



Allegato n. 7

IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY FOR THE OFS

BUILDING A “CIVILIZATION OF LOVE”

Objectives

To underline the importance of family in our lives as Secular Franciscans, and to share our thoughts about family from our own perspective and from our own personal experience with our own family.

Context

Families are at the centre of our lives as human persons.

Different dimensions of “Family”

- Families in which we are born (as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, etc.)
- Families that we create (as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers)
- Families that we join (eg. Church, Franciscan Family, Secular Franciscan Family - local, regional, national and international)

Families have an essential role to play in being evangelized and evangelizing.

What does the SFO Rule say about family?

Rule, Article 17

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. 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.

What do the General Constitutions say about family?

GC, Article 24

1. Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death. Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

What does this imply?

For married couples and parents...

As Secular Franciscans, we must recognize our engagement in family as our first priority in life.

In living out our vocations, we must be at our best in our families. As Seculars, “building a more fraternal and evangelical world” (Rule, Art. 14) must begin at home. As Seculars, building a more fraternal and evangelical world extends to our engagement in the workplace, in society and in the Church ... but, always first, in the family. Sometimes spouses and parents will need to readjust their priorities so that this can happen, especially in terms of how we use our time. All that we do in support of our fraternity and our Order must be “ordered” within the context of living our family lives (implies that we cannot always do all that needs to be done in support of our fraternity and our Order in general, or do it as quickly as we would like). Seculars face unique responsibilities to family and unique challenges.

“It is necessary to act in such a way that your families show convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God’s plan and with the true good of the human person: of the spouses and especially of the children who are more fragile” (Novo Millennio Ineunte 47) (Message from John Paul II on the occasion of the 2002 General Chapter)

For fraternities ...

GC, Article 24

2. In the fraternity:

- 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;
- they should share the important moments of the family life of their Franciscan brothers and sisters and they should give fraternal attention to those — single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced — who are living difficult situations;
- *Rule 19* they should create conditions suitable for dialogue between generations;
- the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered.

Dialogue within the fraternity

Fraternities should engage in dialogue about the family and its challenges. Some discussion starters:

- Have we reflected on the spirituality of the family and of marriage? What are the essentials?
- Do we recognize and celebrate how God is molding our families?
- Do we share the challenges experienced within our families and how we are dealing with these?
- Are we open to diversity? Are we willing to reach out to family members who think differently than we do?
- Are we able to recognize the movement of the Spirit in our families?

Sharing important moments of the family life of Franciscan brothers and sisters

Celebrate important milestones in the lives of the members of your fraternities.

Be aware of the importance of being inclusive of non-professed family members in the events and activities of the fraternity, especially spouses and children.

Be aware of the inter-connectedness of the Franciscan Family.

Engaging in dialogue between generations

The following are some of the comments from an exchange with our 4 adult children around the nature of family, the challenges faced by families in today's world and the contribution that families can make in today's society.

- How important is family to you?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges faced by families today?
- How might these challenges be addressed?
- How important to you is faith/spirituality/religion in the life of a family?
- What is the most important contribution that families can make in today's society?

John (32)

“the most important function of a family is teaching how to love”

“along with teaching children how valuable they are and how much potential they have, teaching them how to love might be the most important gift they can be given ... this is imparted not only by loving them directly, but also by demonstrating how to love others ... when the children grow up and set off on their own, they bring all they've learnt to the families they will start, and are well equipped to love the heck out of their fellow human beings.”

Christina (29)

“Another way of defining family that is becoming more accepted and popularized in recent years is the idea of a ‘chosen’ family ... for me, this is the group of people with whom we surround ourselves and who, while not necessarily being related to us (biologically), nurture, support and love us unconditionally.”

“The central tenets of loving your neighbor and other morals were useful lessons growing up; however, I think that it’s really the commitment to love and care for each other that grounds a family”

Monica (27)

“To me, family consists of the people around us who make us feel connected ... connected to our history and to our future, not just the “right-now”ness of everyday.”

“Family is extremely important to me because it’s made up of the people who make you feel the most yourself, and not some catered version of yourself; they know you, and that makes you know yourself as well. It’s the most reliable mirror that you have.”

Clara (20)

“For me, family is the group of people that I am comfortable being myself around as well as a group of understanding people who accept you with no judgement and will always be there for you, to challenge you, and to help you grow as a person.”

“The most important thing that families contribute to society is fostering supportive relationships and investing time in learning from each other. I may not agree with all the things that each member of my family has suggested, but being able to interact and view things from other people’s perspectives really does prepare you for the real world.”

Family in Today’s World

As Secular Franciscans who are part of an international fraternity, we live out our secularity within the family in diverse ways according to the culture and norms in which we find ourselves. This, of course, adds much richness to the Franciscan family, but it also challenges us to greater understanding and tolerance. In the end, however, our life within the family is one of the primary contributions that we can make to the life of the Franciscan Family.

Our experience in Canada is very different from what is experienced in Asia, or Africa, etc. What is important is that we can learn from each other.

The bottom line is that “there is nothing more important in life than family.” (Leonard Keefe)

It is through family that we first experience the gift of love ... which, in fact, is the presence of God in our lives.

“His Holiness Benedict XVI cordially greets the members of the Secular Franciscan Order (and) ... holds them in his prayer so that they will be, everywhere, builders of a civilization of love.”

Let us resolve to continue our efforts to build a “civilization of love” because ... where there is love, there is God.

Closing Song

Ubi Caritas

Doug e Marion Clorey