

ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale
Via Vittorio Putti, 4/int. 6 - 00152 Roma
Tel. +39 06.45471722 Fax +39 06.45473094
E-mail: ciofs@ciofs.org
www.ciofs.org

Prot. n. 3223

Rome, February 7, 2020

To all OFS and Franciscan Youth International Councilors
To all OFS National Councils
To all Franciscan Youth National Councils

Dears brothers and sisters,

OFS and YOUFRA,

Peace and all good:

This is the fifth in a series that we are sending all fraternities. We propose that you reflect with our local fraternities based on the proposal made by the 2014 General Chapter that invited us to: **“Promote prayer and constructive dialogue in the family. When it is convenient and necessary “encourage the formation of marriage groups and family groups.”** (Const. 24.2).

For the year 2020, the theme that we are proposing for reflection and engagement is:

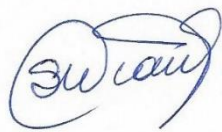
“constructive dialogue in the family”

With this theme we seek to strengthen the bond between family using the importance of dialogue and the family encounter.

The CIOFS website (www.ciofs.org) publishes material every four months on different themes on the family that brothers and sisters can reflect on.

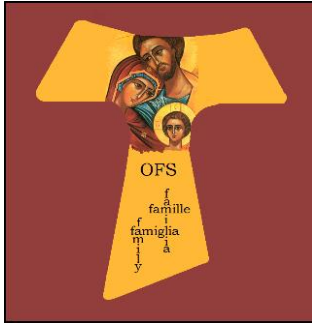
The theme, proposed for the year 2020, is a starting point and each fraternity should evaluate and reflect on it, based on its own needs. We recommend that the initiatives taken by the various fraternities as a result of this proposal be made known through the CIOFS Secretariat, addressed to the Family Commission before August 2020.

May the Lord bless us and may the Holy Family accompany us on our initiatives for the sake of the family.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Silvia Diana", enclosed within a circular scribble.

Silvia Diana
Presidency Councilor
Family Commission





ANNUAL THEME 2020

**“constructive dialogue
in the family”**

Family Commision: Silvia Diana
OFS, Jenny Harrington OFS,
Fr. Francis Dor OFM Cap.



Translation: Mary Stronach OFS

Dear brothers and sisters, we continue to share our family lives in this formation proposal for the local OFS fraternities and YOUFRA. The proposal for the year 2020 is a great challenge for today's families, so we encourage you to reflect together.

Our General Constitutions, Art. 24.2, say:

— the spirituality of the family and of marriage and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;

WORK PROPOSAL:

**We have developed a work dynamic made up of three parts:
SEE, JUDGE AND ACT.**

1. SEE

In this space we invite you to read some thoughts from OFS brothers and sisters that will help us to know our reality in relation to this theme.

... Family, a school of love, a privileged space, in it the love between spouses, between parents and children begins, and it is in the family where the children also discover the love of Christ. One of the customs that should never be lost is dialogue. It must be encouraged and promoted every day. Constructive dialogue supports important values such as respect, communication, tolerance of others and the ability to admit mistakes. It should not be a monologue but rather, in the presentation of ideas of all members of the Family, everyone has the opportunity to express himself/herself and to respond in surroundings of tranquility and freedom.

One of the critical factors today is precisely dialogue; either because of the lack of mutual trust between the spouses, the dominance of one spouse over another, as well as generational conflicts between parents and children. The drama that is lived in these situations is the progressive disappearance of possibilities for dialogue, the lack of time and space for building family relationships, lack of communication, not wanting to share things; these make each one face his/her difficulties alone; and frustration becomes a characteristic of this situation. Dependence on media and social networks become factors that undermine constructive family dialogue ...

Mirtha Ferreira OFS, Paraguay

In any human or spiritual field we find a word that brings together diverse needs and, at the same time, (it brings together) a world of opportunities and measures for improvement: "necessity". The need causes the human being to find ways to attend to it. This is a personal and community call. Transferred to the family environment, we can say that the great need for affection increases day by day, and this, in turn, is degenerating into a total crisis of the human being, of his social being, of his being the son of God.

St. Francis of Assisi, "the man of hugs", shows us the importance of the face-to-face relationship, and of the structure of being family, and it is exactly in the family environment that "presence" is also of vital importance. With presence, we communicate, and dialogue complements it, an infallible pair needed to build fraternity ... to build family.

Today, for various reasons, the members of the family are simply not there... Homes seem to be autoservices – we arrive, we eat, we rest and we leave to go to work or to study.

Where is the family? If they are not there, it is not possible to dialogue and, if there is no dialogue, we are contributing to lonely people, without hope and without the opportunity to experience growth in community ... in fraternity in family...

So, let's consider presence as the first step to "constructive" dialogue. Presence itself expresses one's availability to not only accompany ... but also the availability to listen – not a passive listening, but rather a listening which hears, welcomes, understands and contributes, and in this dynamic, we can express our needs, our ideas, our suggestions ... We "offer" our bricks in the daily construction of the universal fraternity from the family.

Ana María Raffo Laos, Perú

In an increasingly impersonal and chaotic world, the immediate family has become the bulwark of emotional support (Horton, 1979).

Since time immemorial, the family has been the privileged and irreplaceable place for quality human relationships, where each person who shares in the heart of the home, has the blessing of growing, learning, socializing and developing his/her full potential and he/she will share all this later with other relationships where these people develop.

To reach this goal, it is necessary that the family secure in its members strong emotional ties with trust, support, love and understanding as part of the roots that strengthen the unity of the family system that, at the same time, is translated into healthy connections with others daily in the future.

Thus, it constitutes a fundamental task for the family -- the modification of those attitudes, practices and interactions, based on distance, indifference, violence, as aspects that turn the family into a tense and unbearable space to live and develop. The challenge every day, then, is to turn the home into a safe, harmonious place, where every day a person can catch his/her breath and can regain his/her strength to face the difficulties encountered in the current world in which we live, plagued by individualism, anonymity, and distance or virtual relationships.

Virginia Satir (1991), mentions two proposals between which families oscillate. Although they can be seen as extremes, the space that is located between them is the final decision of families to stay on both sides. These types of families are referred to, by the

autor, as nurturing families and at the opposite end, conflicting families. In the first one, there are those people who value themselves in a positive way and are able to value others equally; they maintain direct, clear, sincere communication; they practice flexible, humane standards that are open to change; they establish open and confident links with the social environment..

On the other hand, when living in a conflictive family, people have impaired self-esteem; communication is closed, indirect, sarcastic; rules are imposed and inflexible. However, the good news is that when the family assumes and understands that it is going the wrong way, it can make the necessary changes to become a family that can provide more nourishment.

Hence, dialogue, as a mechanism to meet the needs of members, is a necessary strategy to rescue the essence of the family. This dialogue has to be built on the basis of love, forgiveness, recognition of mistakes and fraternal correction, as well as a high dose of patience, tolerance and respect for the differences and rhythms of each person, but the most important, is to keep the faith and hope that the family can change if everyone strives to remain united and achieve the objectives of the plan that God has sown in its heart.

Fanny Rojas Vargas OFS, Costa Rica

2. JUDGE

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation **Amoris Lætitia** by our Pope Francis will help us to reflect on dialogue in our families. Let us read the texts carefully:

136. Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Yet it can only be the fruit of a long and demanding apprenticeship. Men and women, young people and adults, communicate differently. They speak different languages and they act in different ways. Our way of asking and responding to questions, the tone we use, our timing and any number of other factors condition how well we communicate. We need to develop certain attitudes that express love and encourage authentic dialogue.

137. Take time, quality time. This means being ready to listen patiently and attentively to everything the other person wants to say. It requires the self-discipline of not speaking until the time is right. Instead of offering an opinion or advice, we need to be sure that we have heard everything the other person has to say. This means cultivating an interior silence that makes it possible to listen to the other person without mental or emotional distractions. Do not be rushed, put aside all of your own needs and worries, and make space. Often the other spouse does not need a solution to his or her problems, but simply to be heard, to feel that someone has acknowledge their pain, their disappointment, their fear, their anger, their hopes and their dreams. How often we hear complaints like: "He does not listen to me." "Even when you seem to, you are really doing something else." "I talk to her and I feel like she can't wait for me to finish." "When I speak to her, she tries to change the subject, or she gives me curt responses to end the conversation".

138. Develop the habit of giving real importance to the other person. This means appreciating them and recognizing their right to exist, to think as they do and to be happy. Never downplay what they say or think, even if you need to express your own point of view. Everyone has something to contribute, because they have their life experiences, they look at things from a different standpoint and they have their own

concerns, abilities and insights. We ought to be able to acknowledge the other person's truth, the value of his or her deepest concerns, and what it is that they are trying to communicate, however aggressively. We have to put ourselves in their shoes and try to peer into their hearts, to perceive their deepest concerns and to take them as a point of departure for further dialogue.

139. *Keep an open mind. Don't get bogged down in your own limited ideas and opinions, but be prepared to change or expand them. The combination of two different ways of thinking can lead to a synthesis that enriches both. The unity that we seek is not uniformity, but a "unity in diversity", or "reconciled diversity". Fraternal communion is enriched by respect and appreciation for differences within an overall perspective that advances the common good. We need to free ourselves from feeling that we all have to be alike. A certain astuteness is also needed to prevent the appearance of "static" that can interfere with the process of dialogue. For example, if hard feelings start to emerge, they should be dealt with sensitively, lest they interrupt the dynamic of dialogue. The ability to say what one is thinking without offending the other person is important. Words should be carefully chosen so as not to offend, especially when discussing difficult issues. Making a point should never involve venting anger and inflicting hurt. A patronizing tone only serves to hurt, ridicule, accuse and offend others. Many disagreements between couples are not about important things. Mostly they are about trivial matters. What alters the mood, however, is the way things are said or the attitude with which they are said.*

140. *Show affection and concern for the other person. Love surmounts even the worst barriers. When we love someone, or when we feel loved by them, we can better understand what they are trying to communicate. Fearing the other person as a kind of "rival" is a sign of weakness and needs to be overcome. It is very important to base one's position on solid choices, beliefs or values, and not on the need to win an argument or to be proved right.*

141. *Finally, let us acknowledge that for a worthwhile dialogue we have to have something to say. This can only be the fruit of an interior richness nourished by reading, personal reflection, prayer and openness to the world around us. Otherwise, conversations become boring and trivial. When neither of the spouses works at this, and has little real contact with other people, family life becomes stifling and dialogue impoverished.*

3. ACT

- What aspects of my interior life must I change in order to improve fraternal dialogue in my family?
- What relationship is there between the lack of dialogue and the transmission of the faith from the parents to the children?
- What are some of the major difficulties that today's families confront in view of the need for both parents to work, caring for others and the influence of technology.
- How does the family address current issues of child and adolescent depression, suicide, abortion and the lack of a clear life plan in children?
- How do we foster spaces for meeting and constructive dialogue within the family in a world without time?

4. CELEBRATE:

Let us share the *Prayer to the Holy Family* and each one will bring a photo of his/her family that will be offered during the prayer, introducing each member of his/her family.

January 2020-