed alarming scientific reports about environmental degradation, but Third-world countries continued to strive toward what they saw as progress and development. The age of global awareness had dawned.

The World assembly in 1992 reflected one of the great concerns ushered in by the new decade---a concern for planet Earth. Called Families of the Earth, Creating New Covenants in a Changing World, the assembly introduced into the minds of CFM families all over the world a new idea: that concern for the earth was not only an ecological issue, but a justice issue and a deeply spiritual issue as well.

The World Assembly was held in Merida, Mexico, from October 29 to November 2. To prepare for it, the Hamiltons sent out a questionnaire to all the continents asking CFMers to observe, judge, and act on the state of the ecology in their local communities. "Over and over," the Hamiltons said, "we heard people tell us they didn't understand what the ecology had to do with family, or with social justice. But after completing the questionnaire at their local action group meetings, group after group reported this to be one of the best meeting they ever had."

The World Assembly was held only a few months after the United Nation's first "earth summit," in Rio de Janeiro that sought to forge global ecological policy. The World Assembly, however, focused on educating and involving people personally, inspiring them to return home and act in their own communities. At the grand final action of the assembly, attendees signed A Covenant With the Earth, calling for international agreements on environmental issues and pledging in their daily lives to struggle against lifestyles based on possession and pollution. Another "first" for the Merida assembly was the availability of the written history of ICCFM. In the first quarter of 1991, to mark the 25th anniversary of the movement, LINK began publishing the history. Now ICCFMers all over the world, could, for the first time, look back at their roots.

Even though the topic of ecology was something new for a World Assembly, the issues upon which it rested---consumerism, social justice, concern for the powerless---were not. The General Assembly that October also brought new perspectives to the old issue of funding. Through LINK and in their correspondence, the Hamiltons continually stressed the necessity of each continent taking responsibility for funding their own delegates to World Assemblies. The couple also challenged ICCFMers to take ownership of their own Confederation. "We all must share responsibility for funding," Sue said "because the financial burden can no longer be borne by one or two couples." Historically, the "financial burden" often amounted to thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses for the president couple.



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These issues came to a head on October 29, the first day of the General Assembly at the Universidad del Mayab. "For about 14 hours," LINK reported, "ICCFM was under the leadership of no one but the Holy Spirit." All three couples nominated for the presidency declined, including the Hamiltons. Wayne and Sue told the ICCFM leadership that they were worried about funding problems, but also about the lack of support from some of the continental couples and the past president. A long discussion ensued, in which many delegates took the microphone to speak from the heart regarding the direction of the movement. Rolly summed it all up: "Three couples have declined the nomination, funding is sparse, and there seems to be too much dependency on the secretariat to get things done. What are we going to do about this?"

"The Hamiltons," Vernie recalled, "serenely removed themselves from the auditorium and left the delegates to wrestle with this question on their own." After overnight meetings, Oceania presidents Mike and Helen Ryan from New Zealand, reported the next day to the Assembly that the continental couples had agreed to pledge their support, ongoing commitment, and greater financial responsibility. With these assurances, the Hamiltons accepted the nomination and were re-elected by acclamation.

"I'd never seen an ICCFM election before," Vernie said. "and the moment revealed the bonds that keep the Confederation together. The auditorium burst into cheers and applause, and next to me Teresa Moyo (African continental president) gave out the traditional Chichewa joy-cry. Everyone surged up the aisles to surround Wayne and Sue with hugs and kisses and congratulations. We were one again, united again in our leadership."

Things went smoothly after that. Nop and Elma Muangkroot, appointed by the Hamiltons as their vice-presidents, promised hard work and even their physical presence at secretariat meetings. Fr. Sam Palmer agreed to continue as chaplain. Tony and Lily Gauci were plied with the flags of attending nations when they offered Malta as the site of the next World Assembly. Spirits rose even higher when Darka and Marijo Zivkovic, representatives from the Family Center in Croatia, asked that their country be admitted to ICCFM. The answer was a resounding cheer by all the delegates present, and Croatia became the first eastern European country to join the Confederation.

But the biggest surprise came after the Assembly was over and all the bills had been paid: about \$28,000 was available for investment toward the next World Assembly. Merida was the first Assembly in ICCFM history to provide seed money for the next. Much of the credit for this went to the secretariat's strict budgeting; to the local planning committee in Merida, who worked to get many services donated; and to the fact that 400 people attended--almost double what had been expected. Such a financially successful World Assembly came in the nick of time for ICCFM. "A typical Assembly," Wayne had told the secretariat, "including funded travel for some of our third-world delegates, costs about \$100,000. Much of this amount is donated, but funds aren't coming in from the United Nations or from bishops' councils anymore, as they have the last decade or so."

PART VIII: ONE BODY IN CHRIST

So the Hamiltons began their second term determined to unite the Confederation still further. One of their main goals was to increase ties between ICCFM and MFC in Latin America. Both the Hamiltons and the Muangkroots took Spanish lessons. In spite of financial constraints, Sue Hamilton traveled to Buenos Aires for the MFC continental meeting in October of 1993, the first time either of the couple had done so as heads of the Confederation. Treasurer Peter Broeren, who traveled with her, personally took photographs of all the national MFC presidents present, and the next issue of LINK was devoted largely to MFC in Latin America. SPLA's suggestion for a worldwide CFM Day of Prayer, modeled on their own MFC Day, was gladly accepted by the secretariat and a prayer card in English and Spanish was sent out in LINK as well. The first Sunday in October, 1994, marked the first time ICCFMers throughout the world were linked in prayer.

In May of 1994, the Hamiltons traveled to Rome for another historic event---Europe's first continental assembly. Continental presidents Jacinto and Pilar Gonzalez, who had been traveling all over Europe since taking office, had made many connections, particularly in the newly-free, but economically struggling, countries of eastern Europe. Long-time CFM nations of Italy, Sicily, Spain, Ireland, and Malta were joined at the Rome meeting by newcomers Germany, Portugal, Croatia, Slovakia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic---almost half of all the countries in Europe.



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Only a month later, in Singapore, Asia held its third continental meeting, under the leadership of the new continental presidents, Joe and Charito Hilario. For the first time in over ten years, Taiwan was represented---by no less than Joseph Ti Kang, Archbishop of Taipei and chairman of the Office of the Laity of the Asian Bishop's Conference.

Meanwhile, CFM in Malta had distinguished itself by the role it played in the UN's International Year of the Family for 1994. Representatives from over 900 NGOs came to Malta at the end of 1993 to begin the year-long activities. "With the attendance of such a diversity of delegates," the Gaucis said, "we had practically all the cultures of the world to discuss the most fundamental unit of society, the family." It also, they said, gave them good practice in setting up their first ICCFM World Assembly! The Confederation was honored by the UN for its contribution to the Year of the Family, largely because of the work of the Gonzalez and Maltese CFM.

LINK continued to come out regularly and the ICCFM history was enlarged and updated, thanks to information send in by the Leroux and Antonio and Martha Ruiz Esparza of Mexico, who were working on a history of MFC in their own country.

Preparation for the Malta Assembly began in earnest in January of 1993, when the Hamilton's secretariat met in Florida, USA. For the first time in many years, the group that sat down to plan the World Assembly was truly global in character: Nop and Elma had come all the way from Thailand to help. After comparing costs, and taking note of traffic congestion on Maltese roads, the secretariat took the suggestion of the Maltese planning committee to hold the assembly in a hotel with conference facilities, the New Dolmen on St. Paul's Bay. This was the first time it would be more cost-effective to hold a World Assembly in a hotel, since the available retreat house did not have a large enough auditorium. Even though the secretariat worried about the added cost to delegates, the big plus would be that almost every delegate would be housed under one roof. It would be a great time to interact!

Theme suggestions had been coming in for months, due to an article in LINK requesting them, and the newsletter noted that the World Assembly would take place in the same year that marked the thirtieth anniversary of Vatican II, the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, and the fifth year since the UN World Summit on Children. The secretariat also drew inspiration from Malta itself. The island kept vivid memories of St. Paul's journeys spreading Christianity, so reminiscent of the journeys of a long line of ICCFM leaders like the Crowleys, the Leroux, the Gonzalez, and the Hamiltons.

To develop the theme for the 1995 meeting, the secretariat studied what was going to be discussed at that year's UN World Summit for Social Development. They also drew upon concerns sent in by Brazil (advocating for small group discussions), Africa (AIDS), and Latin America (national debt). The result was the theme for ICCFM's sixth World Assembly of Families: Towards A Global Family: Visions for the Journey.

At the next secretariat meeting in September, 1995, workshops were fleshed out dealing with world health, including AIDS, famine, and the environment; shifting of wealth, including children in poverty, national debt, and unemployment; and social integration, including tribalism, nationalism, militarism, and networking. These workshops reflected some sobering statistics that had emerged after the fall of communism: the world's developed countries were spending as much on military power in one year as the poorest two billion people on earth earned in total income. The concentration of wealth among the very few was greater in 1994 than at any time in the history of the planet. To prepare for the Malta meeting, the Hamiltons again send out "observe" questions for dissemination through LINK and all continental presidents.

The Malta meeting would bring together two long-time friends of CFM as speakers---Fr. Charles Vella and Fr. Gabriel Calvo. With their help, CFM had touched the lives of hundreds of families throughout the years. So also did former presidents Rolly and Isabelle Leroux, who were to be honored in Malta with ICCFM's first Cardinal Cardijn Award, presented to them "in recognition of their consistent and outstanding leadership."

As 1995 began, ICCFM stood in a world more politically and economically united than ever before, yet pulled apart by civil wars and the huge and growing gap between rich and poor. CFMers the world over were going to



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Malta, the crossroads of Europe, Africa, and Asia---the meeting place of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Taking inspiration from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, ICCFMers planned for their next meeting in the conviction that "So too, we, though many, are one body in Christ..."

The roots of ICCFM lie in bright visions and hard journeys, but they still nourish the three fruits ICCFM has always sought to produce: communication, service, and ecumenism among the families of the earth. Despite its struggles with language, perspectives, and finances; despite communication problems that face families everywhere, ICCFM continues to flourish as an example of the universal domestic church, the hands and heart of Christ reaching out to heal and caress the earth.