



**Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis**

**Consilium Internationale**

**FAMILY COMMISSION**

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## **MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY: THE REALITY AND THE CHALLENGES**

*Family and pandemic, challenges in the face of this new reality.*

At the beginning of this year, we were unaware of the changes that were to happen in our family lives and in the world, when the theme “constructive dialogue in the family,” was proposed for reflection and dialogue in the local fraternities. As we now draw to the end of the year, we reflect on the challenges that have had an unpredictable affect on the family. Has the bond between the family being strengthened, using the importance of dialogue and the family encounter, what are the challenges that the family has faced and that they now face with the reality that the pandemic has caused?

Unfortunately it seems that in most countries, local fraternities have not been able to meet and dialogue, and share their realities of the situations of their families, due to the regulations of the lockdown, which has had a great impact on the normal way of living in family life.

There have been positive outcomes of the lockdowns, which have helped members of family to eat together, stay together, spend time together, pray together, and physically witness to each others pains and pleasures. For some families, the pandemic has provided an opportunity to bond and improve their cohesiveness. For others, existing vulnerabilities and conflict have been pushed to the surface.

*A mother shared her realisation of “how much my children loved me, with their very caring attitude of ensuring that I had sufficient food, having bought it for me, created a tremendous bond. My children were very protective of me, with their little acts of love, our appreciation of each other has been enriched.”*

It has also created many unpleasant situations in family life leading to stress and agony, loss of employment, absolute poverty and starvation, tension in parenting relationships, loss of education, no medical treatment, not being able to be present with family at their time of illness and death in the hospitals has been devastating. Incidences of domestic violence, rape and abuse, incidence of separation and divorce has increased in some communities. There is also now a general fear, suspicion, and social unrest

The Sacramental life of the family was prohibited with the closing of the Churches, and then with the lifting of restrictions, only limited numbers have been allowed to enter.

Not been able to practice your faith, has become a cross. Baptisms have not been allowed, marriages not able to take place, Mass could not be attended, Confessions not available, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not possible. Although having access to online Mass was a relief, not being able to be physically present in the true presence of Jesus was stressful.

Our appreciation of the faith was enhanced and there is eager waiting for the return to the Church and participation in the celebration of Holy Mass and the Sacraments. Families have started to pray together at home, discussions on faith have taken place, as some have made use of the Internet Mass and also with the sharing of the inspirational messages that have been received.

We read below on the reality of the situation experienced with the reflections from our sister Josipa Dzajo and brothers Christopher and Richard on the effect the pandemic has had on their families.

JOSIPA DZAJO from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Besides all the bad things this pandemic has brought in the world, in my case I only tried to see the positive sides. For almost a month my husband was paused from work and we managed to spend a lot of time together with our little son. I tried to look at lockdown as some sort of bonus vocation. Also we prayed together more than ever. We were blessed because nobody from our family was affected by virus, so it was easier not to let this worldwide hysteria at our home. We don't have new normal, we managed to stay normal all the time. God blessed us with a new baby on the way, so I cannot look ungrateful on 2020.

CHRISTOPHER O JAMBO from Uganda

My family income declined, because sources of income closed and my little salary was reduced. The lack of finance has made it difficult to have food for my family to eat. We have had to stop the weekly treatment to my daughter who has cerebral palsy, and paying our house rent and other utilities has become difficult. I had started a plan of constructing a family house but everything has stopped. Restrictions on social and spiritual gatherings has affected our social and spiritual life. 70 people are allowed to attend Mass but children are not allowed.

Education of children, it is not clear when they will go back school and many have lost interest in education. I have 2 dependants who were allowed to go back but I have no cash.

The realities of other families:

Many people have lost their jobs and this has created tension and conflicts in families. People who remained working are paid half of their salaries. Business have collapsed. All local commodities have lost a market. We have lost many people as due to lack of funds, they could not access medical services. Some children have left school completely. Some parents are not capable to pay for them anymore, and yet other children are engaged in small business.

People have declined spiritually and some people's Faith has totally gone. I don't think life will be the same after covid.

RICHARD KAKEETO from Kenya

Covid split our family for really long. My wife was locked down in Canada, I in Kenya and the Children in Uganda. It took us a good seven months apart. I had to pay up for a zoom account just to let family meetings happen. When airports were opened, border points between Kenya and Uganda were not open. An efficient Covid19 test is at least \$ 100. By efficient I mean you won't have to wait five days before you get the results back.

Our children are homeschooled so while they backslid on their coursework, they had a lot to learn from the grandparents who were generous to stay with them during this period.

To count my blessings Covid 19 imposed a time for my children with their grand parents. In the few months they have been there I have seen them mature, improve in so many skills like caring for each other and for the home. I have a five year old who now knows which herb to mash and place on a fresh wound or name so many plants and weeds in the local language. I now have a 12 year old who thinks through what we will eat for the day, when to take breaks and prepare meals. I am still protected from the adolescent rebellion but I see the positive impact of their stay with the grandparents.

It is not clear yet how much trauma the children have suffered from this disruption but it is a period they will definitely remember long after this.

For my fellow parents who were dependent on the formal education system, the disruption in Kenya and Uganda is really far reaching. Some parents have lost jobs and livelihoods yet the return to school though gradual will require financial resources.

On the brighter side, Kenya had just introduced the competency based curriculum that had strong involvement of parents. Covid19 allowed for that to happen albeit begrudgingly. In Uganda the Ministry has had to take homeschooling seriously. The National Curriculum Development Centre has crafted learning materials that are easy to use by parents and children in a home set up. Essentially parents are returning to their role as the primary educators...but that is highly dependent on whether parents are or were prepared for that as they started their families.

As we continue our journey of conversion considering the changes made to our lives as Secular Franciscans, we need to consider how to deepen our relationship with God. Only then can we bear witness to the love of Christ for His Church.

#### DISCUSS IN YOUR FAMILIES AND FRATERNITIES

1. How has this pandemic created stress in families and how is it helping to strengthen relationships?
2. Has the lockdown been an opportunity for families to deepen their relationship with God? In what ways?
3. Have the financial challenges been an opportunity to search for a deeper meaning to trust in God, and to become detached to material possessions?
4. Have you and your fraternity been able to assist those families that are devastated by the challenges that are being experienced?
5. In what ways has this uncertain time helped us to live out Article 17 of our OFS Rule?  
*“In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ, 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”.*

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