



K O I N Ō N I A

...together on the journey

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**AS YOU SENT ME INTO THE WORLD,
SO I SENT THEM INTO THE WORLD (Jn 17, 18)**

40 years after the *Seraphicus Patriarcha*

THE FAMILY AS VOCATION AND MISSION

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General Introduction

In this year Secular Franciscans all over the world are commemorating the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of their present Rule by Pope Paul VI with the apostolic letter “*Seraphicus Patriarcha*” dated 24th June 1978. On this occasion the recently concluded XV General Chapter of OFS (Seraphicum, Rome, on November 4-11, 2017) invited all its members to reflect on the application of this Rule and how it is to be lived in concrete situations. The Conference of general Assistants (CAS), in the light of the theme of the General Chapter, “As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world” (Jn 17,18), has decided to dedicate the Koinonia of this year to four related topics:

- **Koinonia 2018-1: “The family as vocation and mission”** – Fr. Alfred Parambakathu OFMConv.
- **Koinonia 2018-2: “The work as vocation and mission”** – Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap.
- **Koinonia 2018-3: “The “ecological conversion” as vocation and mission”**, - Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM.
- **Koinonia 2018-4: “The commitment in the Politics of the Secular Franciscans”**, - Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR.

1. The Family as vocation and mission

The family is often called the principal cell of human society. In Christian terminology it is called *adomestic church* (CCC 2204). Through this present study we intend to look at family life as a

vocation and a mission in the light of the Rule and Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order and of the Encyclical letter *Amoris Laetitia*¹.

One of the great challenges that we face in recent years is the attempt in secularized societies to change laws which, over thousands of years, have recognized the plan of God for marriage and family as founded in the created order, thus constituting the common patrimony of humanity governed by the natural law. This understanding is confirmed right from the beginning of the Bible: “God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it” (Gen 1: 27-28)². And we continue “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body” (Gen 2: 4). The fact that the Bible is full of stories of families is seen from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve’s family, to its very last page, where we have the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb³.

In today’s world, where the framework for public discourse is too often focused on the rights and freedom of the individual, the Catholic Church looks at the individual as a member of a family, and at the family in relation to society⁴. The Church in modern times has always emphasized the fact that the family is the place where our Catholic faith is handed on and lived and that the family itself is related to the plan of God revealed in the Sacred Scripture for the sake of our salvation in Jesus Christ. This fundamental teaching of the Catholic church on family is reflected in the document of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, (6 December 1965) was taken up by Saint Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981) and then in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (11 October 1992). Now we have the latest apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis on Family (19 March 2016) to which we will give special attention.

2. Family as seen in *Amoris Laetitia*

Pope Francis underlines that our time is guided often by the ideologies of extreme individualism and relativism that endanger every sphere of human life, especially family life. Family life comes to be seen as “a way station, helpful when convenient, or a setting in which rights can be asserted while relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desire and circumstances”⁵. Particularly challenging is an individualism that is so concerned with one’s desires, as well as the throwaway culture that sweeps away marriage and family whenever they prove inconvenient or tiresome. These ideologies have affected not only the concept of the institution of marriage, but also the emotional life of people. “We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the

¹ The apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), is the result of Pope Francis’s prayerful reflection on the discussions and outcomes of two synods of bishops held in Rome October 2014 and October 2015 on marriage and the family. In this letter Pope Francis shares with the Church his teaching and encouragement regarding pastoral ministry to marriages and families, and the great vocation and mission that married couples and families are called to live out. This exhortation is of great importance for the understanding and teaching of the Church’s vision for marriage and family life and its pastoral application in our contemporary society and culture. (From now onwards this Encyclical letter will be cited as *AL*).

² All the biblical citations in this article are taken from the *Jerusalem Bible*. For a more detailed vision of the family in the light of the Bible we can refer to, Papa Francesco, *Amoris Laetitia*, 8-30; L. ANTINUCCI, *Seguire Cristo allamania di Francesco*, Padua 2011, pp. 333-343.

³ Cfr. *AL*, 8.

⁴ In this regard it is important to listen to Pope Francis who warns that an extreme individualism “weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that one’s personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute” (*AL*. 33).

⁵ *AL*. 34.

environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye”⁶. Through the present apostolic letter, the Church wants to offer some solid proposals addressing these situations.

The teaching of Pope Francis on family begins by presenting the biblical view on family. He points out that the Word of God is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering (cf. 22). Marriage and family life is seen as the expression of the inherent social dimension of human beings in which the Church is interested because spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family (cf. 316) and the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church (cf. 31). A concise vision of family and marriage can be seen as synthetically presented in article 292:

Christian marriage, as a reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a leaven of new life for society.

With this clear vision of the Catholic Church in mind, let us see how the apostolic exhortation presents the family life as a vocation.

3. Family as a vocation

Family life is envisioned as a participation in the salvific work of Jesus Christ, who became incarnate in a human family and who fulfilled his mission on the Cross. Married couples engage in the same relationship that occurs between Christ and the Church. Marriage is not seen as a mere social convention but as a vocation which requires a concrete response. Thus we read:

The married couples are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament. Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment. (72)

The Pope teaches that this vocation is unique and irreplaceable (cf. 88) both for the Church and for society as a whole⁷. Like in any other vocations, the call to family life also faces challenges regarding physical closeness and affection. Thus it is pointed out that, “...no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation...” (325). It becomes clear that living out the vocation of a “domestic church” is surely no easy task. It becomes possible only when the ideal of marriage is marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability (cf. 34).

4. Family as mission

⁶AL. 39.

⁷ This fact had been present in the earlier teachings of the Church as we see at the Second Vatican Council: “God himself is the author of marriage” (GS 48) and in the Catechism, “the vocation of marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator (CCC 1603).

The main mission of families is to transmit the Christian faith that they have received. Faith transmission is principally done in families – from parents to children⁸. Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek Him and sense their need for Him. “It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon” (288). Through the sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), God invites families to enter into the fullness of life in Jesus Christ. Once they have entered into this life, they are called to proclaim it and to communicate it to others. The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelizing mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle. As Pope Francis forcefully reminds us, the mission of the family always extends outside itself in service to our brothers and sisters:

The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (290).

Today more than ever, transmitting the faith requires a language which is able to reach everyone, especially young people. It must communicate the beauty of love in the family and make people understand the meaning of terms such as self-giving, conjugal love, fidelity, fruitfulness and procreation. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world (cf. 324).

5. Family and the Secular Franciscans

The invitation that Pope Francis makes to all the families of the Catholic Church through the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* must have a greater resonance among the members of the Secular Franciscan Order. As members of the same Catholic Church, the Secular Franciscans, who are called to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality in their secular condition (cf. GC. 8, 1), must be able to respond to the challenges of the modern world that affect family life in the way that the Church expects them to do. As juridical documents the *Rule* or the *General Constitutions* of the Secular Franciscans do not speak about the nature of the challenges that families face. They still clearly say that the effectiveness of the life of a Secular Franciscan depends on the ability to respond to the challenges that come from society (cf. GC. 8, 2).

5.1. Family as the first place of mission

The first place where the Secular Franciscans have to witness their faith and spirituality is in the realm of one’s own family (cf. GC 12. 1; 17. 1): the “mission at zero point” for a Secular Franciscan is his/her family. We need to understand the order of priorities that the Constitutions clearly present when they discuss the presence of the Secular Franciscan in the Church and in the society (cf. GC 17. 4):

- in their own family

⁸ Quoting himself Pope Francis speaks of this transmission of faith in this way, “it is beautiful when mothers teach their children to blow a kiss to Jesus or to Our Lady. How much love there is in that! At that moment the child’s heart becomes a place of prayer”. AL 287.

- then in the fraternity
- and then in the local Church and in society.

So their mission begins in the family. Elsewhere it is said that vocation as Secular Franciscan does not lead to neglect of family duties, but rather must “provide for their families and serve society...” (GC 15. 2). The same logic is found when speaking about peace. “Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in the society” (GC 23. 1) and goes on to say that to preserve peace in the family, the brothers and sisters should, in due time, make a last will and testament for the disposition of their goods (cf. GC 23.3). Thus it becomes clear that family is the first place in which Secular Franciscans live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation.

5.2. Simple and open Christian education

In our study on *Amoris Laetitia* we saw how Pope Francis insisted on the transmission of faith from generation to generation in families. We see the same concept in the *Rule* of OFS. In article 17 we read:

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Through Baptism, the Family of the Church is missionary by nature and increases her faith in the act of sharing that faith with others, above all, with her children. The very act of living a life of communion as a family is the primary form of proclamation. In fact, evangelization begins in the family, which transmits bodily as well as spiritual life. In his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) Pope Francis said, “Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey” (n. 127). This is the challenge of every Secular Franciscan: to be instruments of evangelization on the street, in a city square, during work, or a journey.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church teaches the fundamental truth that, in the plan of God, creation itself is ordered to redemption. Thus the family as a created reality finds its full meaning as a Christian family, as a community for whom Jesus Christ himself is Savior. Jesus makes of this community, this family, an instrument of His own saving, redeeming work on behalf of humanity. Pope Francis, through his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* tries to give flesh to this fundamental teaching. The family, in its vocation and mission, is truly a treasure of the Church. Among the various families that follow the spirituality of St. Francis, the Secular Franciscans have a privileged role to play in this regard, because they live in the family and for the family. As they celebrate the 40th anniversary of their present *Rule* it is their task to understand the life in the family as their primary vocation and mission.

Togo – National elective Chapter

The national elective chapter of the OFS in Togo was celebrated from 13 to 14 January 2018 at the Convent of St. Francis of Assisi of the Friars Minor in Adidogome - Lomé. The Chapter was preceded by a triduum of prayer in preparation, led by Fr. Peter Williams OFM, National Assistant of OFS, Joseph FoganAdegnon OFS and Sr. Aurelia D’Almeida at the monastery of the Poor Clares at La Pouponnière in Lomé. The Chapter was presided by Michel Janian, OFS-Lebanon, Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency delegated by Tibor Kauser, general Minister of OFS, assisted by Fr. Francis BongajumDor, OFM Cap., general spiritual Assistant OFS-GiFra. The opening Mass was presided by Fr. VirgileAgbessi OFM, Minister Provincial of the Province of the Incarnated Word which covers several countries of West Africa. The general theme chosen for this national event was “Your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ (Mt 5:37); the grace of profession in the OFS” on which Fr. Francis gave a lecture. There were 50 capitulars, 4 observers, 8 spiritual Assistants and one Major Superior, the above-mentioned Provincial Minister.

The election was held in the afternoon of the first day, that is, on the 13th. Joseph FoganAdegnon was re-elected as National Minister, for the second mandate from the constitution of the National Fraternity in 2014. The chapter then decided by secret vote that the National Minister be also the International Councilor. This clause will be included in the National Statute which is being revised. The rest of the National Council was reconfirmed almost in its entirety. Michel Janian confirmed the elections. On the same afternoon Fr. Francis Dor held a brief meeting with the Minister Provincial and with the Assistants present. On the next day the closing Mass was presided over by Fr. Francis Dor at the end of which Michel Janian installed the newly elected National Council. Everything took place with great serenity and in a spirit of listening and gratitude to God and to the brothers.

Mozambique – National elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the Fraternity “Santa Margarida de Cortona de Mozambique” was held from 19 to 21 January 2018 at the Provincial Curia of the Friars Minor Capuchin in the city of Quelimane. The chapter was presided over by Silvia Noemi Diana, Councilor of the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), accompanied by Fr Pedro Zitha OFM delegate of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CAS). 60 delegates participated, including 45 capitulars representing 3 regions - south, center and north of Mozambique and there were present 7 local Spiritual Assistants. The inaugural Mass was presided over by the Custos of Friars Minor Capuchin Fr. Salvador Franco Mavida, OFM Cap. The theme of the chapter was “to consolidate our fraternity in co-responsibility and in fraternal communion”, presented by Fr. Orlando António OFM.

BonifacioPaulino was re-elected as National Minister and International Councilor and Rita Jossanias Francisco Chico as International Substitute Councilor, Manecas Paulo Sindique as National Formator, Loureço Miguel Rebeiro as National Secretary and Idalina Demo Simango as National Treasurer. The Sunday Mass, during which Silvia Noemi Diana installed the new national council, was presided over by Fr. Hortencio Bernardo José, OFM. There was the atmosphere of joy, communion and fraternal sharing from the day we arrived until the last day of the chapter.

19th Formation course for the Assistants of OFS and GiFra in Italia

The 19th Formation Course for the assistants of SFO and YouFra of Italy took place in Assisi, at DomusPacis, in *S. Maria degliAngeli*, from 22 to 25 January 2018. The course was organized by the Conferences of the National Assistants and had as its theme “A norm of life in the «global village» in

the context of the 40th anniversary of the Rule of OFS". Around one hundred local and regional assistants together with the national assistants participated and were present the two General Assistants: Fr. Francis Dor, OFM Cap, and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR. Fr. Francis presided at the Eucharist on Wednesday 24, while Fr. Amando presided the concluding Eucharist on Thursday 25. The speakers were: Fr. Lino Temperini, TOR ("Penitents, Franciscans in the sign of *novitas*"), Antonio Ambrosiano, Licia Lucugnano and Luca Fabietti ("The GiFra, fraternity of young people"); Mariano Borgognoni ("Living the Gospel in the «changed conditions of the times»"); Gabriele Marchesi («From the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel. 3.0.»: Living the Rule in the time of Web and social media"); and Paolo Affatato and Domenico Trincone ("The methods of communication").

Korea – National elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of OFS in Korea took place from 26 to 28 January 2018, at the Retreat Center of the Friars Minor Conventual in Seoul, and was presided over by Tibor Kauser, Minister general of the OFS and assisted by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFM Conv, general Assistant of OFS-YouFra. The theme of the Chapter was: "As the Father has sent me, I send you" (Jn 20,21). The opening Mass was presided over by Fr. Leonard Kim OFM, president of turn of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants in Korea. From among the 89 capitulars who were convoked 87 were present.

On the first day of the Chapter Tibor Kauser presented the theme of the Chapter and on Saturday Fr. Alfred spoke about spiritual assistance in the light of the current Rule and Constitutions of OFS. On the second day of the Chapter Fr. Marco Jeong Jin-Chol OFM Conv, Minister Provincial, presided over the Holy Mass. During the elective session of the afternoon Joseph Son was elected as National Minister for his first term. On the next day morning, Tibor and Fr. Alfred, accompanied by Augustine Yoon, Councilor of the Presidency, participated in the monthly meeting of a local fraternity and then visited the National Office of OFS. Fr. Ho Myung-Hwan OFM, Minister Provincial, presided over the closing Eucharist, during which the new Minister and National Council were installed by Tibor Kauser. After the Chapter, Tibor and Fr. Alfred met the outgoing Council and the new Council. The whole chapter took place in a spirit of intense fraternity, sharing and dialogue.

Cyprus – Fraternal and Pastoral visit

The fraternal and pastoral visits (VFP) to the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Cyprus were conducted respectively by Ana Fruk, International Councilor for the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, general spiritual Assistant of OFS and Franciscan Youth (YouFra), from 9 to 11 February 2018. Since in Cyprus there are only three local OFS Fraternities, the VFP program included, in addition to the meeting with the National Council, a visit to each of the Fraternity. The first meeting took place on Friday 9 February in the afternoon with the OFS Fraternity of Larnaca, in the Church of Our Lady of Grace. The visitors also met the local parish priest, Fr. Lawrence Coblavie, OFM. The meeting was followed by the Eucharistic celebration, presided over by Fr. Amando, and dinner with the Fraternity. The following day, Saturday 10, the visitors were accompanied by Fr. Jerzy Kraj OFM, Patriarchal Vicar of Cyprus, to visit the historic city of Paphos and then the OFS Fraternity of Limassol in the Church of Santa Caterina. The meeting began with lunch in the parish hall together with Fr. Andrew Arhin OFM, parish priest. On Sunday 11 February, the visitors met the local OFS Fraternity of Nicosia, in the Church of Holy Cross. The meeting also included participation in the Eucharistic celebration of the parish, presided over by Fr. Amando, and lunch with the poor at the parish canteen, where members of OFS are volunteers on every Sunday. The program continued with an assembly of all the three local Fraternities in the parish hall and ended with a meeting with the National Council. Both Ana and Fr. Amando are very grateful to the brothers and sisters of the OFS and to the OFM friars for their hospitality and fraternal affection.

Switzerland – National elective chapter

The Regional Chapter of the OFS Fraternity of French-speaking Switzerland was held in the Franciscaine Hotellerie at St. Maurice of the Friars Minor Capuchin, on Saturday 3 March 2018. Representatives of the Mouvement Franciscain Laic (MFL) were also present. Fr. Pierre Hostettler OFM Cap, the guardian of the Convent of Friborg, led the initial prayer with a meditation and several chants. Attilio Galimberti, the Councilor of the CIOFS Presidency, presided over the Chapter, accompanied by Fr. Alfred Parambathu OFM Conv, general spiritual Assistant of OFS-YouFra.

At the beginning of the Chapter Attilio presented the need to follow the Rule and the Constitutions of OFS for an ordered fraternal-Franciscan life. Fr. Alfred spoke about spiritual assistance. The presentations were followed by moments of discussions, led by Edith Rohwedder. The Chapter then appointed the new Council; Gerard Corpataux was appointed as the Minister and Edith Rohwedder as the vice-minister. After the election all went for the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Fr. Pierre; Fr. Alfred made the homily. During the Mass, Attilio inaugurated the new Council.

After lunch Attilio and Fr. Alfred met the new Council. In the afternoon an assembly was held between the members of OFS and MFL. It was decided to continue the collaboration between them in a fraternal and organized way.

Hong Kong – Formation course for the Spiritual Assistants

A Formation Course for spiritual Assistants of Secular Franciscan Order was organized by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, general spiritual Assistant of OFS-YouFra at “Honeyville Retreat Center” in Hong Kong, from 5 to 10 March. 44 people attended, among whom there were spiritual Assistants who already work and others who are preparing to take up this position. There were 22 Friars Minor from three different parts, 6 diocesan priests 6 Sisters and a Conventual friar. On Tuesday we were blessed with a visit from the auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong, Joseph Ha OFM, who just came to visit his Franciscan confreres and also to give his support to the work they do for the Secular Franciscan family. At the end of the course there was a visit by Mgr. Javier Herrera-Corona, the delegate of the Holy See in Hong Kong. All the participants thanked a lot for the opportunity to participate in the course in which they have learned a lot. There is still a need for continuous formation so that they can better understand their role as assistants.

Japan - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in Japan was held from March 16 to 18, 2018, at the Catholic Training Center, Nanzan University of Nagoya-Japan. It was presided over by Maria Consuelo Queremel de Nunez (Chelito) Vice-Minister General of OFS, who was accompanied by Fr. Pedro Zitha, OFM, general spiritual Assistant of OFS-YouFra. There were 12 capitulars from 8 regions of Japan in the Chapter. Fumihiko Francis Takeda was re-elected as National Minister and International Councilor and as Deputy Minister Yasuko Terada and as Deputy Councilor Shouko Katoh were also elected. The three national spiritual Assistants were present, Fr. Akihiro Iyoku OFM, who presided over the inaugural Mass, Keita Kobayashi, a lay brother who belongs to “Franciscan Friars of the Atonment”. The Sunday Mass was presided by Fr. Shinichiro Tanizaki OFM Conv., during which Chelito installed the new National Council. At the end of the Mass a copy of the Rule of OFS was presented to the new council by Chelito and Fumihiko Francis Takeda. The Chapter took place in a very fraternal atmosphere and was well organized.