

# FAMILY PROGRAMME



**Based on the booklet “Trial and Suffering of Families:  
Stigmata and Easter!”  
by Dr Adèle Sabine ILAMA MOMBOT,  
Family Commission, CIOFS, 2025**

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Contemporary families face a wide range of trials: marital tensions, wounds inflicted by upbringing, intergenerational conflicts, illness, break-ups, and misunderstandings. Some forms of suffering fade with time; others leave deep scars.

This project will enable your fraternities to address issues faced by families from all walks of life. To get started, appoint a “Family Unit” team leader within your fraternity. This leader will choose a topic that is likely to be of concern to families. Focus on topics that could be useful to your members, such as financial and material difficulties, parenting and parenting issues, domestic violence, addiction, health problems, relationship problems, migration and displacement, cultural and religious diversity, natural disasters, war and emergency situations, families with an LGBTQ+ member, divorce and separation, single parenthood... the list is far from exhaustive.

The booklet *Trials and Suffering of Families: Stigmata and Easter!* (Dr. Adèle Sabine NGUIMBI née ILAMA MOMBOT, Family Commission, CIOFS, 2025) offers a spiritual and anthropological interpretation of these realities. The central message is this: Family wounds are not inevitable – they can become paths to growth.

As part of this project and lesson plan, we also invite you to review the special articles published by the Family Commission in recent years.

You can access the booklet throughout the course by going to: Nguimbi, A. S. (née Ilama Mombot). *Trials and suffering of families: Stigmata and Easter!* - 2025. CIOFS Family Commission. <https://ciofs.info/2025/04/23/trials-and-sufferings-of-families/>

## I. OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

This programme covers twelve themes. However, each group will select ten, including the theme of the introductory meeting. It aims to support families on a journey over several months, structured around five key areas:

### **Understanding the concept of family stigma:**

- Identify specific areas of distress (relationships, children, extended family)
- Explore possible ways of coping with the ordeal
- Discover the keys to resilience
- Incorporate the spiritual dimension as a path to healing

It aims to provide a journey of healing and spiritual growth, structured in accordance with the methodology proposed by CIOFS:

**Prayer – Reflection – Small groups – Reading the booklet – Discernment – Commitment – Spiritual conclusion.**

It proposes:

- A safe space to speak
- Balanced spiritual guidance

## II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### **1. The Paschal Mystery as a Key to understanding**

Suffering is not denied in the Christian faith – it is endured. The risen Christ still bears his wounds (John 20:27). They do not disappear; they are transformed.

### **2. Relational Anthropology**

The family is a relational system. When one member is hurt, the whole family is affected. Resilience is a dynamic process (Delage, 2008<sup>1</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Delage, M. (2008). *La résilience familiale*. Odile Jacob.

### 3. Franciscan Spirituality

Saint Francis did not shy away from poverty or suffering. His conversion began with his welcoming of the leper (Francis of Assisi, *Testament*, 1–3). Minority, humility, and brotherhood shaped his journey.

Saint Francis did not flee from suffering – he endured it with Christ.

The stigmata are not the end. The Resurrection remains possible.

A concrete Franciscan inspiration guides us to a path towards family resurrection.

### III. ANNUAL EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Understanding the scars
- Identifying specific wounds
- Discovering resilience
- Choosing life, conversion, and integrating the spiritual dimension

### IV. A HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

In every encounter:

- Name the ordeal
- Embrace the suffering
- Identify the scars
- Reject victimisation
- Choose resilience
- Commit to solidarity
- Celebrate the family Easter

### V. STANDARD STRUCTURE FOR EACH SESSION

#### 1. Welcome and Opening prayer

The animator of the session begins the meeting with a prayer that invites God's presence and creates a spirit of openness. For example: *"Lord, you lived your passion for us. In life, we too find that through our suffering, we walk with you. Help us to find the strength, hope, patience, and understanding necessary to get through our pain and find the joy of the Resurrection. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."*

#### 2. Introduction to the theme (5 mins)

The animator presents the theme, reads the section of the article corresponding to the difficulty encountered, explains why it matters, and poses guiding questions. He / she should prepare himself / herself by reading the entire article to facilitate discussion.

#### 3. Discussion in small groups (30-40 mins in small groups)

The animator creates small discussion groups of three or four members. Each group chooses a group leader (animator) who should follow the recommendations for guidance and a recorder (someone who will write the key thoughts to be presented to the whole fraternity).

The discussion starts with the reading of the Gospel (if time permits lectio divina can be provided) (10 mins).

After short reflections members of the small group are invited to share their own experiences related to the chosen theme. The guiding questions for the group leader are:

- Talk about your own experience.
- What impact has this had on your family and your spiritual life?
- Has this changed your family relationships?
- What emotions did you feel because of this?
- Were there any positive aspects to this experience?
- List some key phrases that you have used during this difficult time.

**IMPORTANT:** The animator should remind the group members that there are no wrong answers and that everyone should be able to express themselves in a respectful, kind, and friendly manner. All answers will remain confidential.

The animator should also guide the spiritual talks and reflections in a Franciscan spirit, weaving Franciscan values, spirituality, and charism into the discussion throughout the session.

#### **4. General discussion**

Each small group's recorder presents a summary to the whole assembly. This leads into general discussion, where the facilitator opens the floor to the broader group, encouraging connections between what each group discovered.

The animator should try to conclude the discussion by helping brothers and sisters to adopt a positive outlook on this trial, emphasizing that these are real opportunities to grow as a family and spiritually. The animator focuses on the positive aspects that some have gained from this trial

#### **5. Commitments**

The commitments and initiatives phase is crucial — this is where the discussion becomes action. Specific, concrete steps are agreed upon: who will do what, by when, and how it will be followed up. (For example: The next time I find myself in a situation when I feel angry, I will work on my anger issue, by taking 10 seconds of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help me find the most loving way to respond, and then respond. I will inform my group of how my new response affected the outcome of the encounter during our next session.)

It is advisable to begin each session with a brief review of the commitments and initiatives made in the previous meeting, assessing what has been accomplished before moving into the new discussion.

#### **6. Informal fraternal sharing and refreshments**

#### **7. Closing prayer:**

Lord, we ask you to guide us through our trials. You are always with us, in good times and bad. Help us to discern the opportunities that arise from these trials. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

### **VI. QUESTIONS**

A set of questions is provided for preparation and small group discussions. Each cell group may suggest additional questions or select specific ones. These questions are not accusations – they are invitations. Franciscan spirituality is not a theory – it is a simple path: transforming bitterness into gentleness, replacing criticism with mercy, choosing peace, and radiating 'Peace and Good'.

No family is excluded from this transformation.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** go to the end of the twelve sessions (Summary for Animators for Each Session & Animator Guide by Session Theme) to gain more insights on the roles and responsibilities of the animator.

# PROGRAMME



## Introductory session: Presenting the Programme

### **STIGMAS: Understanding the Concept, Understanding Our Wounds** (Chapter 2<sup>2</sup>)

#### **Objective:**

To understand the difference between a temporary ordeal and a lasting stigma.

**Caution:** Avoid any unhealthy glorification of suffering.

The proposed journey follows a theological and pastoral framework:

**Recognising trials – Embracing suffering – Discerning the stigmata – Choosing resilience – Experiencing the family Easter in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi.**

#### The Word of God:

- **John 20:27**, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”
- **Isaiah 53:5**, “But he was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed.”
- **2 Corinthians 4:8–9**, “We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

#### Franciscan Sources: Francis of Assisi, The Testament, 1–3:

*“What had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.”*

Francis speaks of his own experience: what had frightened him and caused him suffering became a source of peace.

#### **Preparatory questions:**

- 1) What trial in my life or my family’s life has felt ‘bitter’ to me?
- 2) Looking back, have I seen anything good come out of that situation?
- 3) Is there a wound that I have not yet entrusted to God or to someone I trust?
- 4) What practical steps could I take to move towards greater inner and family peace?
- 5) How might this experience help me to bear witness to the fact that Franciscan spirituality transforms bitterness into gentleness?

#### **Questions for Small Groups:**

- 1) What wounds persist within families?
- 2) What turns suffering into a stigma?
- 3) What concrete commitment is possible?

**Initiative:** Write down, anonymously, a family wound to entrust to prayer.



## SESSION 1

### **Financial and Material Difficulties and Family Resilience** (Chapter 1.1.1)

**Objective:** to view such adversities, whether financial or otherwise, as not insurmountable, and possibly, as opportunities. The difference between voluntary evangelical poverty and forced poverty due to external conditions.

**Possible topics for discussion:** job losses, unemployment, bills that are hard to pay, invisible scars (humiliation and shame), family resilience, (Franciscan) solidarity, marital conflicts over

<sup>2</sup> Nguimbi, A. S. (née Ilama Mombot). Trials and suffering of families: Stigmata and Easter! - 2025. CIOFS Family Commission.  
<https://ciofs.info/2025/04/23/trials-and-sufferings-of-families/>

finances, feeding one's family, accessing healthcare, sending children to good schools, fear of not having enough, relationship with Providence, how aging could impact our ability to provide for ourselves.

**A brief introduction:** Who was Saint Francis of Assisi? A man who discovered that poverty can lead to inner freedom and joy.

**Clarification:** Franciscan spirituality = living the Gospel in simplicity, brotherhood, and joy.

The Word of God:

- **Matthew 6:25–34**, “Do not worry about your life...”
- **Romans 5:3–4**, “Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope.”
- **Philippians 4:13**, “I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.”
- **Acts 2:44–45**, ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common.’

Franciscan Sources: **Bonaventure, The Major Legend of Saint Francis, Chapter XIII** (stigmata)

**Questions:**

- 1) What are the main financial challenges facing our families today?
- 2) How can these difficulties become a call to trust rather than fear?
- 3) How can we live out humility in the face of unemployment?
- 4) How can we maintain our dignity?
- 5) How does money become a source of division? Communication or accusation?
- 6) Question of conversion: Where have I lacked humility in managing my family's finances?
- 7) Inspired by the spirit of Francis of Assisi, what simple, concrete gesture of solidarity could I offer to a family burdened by financial or material difficulties?
- 8) Francis used to say: ‘Peace and good’. How can I live out that spirit when my family faces financial and material difficulties, and we seek resilience together?

**Possible initiatives:**

- Workshop / fraternal networking
- Setting up a discreet solidarity fund or a fraternal fund
- Organising a food drive
- Family budget' workshop

**Practical Franciscan solidarity:** fraternity is not just about sentiment – it is also about practical support.

**NB:** Resilience is dynamic, personal, and community-based (family-based).

**SESSION 2**



**The Stigmata in the Sacrament of Marriage – Fidelity, Reconciliation, Divorce and Separation**  
(Chapter 1.1.10; 2.2.1)

**Objective:** to provide a loving opportunity and a safe place to help the OFS members deal with issues associated with marriage.

**Possible topics for discussion:** crises, rejection, humiliation, infidelity, marital tensions or even marital breakdown, child custody, family restructuring, emotional impact, prevention and support, blended families, spiritual dryness.

**Key points:** The pain of rejection, humiliation, and silence. Wounds within a relationship.

### The Word of God:

- **Ephesians 4:32**, *“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”*
- **Colossians 3:12–13**, *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.”*
- **Matthew 19:6**, *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”*
- **Ephesians 4:26–27**, *“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil.”*

### Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, The Admonitions, Chapter VI;

**Chapter XVII, 1:** *“Blessed is that servant who no more exalts himself over the good the Lord says or does through him than over what He says or does through another.”*

Francis reminds us of the importance of humility.

**Pastoral care:** Never spiritualise a situation of violence.

### Questions:

- 1) Do I sometimes seek to be right rather than to love?
- 2) Have I allowed a hurtful remark to linger in the silence?
- 3) Do I know how to ask for forgiveness simply?
- 4) What practical changes can I make to the way I speak to bring more peace into my relationship?
- 5) How do marital wounds leave a lasting mark?
- 6) Can we heal without forgiving?
- 7) What concrete action could I commit to in order to bring healing or reconciliation into my marriage or family relationship?
- 8) Suggested time for marital dialogue.

### Questions for small groups:

- How can our relationship become a living testimony to Franciscan gentleness?
- Francis used to say: ‘Peace and Good’. What steps can I take to practice them in situations of fidelity, reconciliation, divorce, and separation?

## **SESSION 3**



## **The Scars Left on Children (Issues Relating to Parenting and Upbringing)** *(Chapter 2.2.2; 1.1.2)*

**Objective:** to provide opportunities for OFS members to discuss how to deal with issues that impact the upbringing of children.

**Possible topics for discussion:** parental absence (demanding work, separation, excessive social commitments), violence, comparisons between children, rebellious adolescence, academic difficulties, passing on values, disability and inclusion, lack of educational resources, blended families, teenagers and new technologies, children’s wounds.

### The Word of God:

- **Mark 10:14**, *“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”*
- **Colossians 3:21**, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.”*
- **Psalms 126:3**, *“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”*

**Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, A Letter to a Minister, 9:** *“There is not any brother in the world who has sinned – however much he could have sinned – who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy.”*

**St. Francis of Assisi. The Earlier Rule (Regula non bullata), X.**

**Questions:**

- 1) What signs indicate that a child is suffering?
- 2) Do I really listen to my children?
- 3) Have I ever downplayed their suffering?
- 4) Do I correct them more than I encourage them?
- 5) What concrete action could I commit to in order to show my children that I love them?

**Questions for small groups:**

- How can I pass on the spirit of mercy of St. Francis to my children?
- Francis used to say: “Peace and Good”. What steps can I take to put them into practice in raising and guiding my children?

**Commitment:**

- Set aside a weekly time to listen to the children.
- Identify signs of silent suffering.

**SESSION 4**



**Peace vs. Domestic and/or Social Violence**  
(Chapter 1.1.3)

**Objective:** to help the OFS members address issues of violence in the home.

**Possible topics for discussion:** domestic and social violence, cycles of violence, impact on children, prevention and support, social pressures.

**The Word of God:**

- **Ephesians 4:26–27**, *“Never let the sun set on your anger.”*
- **Matthew 5:9**, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*
- **Romans 12:18**, *“If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.”*
- **Psalms 34:18**, *“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted.”*

**Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, The Admonitions, Chapter XV, 1:** *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* A person who sows discord cannot be a servant of God.

**Questions:**

- 1) Have I ever remained silent in the face of violence out of fear or shame?
- 2) How does violence affect the children in my family, even when it is not directed at them?
- 3) What does it mean to be a peacemaker in my own home?
- 4) How can I distinguish between genuine reconciliation and simply keeping the peace out of fear?
- 5) What concrete action could I commit to in order to break a cycle of violence or conflict in my family?

**Questions for Small Groups:**

- What prevents families from speaking openly about domestic violence?
- How can our fraternity become a safe space for families who are suffering in silence?
- Francis used to say: ‘Peace and Good’. What concrete steps can I take to put them into practice in situations marked by domestic or social violence?

**Possible initiatives:** Offer a prayer intention at each meeting for families affected by violence.

## SESSION 5



## Addictions and Health Problems (Physical and/or Mental) (Chapter 1.1.4; 1.1.5)

**Objective:** to assist the OFS members in addressing issues of addiction and other similar issues.

**Possible topics for discussion:** information and communications technology, screens, drugs, alcohol, gambling, behavioural addictions, social media, financial and relational impact, serious illnesses, disability, mental health, readjustment of family roles, teenagers and new technologies.

### The Word of God:

- **Romans 12:2**, *“Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”*
- **1 Corinthians 6:19–20**, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body.”*
- **James 5:16**, *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*

**Franciscan source: St. Francis of Assisi, The Admonitions, Chapter XIX, 1:** *“Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself any better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and looked down upon [...]”*

In the face of shame and stigma linked to addiction or illness, Francis calls us to radical humility and compassion.

### Questions :

- 1) Is there a form of addiction — to screens, substances, or behaviour — that is quietly affecting my family life?
- 2) Do I tend to judge rather than understand when faced with addiction or mental illness?
- 3) How does illness or addiction reshape family roles, and how do we cope with that?
- 4) Have I sought help — spiritual, medical, or relational — for a difficulty I have been carrying alone?
- 5) How can we teach our children joyful sobriety in a world saturated with stimulation?
- 6) What concrete action could I commit to in order to support a family member struggling with addiction or illness?

### Questions for small groups:

- What prevents families from speaking openly about addiction or mental illness?
- How can our community become a space of welcome and non-judgement for families affected by these realities?
- Francis used to say: ‘Peace and Good.’ What concrete steps can I take to put them into practice in situations of addiction and health problems in my life and the life of my family?

### Commitment:

- Identify one habit or behaviour in my daily life that I could moderate or offer to God as an act of joyful sobriety.
- Commit to accompanying, without judgement, a person in my circle who is facing addiction or illness

### Possible initiative:

- Organise a morning, evening, or educational conference on responsible digital use.
- Offer a moment of silent prayer or intercession at each meeting for those suffering in silence.

## SESSION 6



## Stigmas within the Extended Family (Chapter 2.2.3)

**Objective:** to provide an opportunity for OFS members to discuss relationship issues and family conflicts within the extended family (Chapter 1.1.6).

**Possible topics for discussion:** poor communication, differences of opinions, rejection by in-laws, infertility, social pressure, stress, intergenerational conflicts, mediation, family therapy, tensions within the extended family.

### The Word of God:

- **Romans 12:18**, *“If possible, live at peace with all.”*
- **John 17:21**, *‘So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.’*
- **Ephesians 4:26–27**, *‘Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun set on your anger.’*

**Franciscan Sources:** **St. Francis of Assisi, The Earlier Rule (Regula non bullata), Chapter VII, 15:** *“Wherever the brothers may be and in whatever place they meet, they should respect spiritually and attentively one another [...]”*

**Pastoral care:** Never spiritualise a situation of violence.

### Questions:

- 1) Is there a family conflict that I am harbouring in my heart?
- 2) Do I speak respectfully of my family members?
- 3) Have I harboured unnecessary resentment?
- 4) Is the extended family a source of support or a source of hurt?
- 5) How can I restore harmony in my family?
- 6) What concrete action could I commit to restore peace, even if the other person does not change?

### Questions for small groups:

- Do I know how to offer support without judging?
- Who in my extended family might need a kind word or a gesture of reconciliation?
- What concrete action can I take to become a peacemaker in my surroundings?
- How can I share Franciscan spirituality through my acts of compassion?
- How can I live out Franciscan minority in my family relationships?
- Francis used to say: “Peace and Good”. How can I embody that spirit when dealing with the different challenges that arise within my extended family?

### Commitment:

Choose to replace one word or gesture of criticism with one of gentleness in my interactions with extended family members.

## SESSION 7



## Migration and Displacement, Natural Disasters, Wars and Emergencies (Chapter 1.1.7; 1.1.9)

**Objective:** To assist OFS members in engaging in respectful dialogue about the challenges of migration, displacement, natural disasters, wars, and emergencies, fostering mutual understanding and solidarity.

**Possible topics for discussion:** armed conflicts, political instability, pandemics, floods, fires, loss of property and insecurity, economic migration, political exile, geographical separation, cultural adaptation, loss of social networks.

### The Word of God:

- **Jeremiah 29:4–7**
- **Mark 4:37–40**
- **Matthew 5:9**
- **Luke 10:27; 30–37**
- **Revelation 21:3–4**, *‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, (for) the old order has passed away.’*

### Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi. The Admonitions, Chapter XV, 2:

*“Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

### **Questions:**

- 1) How do I maintain peace and faith when I am surrounded by fear, violence, or insecurity?
- 2) Am I capable of remaining hopeful and supportive for others during difficult times?
- 3) Is there someone near me who is more vulnerable and needs my help?
- 4) What would Christ expect from me in the face of people who have lost their home, their security, or their loved ones?
- 5) Am I a witness of hope, peace, and fraternity in situations of division and fear?
- 6) What concrete action could I commit to in order to help a displaced or vulnerable family rediscover dignity and trust?

### **Question for Small Groups:**

- What prevents us from reaching out to those who are most vulnerable in our midst?
- Francis used to say: ‘Peace and Good.’ How can I help families rediscover dignity, courage, and trust in God despite their suffering?

### **Commitment:**

Identify one concrete gesture of welcome or solidarity towards a displaced or vulnerable person in my community.

### **Possible initiatives:**

- Organise a collection of essential goods for families affected by displacement or disaster.
- Create a space of welcome and listening within the group for those who have experienced migration or loss.

## **SESSION 8**



## **Cultural and Religious Diversity** (Chapter 1.1.8)

**Objective:** to provide an opportunity for our OFS members to address issues of cultural and religious diversity.

**Possible topics for discussion:** different religious practices, children turning away from the faith, intercultural marriages, interfaith marriages, conversions, identity tensions, passing on the faith, the challenge of secularism, respectful dialogue across differences.

### The Word of God:

- **Galatians 3:28**, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*
- **Luke 10:33**, *“But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.”*
- **Acts of the Apostles 10:34–35**, *“Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, ‘In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.’”*

**Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi. The Earlier Rule (Regula non bullata), Chapter XVI, 5–6:** *“As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians.”*

**Questions:**

- 1) Am I able to respect others without weakening my own Christian identity?
- 2) Do I approach differences with fear and judgement, or with openness and dialogue?
- 3) How do I respond when children or young people distance themselves from the Church or the faith?
- 4) How can I accompany young people without forcing or condemning them?
- 5) How can I remain authentic in my faith without becoming intolerant or closed towards others?
- 6) How can I transmit faith as a living relationship with Christ rather than merely as rules or traditions?

**Questions for small groups:**

- How does our community welcome families marked by cultural or religious diversity?
- What does it mean to bear witness to Christ without imposing him?
- Francis used to say: ‘Peace and Good.’ What practical habits can strengthen faith in family life — shared prayer, Scripture reading, service, participation in the sacraments, acts of charity?

**Possible initiatives:**

- Organise an interfaith or intercultural sharing evening within the group.
- Invite a speaker to address the theme of faith transmission in diverse families.
- Offer a prayer intention for families navigating religious or cultural difference.

**SESSION 9**



**The Hidden Strengths of the Family (Chapter 3)**

**Objective:** to assist our OFS members in finding the hidden strengths in family and building stronger bonds based on those strengths.

**Possible topics for discussion:** faults and tolerance, mercy and forgiveness, humility, acceptance of others; gratitude, recognising gifts, the beauty of simplicity, joy as a spiritual strength.

**The Word of God:**

- **Mark 9:23**, *“Everything is possible to one who has faith.”*
- **Matthew 7:1–5**, *“Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?”*
- **Luke 6:37–38**: *“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”*

**Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, A Letter to a Minister, 5:** *“And love those who do those things to you and do not wish anything different from them, unless it is something the Lord God shall have given you.”*

Franciscan tradition: *“Where there is hatred, let me put love.”*

**Questions:**

- 1) Do I accept my family members as they are?

- 2) What are our family's strengths?
- 3) Do I see faults more readily than qualities?
- 4) Have I allowed bitterness to take hold in my heart?
- 5) Do I see myself as a victim of circumstances?
- 6) What positive choice can I make today?
- 7) What concrete decision can I take to regain inner peace and contribute to peace in the wider world?
- 8) How can I practically value everyone's gifts in order to strengthen family peace?
- 9) Do I know my own strengths?
- 10) Do I compare myself too much with others?
- 11) What talents can I develop and offer to my family and fraternity?
- 12) How can I use my strengths to bring peace and goodwill to those around me?
- 13) How can my family become a simple and joyful reflection of Franciscan fraternity?

### **Questions for Small Groups:**

- What does it mean to see the hidden strengths in a family that is struggling?
- How can our community help families rediscover their gifts rather than focus on their wounds?
- How can gratitude become a daily spiritual practice within family life?
- What concrete action could I commit to this week to live out the spirit of 'Peace and Good' within my family?

## **SESSION 10**



## **Family Resilience – Resignation or Resilience?** (Chapters 3.3; 3.3.1–3.3.7; 3.4)

**Objective:** to understand that resilience is a dynamic process; to explore the seven levers of resilience. Facing stigma - Resolution or victimisation.

**Possible topics for discussion:** leadership, beliefs, capacity for action, family functioning, relational ethics, mentalisation, spiritual dimension, passive and active reactions, rejection and abandonment vs. support, stress, withdrawal, conflict, solidarity, adaptation, communication.

The seven levers of resilience: Leadership – Beliefs – Action – Functionality – Relational ethics – Mentalisation – Spirituality.

### **A. Reactions and Actions (Chapter 3.1)**

#### The Word of God:

- **Deuteronomy 30:19**, *“I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.”*
- **Joshua 24:15**, *“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*
- **James 2:17**, *“So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”*
- **John 16:33**, *“I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.”*

**Franciscan Sources:** **Thomas of Celano, The Life of Saint Francis, the First Book, Part II, Chapter VI, 103:** *“Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing.”*

**St. Francis of Assisi, The Admonitions, Chapter V:** «That no one should boast in himself but rather glory in the cross of the Lord».

**Discernment:** Trusting surrender ≠ fatalism. Entrusting one's suffering to God is not passivity — it is the foundation from which active resilience grows.

## B. Rejection or Support? (Chapter 3.1.3)

### Word of God:

- **Galatians 6:2**, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
- **Luke 10:33-34**, “But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him.”

Franciscan Sources: **St. Francis of Assisi, The Testament, 1.**

### Questions:

- 1) Have we ever abandoned a suffering family member?
- 2) How can we become a more supportive family?
- 3) Have I ever felt abandoned by my family?
- 4) Who provides leadership in our family, and how is that leadership expressed?
- 5) What beliefs sustain our hope in difficult times?
- 6) Where have we succumbed to victimisation rather than choosing resilience?
- 7) What radical choice must we make to move from resignation to resilience?
- 8) Have I ever avoided someone because they made me uncomfortable?

### Questions for small groups:

- What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of our family when faced with adversity?
- How does our fraternity support families on the verge of resignation?
- What does Franciscan resilience look like in practical, everyday family life?

**Exercise:** Identify the dominant reactions within our families — passive or active, resigned or resilient. Share one observation with the group.

### Commitment:

- Visit a vulnerable family or person and offer a concrete gesture of fraternal solidarity.
- As a group, make a communal act of renouncing resignation — choose one shared commitment to active resilience.

## SESSION 11



## Choosing Life — Healing through Faith (Chapter 3)

**Objective:** to assist our OFS members in finding ways to heal through faith.

**Possible topics for discussion:** healing and forgiveness, entrusting wounds to God, personal decision-making, bearing witness, the family as a place of resurrection.

### The Word of God:

- **Deuteronomy 30:19**, “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live.”
- **John 9:6–7 / Mark 10:51**, “What do you want me to do for you?” — **Christ’s question to each of us.**
- **Jeremiah 17:14**, “Heal me, LORD, that I may be healed; save me, that I may be saved, for it is you whom I praise.”
- **Romans 8:28**, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Franciscan Sources: **St. Francis of Assisi. The Cantic of the Creatures, 10:**

“Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love.” Francis composed this cantic in suffering — nearly blind, in physical pain — and yet chose praise. This is the heart of Franciscan resilience: choosing life and gratitude even in the midst of trial.

### **Questions:**

- 1) Do I truly believe that God can heal our family?
- 2) Have I entrusted our wounds to the Lord in prayer?
- 3) Am I still afraid of the future?
- 4) Am I making good decisions for myself and for my family?
- 5) Am I easily influenced by fear, comparison, or the opinions of others?
- 6) What sort of person do I want to become — and what sort of family do I want to build?
- 7) What practical choice can I make today to move towards a more balanced and peaceful life?
- 8) What specific time for prayer or reconciliation can I set aside to foster peace within our family?
- 9) How can our family become a living witness to Franciscan hope?

### **Questions for small groups:**

- What does it mean to choose life concretely, in the midst of family suffering?
- How can our fraternity support families who are struggling to find hope?
- Where have we seen healing happen — in our own families or in those around us?

**Commitment:** Franciscan spirituality invites us to choose simplicity and goodness. This week:

- Name one wound or fear that I will consciously entrust to God in prayer.
- Choose one concrete gesture of reconciliation or tenderness towards a family member.

### **Possible initiatives:**

- Invite families to share a brief testimony of hope or transformation.
- Create a ‘prayer basket’ — each person writes a wound or intention anonymously and the group prays over them together.
- Offer a moment of silent adoration or contemplative prayer focused on healing and new life.

## **SESSION 12**



## **The Spiritual Dimension as a Catalyst for Healing** (Chapter 3.3.7)

**Objective:** to encourage our OFS family to believe that God is able to help, support, and transform our family lives.

**Possible topics for discussion:** faith and hope, the Word of God as a source of healing, Franciscan spirituality, the family’s journey through Lent and Easter: from trial to joy, the spiritual dimension as a path to resilience, praise in the midst of suffering.

### **The Word of God:**

- **John 16:20**, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.”
- **Proverbs 24:16**, “For the just man falls seven times and rises again.”
- **1 Corinthians 13:7**, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
- **Psalms 33:19**, “To deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.”
- **2 Corinthians 12:9**, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

**Franciscan Sources: St. Francis of Assisi, A Letter to a Minister. St. Francis of Assisi, The Canticle of the Creatures, 3.**

“All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made.” Francis composed the Canticle not in a moment of consolation, but in the midst of physical suffering and inner darkness. His praise was not a denial of pain — it was a spiritual choice to see beyond it. This is the heart of Franciscan healing: not the absence of the wound, but the transformation of it.

## **Questions:**

### *Faith and suffering:*

- 1) How does faith transform the way I perceive suffering?
- 2) Do I speak to God when things are not going well?
- 3) Do I truly believe that He can help me?
- 4) Have I ever felt inner peace after praying?
- 5) Francis found his strength in prayer. How can I discover and cultivate this strength in my own life?

### *Looking back on the journey:*

- 6) How to celebrate the family Passover?
- 7) At the end of this journey, have I identified the scars present in my family life?
- 8) What transitions have taken place within me or within my family during this programme?
- 9) What actions of thanksgiving?
- 10) Do I know how to give thanks despite difficulties?
- 11) In our family, do we recognise what is going well, alongside what is difficult?
- 12) Had I lost hope — and has something shifted?

### *Looking forward:*

- 13) How can I celebrate the family Easter — the passage from trial to joy?
- 14) How can I concretely nurture trust and peace in my home?
- 15) How to show that Franciscan joy is possible even in suffering?
- 16) Francis found his strength in prayer. What prayer or moment of silence could I establish to bring more peace into my daily life?
- 17) What concrete action could I commit to in order to carry the fruits of this journey into my family life going forward?

## **Questions for small groups:**

- How can our fellowship support families struggling to find hope?
- Where have we seen healing take place—in our own families or in those around us?

## **Commitment:**

Write a personal prayer of thanksgiving — name one wound that has begun to heal and one grace discovered during this journey.

## **Possible initiatives:**

- Organise a closing celebration — a shared meal, a prayer of thanksgiving, and a moment of testimony.
- Invite each family to light a candle as a symbol of the passage from darkness to light — from stigma to Easter.
- Create a communal prayer of praise, inspired by the Canticum of the Creatures, written together by the group.
- Offer each participant a written blessing or word of encouragement to take home.

**Conclusion:** Praise can be born in the heart of suffering. This is the message of Saint Francis. This is the message of this programme. Family wounds are not the final word. The final word belongs to the Resurrection.

## SUMMARY FOR ANIMATORS FOR EACH SESSION

At the close of each session, the animator guides the group through three closing movements:

### **1. What have we learned?**

Invite participants to name one insight, one word, or one image that stayed with them from the session. This is not a test — it is a moment of collective harvesting.

### **2. What concrete conversions?**

Invite each participant to identify one change — however small — that they feel called to make in their attitude, their words, or their behaviour within their family. Conversion is not a grand gesture; it begins with a single step.

### **3. Final question for every session: can I carry our family crosses with Christ, in the manner of Francis of Assisi?**

This question is not meant to be answered fully — it is an invitation to ongoing reflection, prayer, and surrender.

## ANIMATOR GUIDE BY SESSION THEME

Each month, the animator prepares and leads the session according to the following framework:

### **1. Personal preparation**

- Read the relevant section of the booklet in full before the session.
- Identify two or three key sentences to highlight or return to during the discussion.
- Take a moment of personal prayer before guiding a session.

### **2. Required attitude**

The role of animator is to create a safe and welcoming space. This requires:

- Neutrality — do not impose your own interpretation or experience.
- Confidentiality — what is shared in the group stays in the group.
- Kindness — welcome every contribution without evaluation.
- Ability to rephrase — help participants express what they are struggling to articulate, without putting words in their mouths.

### **3. Pastoral points of attention**

- Never force sharing — silence and hesitation must be respected.
- Avoid moral judgements — the group is a space of accompaniment, not correction.
- Be attentive to signs of deep distress — if a participant appears to be in crisis, accompany them gently and direct them to appropriate professional support after the session.

### **4. Recommended tools**

- A board or large sheet of paper for collective summaries and key words.
- Deliberate moments of silence — do not fill every pause.
- Anonymous sheets for sensitive questions or written intentions.
- A family prayer notebook — each group keeps a shared record of intentions, commitments, and thanksgivings across the programme.

## ROLE OF THE ANIMATOR

The animator is above all a servant of the group. His/her role is not to teach, but to accompany. Not to resolve, but to open. Not to conclude, but to send forward.

Concretely, this means:

- Ensuring confidentiality — remind the group at the opening of each session.
- Promoting freedom of speech — no one is obliged to share; every contribution is welcome.
- Avoiding any moral pressure — the programme is an invitation, never an obligation or a judgement.
- Directing to professionals when necessary — the facilitator is not a counsellor; knowing one's limits is itself a form of care.
- Maintaining balance between faith and realism — Franciscan spirituality is not a flight from reality. It is a way of facing reality with hope.

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