



FAMILY GLOBAL COMPACT

We do well to focus on concrete realities, since «the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history», and through these «the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family».

(Amoris Laetitia, 31)

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MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS for the Launch of the *Family Global Compact*

Dear brothers and sisters!

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, I expressed my conviction that “the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church” (No. 31). With this in mind, I wish to support the *Family Global Compact*, a collaborative plan aimed at bringing the pastoral care of families into dialogue with centres of study and research on the family located in Catholic universities around the world. An initiative of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life and the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, the Compact is inspired by studies and research on the cultural and anthropological relevance of the family and the new challenges it faces.

The goal is synergetic: to enable the pastoral care of families in the particular Churches to benefit from the research and the educational and training programmes in Catholic universities. Together, the universities and programmes of pastoral ministry can more effectively promote a culture of family and life in this time of uncertainty and a certain shortage of hope. Solidly grounded in present realities, such a culture would help new generations to appreciate marriage and family life with its resources and challenges and the beauty of generating and nurturing human life. What is urgently needed, in a word, is “a more responsible and generous effort to present the... motivations for choosing marriage and the family and in this way, to help men and women better respond to the grace that God offers them” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 35).

Catholic universities have the task of developing in-depth theological, philosophical, legal, sociological and economic analyses of marriage and the family, in order to uphold their importance within contemporary systems of thought and action. Studies have revealed a crisis in family relationships, fueled by both contingent and structural problems, which, in the absence of adequate means of support from society, make it more difficult to create a serene family life. This is one reason why many young people are choosing unstable and informal types of emotional relationships over marriage. At the same time, surveys make it clear that the family continues to be the primary source of social life, and point to the existence of good practices that deserve to be shared and promoted globally. Families themselves can and should be witnesses and leaders in this process.

The Family Global Compact is not meant to be a static programme aimed at crystallizing a few ideas, but a process structured in view of four goals, namely:

1. Initiating a process of dialogue and greater collaboration among university study and research centres dealing with family issues, in order to make their activities more productive, particularly by creating or reviving networks of university institutes inspired by the social doctrine of the Church.
2. creating greater synergy of content and goals between Christian communities and Catholic universities.
3. promoting the culture of family and life in society, so that helpful public policy resolutions and objectives can emerge.
4. harmonizing and advancing proposals that result from this, so that service to the family can be enhanced and sustained in spiritual, pastoral, cultural, legal, political, economic and social terms.

It is in the family that many of God's dreams for the human community are realized. Hence, we cannot resign ourselves to the decline of the family in the name of uncertainty, individualism and consumerism, which envision a future of individuals who think only of themselves. We cannot be indifferent to the future of the family as a community of life and love, a unique and indissoluble covenant between a man and a woman, a place where generations meet, a source of hope for society. The family, it should be recalled, has a positive effect on everyone, since it is a *generator of common good*. Healthy family relationships represent a unique source of enrichment, not only for spouses and children but for the entire ecclesial and civil community.

I thank all those who have joined the Family Global Compact and those who will do so in the future, and I invite them to devote themselves with creativity and confidence to every initiative that can help put the family once more at the heart of our pastoral and social commitment.

Francesco

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 13 May 2023

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, in the occasion of the "Amoris Laetitia Family" Year proclaimed by Pope Francis, the **Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life** and the **Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences**, with the collaboration of **CISF (International Center on Family Studies)**, launched a course of research and reflection in order to create a **Global Compact on the Family** (henceforth, **Family Global Compact**), i.e., a shared program of actions for the promotion of the family throughout the world in light of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

The family stems from "the intimate partnership of married life and love between a man and a woman" (GS 48), the suitable place for the full development of the person and interpersonal relationships, responsibility and solidarity. However, the fragility of family ties and the difficulty today in understanding the anthropological foundations of marriage, generativity, the value of life and brotherhood call for more decisive and effective strategies of action at the cultural, educational, social and ecclesial levels, so that new generations can recognize, protect and appreciate the irreplaceable value of the family.

This does not exclude the fact that we are all called to take into account, regarding both pastoral and political action, the variety of forms of family to which customs and laws have accustomed us today; but we cannot renounce to clearly proposing a Christian message as regards the beauty of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman, which the Creator conceived as a divine and human institution, the very foundation of society.

"In a dramatic moment such as the one we are living because of the war [...] it is important to pause and reflect on the foundations of human relationships, better still, on that anthropological "position" where every human being is born, grows and learns to enter into relationships with others: the family, the fundamental cell of society (cf. EG 66). The conditions of peace are structured therein, both inside and outside ourselves, and we learn to live together with diversity.

The family, in fact, is the first factor in humanizing individuals and social life, but the obvious difficulties in which family relationships, marriage and the very idea of love from which the family is generated find themselves today, demand new points of consideration in order to understand how to place at the center of academic, cultural and ecclesial reflection those foundational dimensions of the family that can make it be perceived for what it is: a relational good for individuals and for society"¹.

In this sense, the goal of the FAMILY GLOBAL COMPACT is to ensure that the Church and society move together to give voice to a global thinking on the family that is authentically respectful of what it is, according to Christian anthropology: a community of life and love, an indissoluble covenant between spouses, self-giving, mutual help, fidelity, stability, procreation and education of children, a meeting of generations, and a contribution to the common good (GS 48ff.).

¹ Card. Pietro Parolin, *La famiglia come bene relazionale: la sfida dell'amore*, in P. Donati (ed.), *The Family as a Relational Good: The Challenge of Love*, Proceedings of the PASS Plenary Session 2022, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2023, pp. 37-46.

Church pastoral action needs to find concrete support in the thinking and research work of universities and cultural centers that are inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church. These centers are called to carefully identify research and formation strategies to develop arguments, responses and courses of action, including in the public sphere, to concretely support the Church's evangelizing mission in the world conveying the Christian message about the family. A common effort must be made to promote the leading role of the family in the economy, society, and the development of human persons and the common good. The family, although in difficulty, is the core of society and, as such, it is there that solutions to social problems should be sought.

In this sense, the Family Global Compact assumes that the family should not only be recognized as an ecclesial, economic, political and social subject of every human community, but that families today be made more aware of their crucial role.

Besides, the structural, cultural and normative changes and separations affecting family relationships and the very concept of family (its definition) today seem to challenge the possibility of attributing a shared meaning of the word "family," in favor of a deconstruction of family ties, the stability and the renouncement to welcoming life, which undermine the very identity of the family and the value of the newborn life, in a society that is becoming increasingly "post-familial" and conditioned by the mentality of casting aside those who are most fragile.

*"We know that social changes are altering the living conditions of marriage and families all over the world. Moreover, the current context of prolonged and multiple crises is putting a strain on the projects of stable and happy families. This state of affairs can be responded to by rediscovering the value of the family as the source and origin of the social order, as the vital cell of a fraternal society capable of caring for the common home. [...] In this sense, marriage and the family are not purely human institutions, despite the many changes they have undergone over the centuries and the cultural and spiritual differences among various peoples. Beyond all the differences, there are common and permanent traits that reveal the greatness and value of marriage and the family. However, if this value is lived out in an individualistic and private way, as is partly the case in the West, the family can be isolated and fragmented in the context of society. The social functions that the family performs among individuals and in the community, especially in relation to the weakest, such as children, people with disabilities and the dependent elderly, are thus lost"*².

Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, Rome, 29 April 2022.

Regardless, in fact, of the individualistic deconstruction of the contemporary family, the family will always continue to have as its distinctive, foundational and indispensable feature its very specific relationality.

"The asset of the family is not aggregative, that is, it does not consist in aggregating the resources of individuals to increase the utility of each, but it is a relational bond of

² Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, Rome, 29 April 2022.

perfection, which consists in sharing relationships of faithful love, trust, cooperation, reciprocity, from which the goods of the individual members of the family derive and, therefore, their happiness. Understood in this way, the family, which is a relational asset in itself, also becomes the source of many assets and relationships for the community, such as a good relationship with the State and the other associations in society, solidarity among families, the welcoming of those in difficulty, caring for the least, combating the processes of impoverishment, and so on”³.

Family relationships, in particular:

- offer the person a network of primary relationships based on care and reciprocity, combating isolation and loneliness, and providing the person with resources to deal with the complex personal and social challenges of existence;
- act - at the community level - as a factor of social, ethical and economic cohesion. Families build the relational micro-fiber of society, a network of ties between people and responsibilities for the common good, also in part through their educational task in generating socially responsible citizens and educating in social virtues.

In this regard, it is of top priority that any intervention in favor of the family should promote: the solidity of the legal institution of marriage and its specific features with respect to any other type of publicly recognized union, being in itself intended to guarantee the order of sexuality (capable of defining clear roles in the family: mother/father/son) in the order of generations, which succeed one another over time; the development of "good relationships" internally and supportive relationships externally (in maternity, paternity, conjugal, intergenerational relationships, any care-giving relationship, extended parental relatives networks, relationships in the neighborhood and in local communities); the families' awareness and ability to be builders of hope and a source of education for the common good and social virtues; new relational skills especially within families, so that they can educate their children knowing how to grasp the challenges of the times; and the building of stable networks, including giving the family a voice in public sphere and politics; generously welcoming human life and respecting life at every stage of existence; forming adults, as well as young people, on ethical issues to educate their children toward Christian values and the desire for a full stable family life in marriage.

The Compact that we are presenting included the Family Study and Research Centers of Catholic Universities throughout the five continents that are inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church, by collecting information and research on the cultural and anthropological relevance of the family, with a focus on family relationships, the social value of the family, and good practices in family policies at the international level. This information will be gathered together in a summarized Report published by the International Center for Family Studies (CISF).

³ Pope Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*, Rome, 29 April 2022.

The principle of realities⁴ has been a guide in the methodology of this project's work: *“We do well to focus on concrete realities, since «the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history», and through these «the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family».*⁵

The text, therefore, does not address philosophical, legal, theological and doctrinal issues on marriage and the family, rather it entrusts universities with the development and in-depth study of more speculative analyses, precisely starting from the needs that emerged from the careful observation of contemporary reality.

The *Family Global Compact* is not intended to be a static document, rather to promote a permanent process of connection, dialogue and collaboration within the world of scientific and university research, a kind of *progress report* within a network to give direction to research on the family, make coordination more active among university study centers that are inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church, and give grounded content and strategic objectives to public policies for the family.

Moreover, the *Family Global Compact* intends to develop its course of action in full synergy and convergence with the **Global Compact on Education**, launched in 2019 by Pope Francis on the theme of education, which already contains significant references to the leading role of the family and family relationships in education and, therefore, in the social sphere⁶.

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 231-233.

⁵ *Amoris Laetitia*, 31.

⁶ There are many possible forms of synergy between the priorities of the *Family Global Compact* and the seven points of the Compact on education (www.educationglobalcompact.org): (*putting the person at the center, listening to the younger generation, promoting women, empowering the family, embracing acceptance, renewing the economy and politics, safeguarding the common home*). In particular, in point 4, the importance of close synergy between educational agencies and the family is strongly emphasized, defined as *“the primary and principal educator. It is the fundamental unit of society and as such it must be able to fulfil its task as the source of generative and constitutive relationships for the human person, to which all the other actors must contribute. In Gravissimum educationis it is stated that parents are the primary and principal educators of their children. ‘This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking.’ So the family ‘is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs [...] particularly in the Christian family [...] children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God, to worship Him, and to love their neighbour’ (n.3)”* (Global Compact on Education, Vademecum, 2021).

<https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/resources/Risorse/vademecum-english.pdf>

The structure of the Family Global Compact:

- Family relationships (Point 1)
- The family, a social subject (Point 2)
- Social and political challenges (Point 3)
- A challenge for all (Point 4)

Each point is briefly outlined with the main critical issues and some proposals to support the family to be implemented in university research and formation programs.

In Item 4, some general principles of action are outlined for other social actors that the Family Global Compact challenges alongside universities.

POINT 1. THE QUALITY OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1.1 The core: the man-woman couple relationship*

Challenges

Today, the relationship of the couple represents one of the most interesting and problematic elements of "family-making." The constant decrease in marriages, the increase of couples living together and their fragility, the narcissism of emotional and sexual life, the increase in separations and divorces, as well as the gender ideology that renders masculine and feminine trivial are expressions of a privatization of family ties that is overwhelming not only for the couple. Their children, who are increasingly marginalized with respect to their family ties in the public sphere are affected as well. Every change that customs and laws introduce in relation to couples' lives and a person's identity inevitably reflects upon children and family dynamics.

Moreover, the fragility of couples fuels situations of loneliness and social marginalization, depriving them of their generative capacity in the family and society.

Among the difference and multitude of relational models, the "aggregate couple" and the generative couple stand out. The aggregate couple is structured as a number of individuals who seek self-realization in their relationship. On the contrary, the generative couple achieves fulfillment insofar as they produce relational goods for themselves, their children and the community, which transcend them. The couple achieves fulfillment when they become generative for themselves and others, and more generally when they succeed in producing relational goods and values. That is, it is the presence or absence of the generative project (the *We-relation* – *we as a couple* - even before becoming parents) that expresses the quality of the couple's relationship.

Suggestions

The possible responses to the fragility of the couple relationship are inscribed in actions of interventions at the local level, aimed at developing a culture that takes care of couple relationships, through available trained human resources and economic ones as well. There is the need to provide stability for families and children, first of all from a material and relational point of view.

* Various symptoms of a "culture of the ephemeral" emerge. Here I think, for example, of the speed with which people move from one affective relationship to another. They believe, along the lines of social networks, that love can be connected or disconnected at the whim of the consumer, and the relationship quickly "blocked". I think too of the fears associated with permanent commitment, the obsession with free time, and those relationships that weigh costs and benefits for the sake of remedying loneliness, providing protection, or offering some service. We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. (AL 39). «At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family». (AL 40)

Tax benefits, economic subsidies, housing concessions, services and tools for reconciling conflicts and relationship difficulties through the promotion of a greater awareness of the "health status" of the couple's relationship would be beneficial. Counseling services should accompany couples throughout the family life cycle, within both the civil and ecclesial contexts.

Services for listening and support are needed for crisis/conflict situations, so they can be promptly addressed with preventive interventions to avoid permanent breakups (separation/divorce or abandonment).

Opportunities need to be created to educate youth and adults in healthy emotional, affective and psychological relationships.

Specific actions

- Courses of formation to help couples bond, including in the church- related context, with the aid of experts
- Counseling and support for couples throughout the family life cycle, at the social level but also the spiritual and pastoral ones as well
- Tax benefits and economic support for young couples getting married
- Services and tools to balance work and family life for both men and women
- Promotion of family and couple relationships in services and labor regulations
- Counseling centers, listening centers and speaking groups, including in church settings, to accompany couples in times of discernment
- Individual guidance for personal fragile situations.

Guidelines for family-focused university research (the man-woman couple relationship)

- *Deepening one's knowledge of the transformative processes of the couple relationship in its various dimensions, with interdisciplinary projects to orient academic thinking toward strengthening the life of couples and marriage starting from mutual respect and an appropriate preservation of the roles of male and female in the family and society. Goal: family stability*
- *Developing analyses and evaluations on public policies that support couples' relationships, at the macro-social level and in the outreach service system (helping relationships, family counseling centers, and consulting), including family mediation in cases of separation/divorce to promote relationships between couples and healthy male-female relationships*
- *Helping to design and implement formation courses for practitioners dealing with couples and formation courses for the couples themselves*
- *Promoting studies to spread programs of affectivity and sexuality education based on Christian anthropology to train young people in marital sexuality and a full and responsible intimate life*

1.2 Promoting marriage*

Challenges

The widespread dissatisfaction of family relationships also appears to be related to the lack of social and legal importance connected to marriage in many civil systems and cultural contexts, which is accompanied by a condition of family isolation and increasing individualization of relationships. The distress of contemporary society also seems to be rooted in the fragility and weakness of family ties, which tend to become increasingly fluid and lack specific public recognition.

The main challenges that arise from this context are the isolation of families and the unappealing nature of married life. This context also includes the general low disposition towards new life, that is, to the generation of children.

- The state of isolation refers to a family life perceived intimately, as a private affair. This reduces opportunities to exchange views between families (which serve to strengthen family identity) and fluid relationships between family and other institutions (school, associations, work).
- The unappealing nature of married life can be detected by the preference given, especially by young couples, to other forms of cohabitation. Married couples being so invisible on the public scene and the growing alienation of younger generations from the institutional choice of marriage are related processes, signs of a more general public and social irrelevance with regard to marriage that produces widespread malaise in families and society. The fragility of free unions does not generate relational goods in the same way as marriage, which in itself is stable (trust, solidity of relationships, shared responsibilities, certainties, hope for the future...).
- The value of marital exclusiveness and fidelity are no longer perceived at the cultural level, nor are they protected at a legal level. This profoundly affects people's sexual habits and their happiness, before and after the formation of a stable life as a couple by the younger generation. Infidelity, separation and divorce are now structural critical issues.

* As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. [...] What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them. (AL 35)

No one can think that the weakening of the family as that natural society founded on marriage will prove beneficial to society as a whole. The contrary is true: it poses a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values and the moral progress of cities and countries. There is a failure to realize that only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life. We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability, but *de facto* or same-sex unions, for example, may not simply be equated with marriage. No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society. But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the work of raising children and, in general, to encourage the stability of the marriage bond? (AL 52)

- The low tendency to have children suffers the negative consequences of this progressive de-structuring of the public relevance - from a normative, economic and social point of view - of the marriage covenant and its stability.

Suggestions

The legal appreciation of marriage requires new insights about the strictly legal and anthropological value of the bond based on the difference and reciprocity between men and women, which makes it unique compared to any other type of union, even from a cultural point of view. There is an urgent need to rediscover the foundations of conjugal fidelity and exclusivity within the framework of a monogamy that once again becomes de facto monogamy. Marriage is, in fact, meant to guarantee the order of sexuality in the order of generations. Knowing one's origins and family role in relation to every other subject in the family constitutes the foundation of a person's identity.

The economic empowerment of marriage requires interventions targeted at emphasizing the benefits of the union, which today are penalized compared to the benefits reserved for individuals.

Moreover, spousal relationships can be enhanced in the social sphere through initiatives, services and interventions aimed at couples, with a view to self-help and sharing of meaningful experiences, with couple counseling services, recreational/leisure activities and social volunteering aimed at couples. Thinking about individuals is not enough. People need to be helped to build their own "we" as a couple.

Promoting a culture of marriage and the choice to marry should benefit from the witness of families capable of displaying the specific virtues and qualities that stem from marriage, such as stability, fidelity, indissolubility, promotion of male and female dignity and identity, and openness to life and care, i.e., generativity.

In the public sphere, communication about marriage should enhance its generative aspects through programs and seminars to raise awareness of the values that sustain marriage, such as fidelity and reciprocity, and its generative effects for the family, society and the Church. In parallel, interventions are urgently needed to make people understand the value of openness towards life and the generation of children as a factor in humanizing and perfecting marital and family life. Policies to support the generation of human life are needed.

In the ecclesial sphere, it is worth mentioning that new attention is being given to courses of preparation for married and couple life, through the innovative proposal of a **catechumenate for married life**⁷, launched on the occasion of the Tenth World Meeting of Families (Rome, June 22-26, 2022), as a new itinerary that can accompany children from childhood onwards to discover that getting married and building a family are a vocation, not a mere choice of cohabitation between two individuals, thus reclaiming the correspondence between natural marriage and sacramental marriage. The catechumenate can change the way of thinking about marriage and the family; it is a revolution of perspective that will be able to develop

⁷ Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life*, Rome 2022. http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/dam/laityfamilylife/amoris-laetitia/OrientamentiCatecumenatomatrimoniale/Catechumenal%20Pathways_ENG.pdf

to its greatest potential thanks to the support of institutions and universities, alongside the particular Churches.

Specific actions

- Providing vocation discernment services for individuals, couples and families in the particular churches
- Guaranteeing and enhancing services of formation and preparation for marriage and family life in the particular Churches, with a new and more solid course of a "catechumenate" for young people and couples, i.e., initiation and deepening of the faith even for couples before and during married life.
- Providing formation to those who teach the catechumenal itineraries for married life, both in pastoral and ecclesial settings as well as in academic contexts.
- Promoting recreational and/or leisure and volunteer activities for couples.
- Urgent interventions are needed to protect the marital bond in marriage crisis situations.
- Promoting services to support children of separated parents as well as assisting the separated parents in raising their children.
- Advocating in the public sphere those values proper to marriage and the married couple: duration and indissolubility, fidelity and exclusivity, difference, reciprocity and respect ...
- Helping young couples to live out their life plans together with other families (promoting family groups)
- Supporting and increasing services that assist and encourage maternity and birth (counseling centers, life help centers)
- Forming and accompanying young people in a good emotional/sexual married life, in understanding the value of chastity, self-respect and respect for others, motherhood and fatherhood
- Promoting and enhancing family self-help groups and associations

Guidelines for family-focused university research (marriage)

- *Analyzing the normative legal aspects of marriage (rights/duties of spouses, taxation, property aspects, exercising parenthood) and identifying ways to enhance the marital bond, also in light of the impact of divorce regulations upon individual choices*
- *Developing analyses and evaluations of how marriage affects the intensity of family relationships, people's well-being, and social cohesion*
- *Exhaustively studying the criticality of economic policies and their relationship to the trend of marriage breakup*
- *Promoting studies on public marriage support interventions (formalizing and distributing best practices)*
- *Studying the impact of gender ideologies on individuals' sexual behavior and family relationships (both intra-generational, within the couple and between young people, and inter-generational, between parents and children)*
- *Studying and developing models of catechumenal itineraries that can be offered in a flexible manner to dioceses to help them in those aspects and disciplines that require expert advice. Developing models for each stage of the catechumenate to married life (dealing with the remote stage of formation of children to the vocation to marriage)*
- *Forming lay people, particularly married couples, on how to accompany young people on catechumenal paths to married life (vocation coaching also for those living together, young adults, and other life situations)*
- *Investigating the causes that, as part of the process of secularization, lead young people (including Catholics) to reject institutionalized bonds, thus the legal institution of marriage, as well as the sacrament*
- *Proposing models to support the couple's relationship, to care for the marital bond*

1.3 Welcoming new life*

Challenges

The declining birth rate that now characterizes vast areas of the world and causes severe demographic and migratory imbalances, with serious consequences in economic and social terms as well, has structural as well as cultural causes.

Within the conjugal life, but also outside of marriage, contraception, abortion and sterilization are widespread practices, allowed by the laws of many countries, that have transformed the meaning of procreation: from a natural inclination and gift of God to a project and result of a procreative will that tends to dominate life. Assisted reproduction, embryo selection to avert the birth of children with genetic disorders or unwanted sex, embryo and gamete donation, lend themselves to a selective mentality by which adults end up projecting unjustified expectations onto their desired children. "A healthy child only at the right time" is now the most common attitude, especially in more advanced countries where technology is most available. From the practical point of view, the relationship between a couple's economic and working conditions and the possibility of opening up to life is inversely proportional to the ageing of the couple: in the fertile years of youth, economic conditions are often precarious and discourage being open to life; at an older age, economic conditions improve, but the couple's fertility decreases.

Resorting to prenatal diagnosis for eugenic purposes represents the subsequent and consistent consequence of a "reproductive" culture, which sees the birth of a child as the fulfillment of a mere desire, rather than the acceptance of a priceless gift.

Moreover, the division between sexuality and procreation requires an educational effort towards the younger generations, who are in danger of trivializing sexual relations, underestimating their importance for the good of oneself and others. Education, awareness and respect are urgently required.

The throwaway culture is also revealed in the lack of inclusion of people with disabilities: violence, stigma and abuse often stem from the denial of the person's dignity and an identification of the person with a pathology.

The fragility or complete lack of family ties is burdensome for the younger children, orphans, children forced to work, children who migrate alone, those who are not registered in the civil register and street children.

** From the outset, love refuses every impulse to close in on itself; it is open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself. [...]*

A child asks to be born of that love, and not by any other means whatsoever, for «he or she is not something owed to one, but is a gift», which is «the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of the parents». Because «according to the order of creation, conjugal love between a man and a woman, and the transmission of life are ordered to each other (cf. Gen 1:27-28). Thus the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of mankind, through the transmission of human life». (AL 80-81)

Suggestions

It is necessary to educate young people not to dissociate the sphere of sexuality from that of emotions and generativity, in order to reconnect these fundamental dimensions of a person's life. Moreover, the conjugal relationship remains the most suitable for realizing these dimensions to the fullest and most harmonious form, since it is founded on the total gift of one's life to another, on reciprocity, symmetry and mutual help between spouses, through a bond that is intended to be indissoluble. It is therefore appropriate that a clear message be given to children and young people in this regard, and that the Catholic school also teaches in this sense.

It is necessary to realign the generative dimension with the affective-sexual dimension also from a biological and anagraphical point of view, that is, ensuring the most favorable conditions for getting married and having children at a young age. To do this, it is necessary to adopt social policies and economic measures that can harmonize young people's desire for a family with their legitimate aspirations and work needs. In this regard, not only the State and public agencies, but also private businesses can do much to ensure that the choices to marry and have children do not have a negative impact on people's employment, women in particular.

Support for couples who have children should also be ensured at an older age, avoiding incentives for the use of in vitro fertilization techniques, which require the production of large numbers of embryos destined to die or remain frozen, raising significant ethical issues. Moreover, these techniques involve the use of resources, including public resources, that could be devoted to other means to support young couples to have children, financial support for large families, and the adoption of minors.

Finally, it is also the responsibility of public services to accompany, on the medical, psychological and spiritual level, couples who have received an unfavourable prenatal diagnosis, in order to avoid the eugenic drift towards these families: children, even with disabilities, are children and their lives are unique and unrepeatable. They should be protected in their right to life like anyone else.

Specific actions

- Promoting and increasing services to support and accompany mothers in birth and motherhood (counseling centers, life help centers)
- Accompanying young people towards both an affective and sexual good married life, with an understanding of the value of chastity and respect for self and others
- Promoting courses on emotional and sexual education in schools, focusing on the importance of marriage and the family as privileged forms of personal fulfillment, chastity, total self-giving and a place to welcome newborn life.
- Enhancing social and economic models capable of harmonizing family and work dimensions, as well as maternity and paternity measures to support young couples and large families.
- Promoting models of medical, social welfare and pastoral accompaniment for families who have children with disabilities, as well as for families who have received unfavorable results of some disease from prenatal diagnosis.

- Promoting models for understanding the condition of disability that help overcome welfarism, in order to embrace a style that is inclusive and foresees participation of people with disabilities.
- Promoting a culture of respect to eliminate violence and abuse against people with disabilities.
- Encouraging scientific research regarding prenatal and perinatal care as an alternative to abortion, as well as providing care and support services for pregnant women.
- Promoting methods of natural fertility for understanding one's body and fertility
- Promoting and financially supporting the establishment and development of centers for the study and monitoring of cases of couple infertility, where alternative solutions to assisted reproduction are proposed (e.g., *Naprotechnologies*, ...)
- Promoting child adoption, not only for infertile couples, but also as a Christian choice of openness and acceptance.
- Raising awareness about generativity not only biologically, but also spiritually and socially.

Guidelines for family-focused university research (marriage)

- *At the philosophical level, focusing on the multiple conceptual and practical differences between "procreation" and "reproduction"*
- *Further studying ethical, anthropological, legal, and economic reflections on the consequences of widespread, eugenic use of selective prenatal diagnosis and assisted reproductive technologies*
- *Promoting studies for the care of children with prenatal and perinatal conditions, combining the therapeutic dimension with that of caregiving and family support, both psychological and pastoral*
- *Promoting the establishment and development of centers for the study and monitoring of cases of couple infertility, where alternative solutions to assisted reproduction are proposed (e.g., Naprotechnologies)*
- *Verifying the efficacy of policies adopted in different countries to support the birth rate, identifying the most effective measures for balancing family and work life, with specific reference to young couples and large families*
- *Analyzing and updating the content of programs on affective and sexual education presented in schools, emphasizing the importance of conjugal and family ties, as well as the link between sexuality and human procreation*
- *Proposing models for supporting couples who cannot have biological children*
- *Further exploring the link between medicalized perceptions, negative stories of the disabling condition and calls for euthanasia or "therapeutic" abortion, in order to contrast the throwaway culture.*
- *Proposing methods and areas to support families so that, where possible, they feel assisted in accompanying their loved ones with disabilities to independence.*
- *Promoting a culture of embracing children abandoned by their families*

1.4 From age to age*

Challenges

Every stage of a family's life cycle is characterized by specific developmental milestones, involving continuous reworking of the relationships between the couple, as well as the parents-children, adult children-elderly parents and grandparents-grandchildren relationships. Certain demographic phenomena - life span extension, postponing marriage and having children, and the drastic reduction of births also due to a generalized closure to new life - have had a decisive impact on the transition processes of families, and in particular on care in inter-generational ties, both between parents-children and grandparents-grandchildren. The linearity that characterized family progression in the past (childhood, adolescence, youth, leaving the family, building a new family with children, old age of the previous generation) has given way to a more complex generational intertwining, resulting in overlapping situations marked by different care and developmental tasks, with often unclear roles where family situations resulting from separations/new unions/children from different partners overlap and intertwine.

Nowadays, providing care represents a challenge upon which the well-being of individuals and families is being played out. The processes of demographic transformation, the weakening of parental networks and the increasingly marginal role of public family support systems have made the tasks of caring for families urgent, complex and diverse, often revealing families in distress. In many geographical contexts, vertical family relationships are in crisis.

The weakening of parental networks, in some contexts, is also expressed in the reduced willingness of the elderly to care for their grandchildren, for cultural reasons, especially in more advanced countries, but also in the limited willingness and opportunity for children to care for their elderly and lonely parents.

In addition, the application of digital technologies to daily life for the delivery of public services requires skills and tools that many older people do not possess. This creates distressing situations, which put elderly people and families in difficulty.

* *The virtuous bond between generations is the guarantee of the future, and is the guarantee of a truly humane society. A society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour [...] It is a society destined to be filled with surly and greedy young people. (AL 189)*

Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren [...]. Their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age-old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are. Hence, «attention to the elderly makes the difference in a society». (AL 192)

Therefore, «a society that has no room for the elderly or discards them because they create problems, has a deadly virus», since «it is torn from its roots». (AL 193)

Suggestions

Suggestions must take into account all actors involved in the family network and involve all generations: young children, adults and the elderly. Proposals are needed to accompany family transitions (birth and childcare, education, care of elderly parents):

- dedicating time to reflect upon family identity and providing training in skills for effectively coping with critical transitions;
- reflecting on the identity of the elderly
- enhancing the social nature of family relationships;
- encourage families and the elderly people to participate in the social and ecclesial context.

Projects should reach out to couples and the elderly and open up to different generations:

- meetings with couples should aim at strengthening the bond of caring for and nurturing their children, as well as for older family members;
- the relationship with the older generations should aim at acknowledging the caring role of grandparents, while also recognizing the public importance of the caregiving relationship between offspring *caregiver* and aging parent.

It is priority for a society that knows how to care for the vulnerable to support families so that they can provide for this caring role, without having to isolate and exclude elderly parents from the family, confining them to residences and nursing homes, when not strictly necessary for clinical-care reasons.

Within the framework of some specific conditions of necessity or fragility, the church is identified as a central factor in child protection, assistance, as well as the human and spiritual accompaniment of the elderly, palliative care, and bereavement support. The Church's role should be enhanced in every context of the community.

Moreover, care given in the family should influence legislative decisions so that family care and caregiving is also promoted and supported financially. Caring for loved ones is a right/duty that should be guaranteed throughout the entire life cycle of the family.

Specific actions

- supporting family resilience over time by enhancing the family member's own resources and providing support and preventing new problems
- enhancing the Church's contribution as the privileged representative of families in the major transitions of family life cycles, as well as for those who remain isolated, the elderly and children
- promoting family formation on the tasks for providing care and education and the intergenerational care of the very young and the elderly
- accompanying families in the intra-generational dialogue between siblings in their caring duties toward their parents
- Fostering exchanges between families by promoting family associationism

- arranging targeted interventions to support the needs of the more fragile families in organizing, managing and providing care
- taking measures to simplify providing public services to the elderly to facilitate access even without technological *devices*
- enhancing home-based services for the care of non-self-sufficient people and co-housing

Guidelines for family-focused university research (intergenerationality)

- *Analyzing the intergenerational dimension of public policies and promoting effective policy models in this field*
- *Fostering and promoting intergenerational communication of family lifestyles, values, family patterns (role of grandparents, family caregiving)*
- *Assessing the impact, even economic, of breaking intergenerational ties between different generations and caregiving relationships*
- *Coordinating the conception, design and evaluation of intergenerational interventions and services*
- *Exploring cost-effective models for extending paternity and maternity leaves*
- *Developing family-oriented models of care (e.g., co-housing) instead of pure welfarism*
- *Investigating the phenomenon of abuse of the elderly in terms of abandonment and economic poverty*
- *Researching the psychological and social motivations for the elderly seeking euthanasia in some geographical settings, where it is legally permitted*
- *Reflecting on the theme of migration and the effects it has in terms of tearing apart the family fabric, breaking intergenerational ties*

1.5 No to domestic violence*

Challenges

Family relationships, usually considered a source of warmth and fulfillment, can become fraught with tension, violence, and abuse. In family situations in which, for various causes, relationships are inhibited or are under severe stress, dysfunctional ties can escalate to indifference, neglect, disregard of the other, and even to the most serious forms of neglect or abuse and violence.

It is certainly necessary to distinguish conflict situations, from situations of violence:

- in the former, conflict in the couple can be a disruptive element in the family balance but, through appropriate reflexivity and targeted interventions, it can become a constructive element in the welfare of the family and marital relationships, preventing more serious forms of violence or abandonment;
- in the latter, violent family relationships generate profound disruption, which hurts and endangers the well-being of all family members, destroying the very virtues of the family context.

Domestic violence, the victims of which are mainly women, the disabled, the elderly and minors, is often a hidden phenomenon that is difficult to declare and report. In this case, on the one hand, the integrity of individuals is at risk, while on the other hand, the functioning of families. Therefore, interventions must take into account the multiple relationships and generations involved.

Specific attention needs to be given in some countries where women are still subjected to violence and social marginalization, especially when they are alone (childless widows, single women, child brides, female victims of genital mutilation, female HIV patients...)

** There are sad situations of violence within families that breed new forms of social aggression, since «family relationships can also explain the tendency to a violent personality. This is often the case with families where communication is lacking, defensive attitudes predominate, the members are not supportive of one another, family activities that encourage participation are absent, the parental relationship is frequently conflictual and violent, and relationships between parents and children are marked by hostility. Violence within the family is a breeding-ground of resentment and hatred in the most basic human relationship». (AL 51)*

Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement which, rather than a show of masculine power, are craven acts of cowardice. The verbal, physical, and sexual violence that women endure in some marriages contradicts the very nature of the conjugal union. I think of the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making. History is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior, yet in our own day, we cannot overlook the use of surrogate mothers» or the «the exploitation and commercialization of the female body in the current media culture». (AL 54)

Can we really ignore or overlook the continuing forms of domination, arrogance, abuse, sexual perversion and violence that are the product of a warped understanding of sexuality? Or the fact that the dignity of others and our human vocation to love thus end up being less important than an obscure need to “find oneself”? (AL 153)

It is not superfluous to remember that even within marriage itself, sex can become a source of suffering and manipulation. (AL 154)

Suggestions

Preventative intervention is needed, offering parents violence-free educational strategies to give witness of virtuous and generative family relationships to young people.

Conflict and marital crises should find appropriate responses in family planning services, listening centers and joint living projects that are able to address crises in a timely manner. Such interventions are part of the prevention of separation and forms of domestic violence, before and after the eventual breakup and/or separation. A non-marginal aspect lies in corrective or re-educational actions aimed at perpetrators of violence, in order to promote family relationships marked by mutual respect, especially toward women.

It is necessary to reinforce the ways in which women, who are victims of violence, are taken in and protected with residential services, sheltered housing and other forms of reception and accompaniment.

Specific actions

- Training families to contrast violence and promote virtuous educational and relational patterns
- Educating men to respect women, even in their sexual relationship, as well as minors
- Training and support for women so that they know how to report all forms of family abuse/violence against themselves or children
- Promoting family planning services, listening centers, counseling and support for couples, including education regarding intimacy and the emotional/sexual life in respect for each other
- Giving financial support for counseling centers, social services, anti-violence centers, and shelter homes for women and children for the purpose of reporting abuse and to accompany those involved
- Disseminating centers that promote re-educational actions that aim at violent perpetrators
- Creating safe houses for women and children who experience violence/abuse
- Strengthening church-based structures for the protection of minors, fragile people with disabilities, the elderly, and any other vulnerable people who suffer from abuse, discrimination, and violence

***Guidelines for family-focused university research
(domestic violence)***

- *Strengthening the understanding and diffusion of the phenomenon of violence and abuse in all its expressions in contemporary societies*
- *Elaborating models of early prevention, both in terms of reading signs of distress and developing urgent interventions, in the social and pastoral spheres*
- *Promoting the creation of educational programs on the difference between men and women and the development of peaceful and nonviolent relationships, including in the area of affective and sexual education*
- *Promoting the development and diffusion of programs for educating men to respect women, to prevent femicides and abuse*
- *Helping to develop and implement models of intervention for victim protection (sheltered houses) and rehabilitation-recovery of perpetrators of violence*

POINT 2. PROMOTING THE FAMILY, A SOCIAL SUBJECT

2.1. Family networks: “close” solidarity relationships**

Challenges

There are more and more frequent phenomena of social fragmentation/isolation of families due to various factors: weakening of extended kinship relationships, breakdown of neighborhood/community networks, breakdown of couple/family relationships. The very intergenerational solidaristic ties of the extended parental group are often broken or weakened, due also in part to nuclear urban development patterns. This strongly affects the growing loneliness of individuals and couples and the procreative choices of families: the declining birth population is a worrisome factor in many areas of the world, at the same time the cause and effect of economic crises that seriously burden younger couples. The sense of abandonment of families then affects the perception of the presence of the elderly, the sick and people with disabilities as if they were a burden.

Another decisive element in the weakening of "neighborly" relationships and the progressive isolation of families and individuals are migratory movements, triggered by high-impact geo-political events (wars, territorial/environmental impoverishment, economic crises), or by family projects for socio-economic advancement, especially when imposed. Even short-range moves within individual countries/geographical areas (especially from the countryside to the city) can break or make community ties fragile, thus making the family vulnerable. Emergency and/or long-range displacement/migration have a greater negative impact on these networks.

This is also why in **implementing family policies**, valuable examples of intra-family solidarity, as well as those of family alliances, should by no means be overlooked.

** Beyond the small circle formed by spouses and their children, there is the extended family that cannot be ignored. In fact, «the love between husband and wife and, in a derivative and broader way, the love between members of the same family – between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household – is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family». This also includes friends and friendly families, and also communities of families who support each other in difficulties, social engagement and faith. This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace “even those who have made shipwreck of their lives». It can also help to compensate for parental weaknesses, or to promptly discover and report possible situations of violence or even abuse experienced by children, giving them sound love and family support when their parents cannot ensure it. (AL 196-197)*

Suggestions

From a general policy perspective, **supranational governance projects** for migration policies are needed to reduce those structural problems that cause hardship and vulnerability during migration, which uproot individuals and families from their original relationships.

Local community protection/enhancement policies, and area protection projects that tend to keep people in their geographical and economic contexts, thus also nurturing environmental protection/enhancement, are also important.

There is an urgent need for widespread outreach to families, so that the willingness of families to engage in various types of primary community-based relationships (inter-generational dialogue, neighborhoods, local communities, inter-family associations, self-help groups, consumer/production cooperatives) is encouraged. Policies must be extensive at the local level (local authorities, community collaboration networks among various public and private actors).

Specific actions

- Supporting the permanence of families and communities throughout the territory, giving special attention to rural areas, with measures to encourage local employment
- Fostering solidarity mechanisms among migrant families and between migrant families and families in the receiving destination area
- Supporting families both economically and through social networks in their caring for and nurturing of the young and most vulnerable
- Promoting family-friendly housing-urban policies with adequate common spaces, also for socializing (especially in large metropolitan areas)
- Promoting housing policies that take into account the needs for adequate space to care for and nurture fragile family members (e.g., the sick and elderly) and that are inclusive (free of architectural barriers that hinder access for the children, elderly or disabled).
- Promoting social interventions at the local level that enhance the active citizenship of families, neighborhood networks, and participatory democracy (e.g., participatory budgeting initiatives)
- Giving a voice and a role to local family associations, promoting help and mutual aid experiences (solidarity purchasing groups, production and consumption cooperative networks, family micro-entrepreneurship, energy communities)

***Guidelines for family-focused university research
(close family networks)***

- *Deepening and promoting understanding of the power of family ties*
- *Analyzing and promoting at the political and cultural levels the presence and characteristics of networks of extended families, relatives, friends, community/neighborhood (density, diffusion, duration, intensity)*
- *Accompanying community development projects in their various stages (project planning, implementation, evaluation, modeling)*
- *Promoting research on the relationship between people, families, and the environmental context (urbanization, rural areas, territorial mobility)*

2.2 Families teach faith and the common good*

Challenges

Globally, consumerism, the throwaway culture, relativism and individualism constitute widespread cultural orientations, of which families are at risk of becoming both victims but also unwitting perpetrators.

The special interests of individual parties (individuals, households, social groups, nations...) become prevailing over a solidaristic perspective of promoting the common good, both at the macro-social level, in the economic, cultural and political spheres, and at the micro-social level, in the valued choices and behaviors of individuals and households.

Moreover, the development of digital technologies creates obvious educational difficulties in families, both because of the content conveyed by social media and the practice they foster of establishing virtual relationships that are not real, which generate strong intra- and inter-generational relational difficulties.

A recent problem concerning today's generation is the extensive use of television series, through platforms, which entail long and repetitious viewing periods that can damage health and family relationships.

Suggestions

A major cultural call to values of the common good (brotherhood, protection of creation, solidarity, proximity) is needed, in tune with the growing calls of the Social Doctrine of the Church and the more recent Magisterium.

Also, educational agents (family, school, media systems) need to be involved. It is

* *The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom. (AL 274)*

Parents have a serious responsibility for this work of education. (AL 17)

But nowadays who is making an effort to strengthen marriages, to help married couples overcome their problems, to assist them in the work of raising children and to encourage the stability of the marriage bond? (AL 52)

Parents' tasks include shaping the will of their children and fostering good habits and a sentimental inclination to goodness. (AL 264)

The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission. (AL 85)

The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence may be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. (AL 55)

Another challenge stems from various forms of an ideology, generically called gender, that «denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman. [...] This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. [...]». It is a source of concern that some ideologies of this sort, which seek to respond to what are at times understandable aspirations, manage to assert themselves as absolute and unquestionable, even dictating how children should be raised. (AL 56)

Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today's world, where many people keep up a frenetic pace just to survive [...]. Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour. (AL 287)

opportune that families - parents and children - be offered training courses and tools to promote a generative and pro-social value perspective. At the pastoral level, it is necessary to provide families with areas for reflection and formation to educate their children in human and Christian values for respect of self and others, human life and creation.

At the public policy level, it is possible to devise means of support and incentives for pro-social behavior (encouraging environmentally sustainable consumption, encouraging solidarity actions with tax incentives).

The rights/duties of the family to educate their children according to their faith (religious freedom) need to be promoted more vigorously, as well as training parents to develop new relational skills to educate their children.

Specific actions

- Educational and awareness programs for the protection of human life and creation.
- Families' participatory projects with the educational systems of schools
- Communication and awareness programs for social responsibility/common good to be promoted through all forms of media
- Promoting, supporting and publicizing family foster care projects and regulations, national and international foster care and adoption projects for minors, "family-to-family" foster care experiences, including those for migrants and families (welcoming unaccompanied foreign minors and families to be placed in communities)

Guidelines for family-focused university research (family and education to faith and the common good)

- *Strengthening the understanding of educational processes and models within families (pro-social-responsibility education)*
- *Promoting studies and courses to accompany and support families who undertake educational processes*
- *Developing analyses and evaluations of structural, relational and value variables that foster (education towards) pro-social behavior*
- *Helping to design and implement innovative formation for family contact workers to promote family social responsibility*
- *Developing pastoral models of parental accompaniment and formation on current issues in raising children*
- *Promoting courses and adult formation on bioethics issues related to family life (procreation, end of life, smartphone use, inclusion, risky behavior...)*

2.3 Promoting Family associations: giving voice to families*

Challenges

The central role of the family in overall political choices is not to be taken for granted, also because of an objective weakness in the representation and the "voice" of families. The ability of families to become public subjects, to affect public decisions and general economic choices also passes through their aggregative strength in representative associations, capable of carrying out concrete actions of political, cultural and economic pressure (actions of consumer protection associations, political proposals, representation of specific interests and rights).

The greater or lesser effectiveness of these actions also depends on the State *governance* model: public-centric systems give little room to intermediate bodies/associations, just as they also find little room in liberalist systems with low levels of public welfare intervention and strong centralization of the *for-profit* market.

The *non-profit* sector is a key element in giving voice to and supporting the *empowerment* of families, in a circular process that can in turn provide room for their protagonism. Family associationism strengthens the ability of families to represent themselves and dialogue with institutions as a key political actor. However, there is a problem of internal fragmentation of associations among themselves, which could be avoided through the enhancement of inter-associative networks that work in synergy for common goals.

There is also a problem with spreading associationism among families, who often do not have the opportunity to come into contact with associations that could be of help to them. In this sense, the role that parishes already play in bringing families together could be reinforced.

Suggestions

A movement of aggregation among families and among associations is needed to generate representatives capable of influencing public debate and policy choices, giving voice to the needs of families.

* «The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony». (AL 202)

The parish is a place where experienced couples at the disposal of younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. (AL 223)

Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow. For example, such means include: meetings of couples living in the same neighbourhood or nearby, brief retreats for couples; talks by experts on concrete issues facing families, marriage counselling, home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires, social services dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence), programmes of spiritual growth, workshops for parents with troubled children and family meetings. (AL 229)

A special word of appreciation is due to those associations and family movements committed to serving the elderly, both spiritually and socially. (AL 48)

It is necessary to demand that the institutional political system provide a place for dialogue and confrontation for the society, by means of instruments for negotiation and coproject planning, with respect to the various legislative instruments (laws, intervention plans/projects, service design).

The Church, in all its forms (including parishes), may play a crucial role as a "social entrepreneur" (promoter of innovation), also giving support in conveying these ways of action and aggregation, promoted by the laity, from one country to another.

Specific actions

- Promoting networks between family associations to consolidate public and political representation of families
- Strengthening the role that parishes play in bringing families together
- Establishing permanent bodies for consultation and dialogue between the public, private and third sectors (family councils, co-planning of interventions, participatory evaluation)
- Proposing legislative tools and economic and tax incentives to promote services and interventions designed, implemented and managed by associations and families, according to the principle of subsidiarity

Guidelines for family-focused university research (family associations)

- *Increasing the knowledge of formal association phenomena of families (family associations, networks, modes of action and representation in public debate)*
- *Enhancing ways of giving value to the laity and families within parishes*
- *Promoting the spread of family aggregations around common values*
- *Following up on the drafting and implementation of legislative instruments and support to promote family associationism in public life*
- *Helping to design and implement training programs for Christian family association leaders*

2.4 Public discourse on the family: bearing witness and communicating beauty*

Challenges

In today's society the public discourse on families that prevails is one that highlights their vulnerabilities, negative aspects and elements that restrict individual freedom. Just as prevalent in the media is the "bad news", particularly that involving the family. In contrast, *story-telling* of good practices, positive relationships, and working models is less frequent.

The families themselves, even in their associated forms, struggle to generate public stories about the family as "good news," and sometimes they make their communications functional only to aspects of claims/performance. The opportunity to tell the story of the family as a strategic resource for the well-being of individuals and society is thus lost.

Instead, it is important **to recognize the beauty of the communion of love that is experienced in the family, in the reciprocal and free gift, in fatherhood and motherhood, in family ties**, overcoming opposing ideologies and returning to reality. Therefore, the narrative *of the beauty and joy of love in the family* should start from the bottom, from the families themselves, as a living testimony, so that they can express their own identity and interests.

Suggestions

It is necessary that there be examples in *mainstreaming* media where the stories of families can find an appropriate and competent voice, in a pro-positive way and not merely sensationalistic and emergent ones.

Intervening in public regulatory/self-regulatory codes to block (or at least protest against) stories that are perceived as hostile to generative and supportive family relationships.

Generating a family narrative network that is a direct expression of families, including enhancing the potential of new digital media (*social media*, widespread *broadcasting*, *peer-to-peer* communication), which gradually knows how to generate

* *By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God's love present in society. (AL 184)*

The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church. « [...] The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members – from toddlers to seniors – are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable» both for the Church and for society as a whole. (AL 88)

contacts, targets of the stories and authors of a new storytelling of the "family good news."

Specific action

- Promoting the formation of families on how to use social media, platforms and their content to protect their children's education
- Monitoring prevailing patterns of public representation of the family (and possible advocacy/pressure in the media)
- Training/consultation opportunities with media professionals.

Guidelines for family-focused university research (the family, the good news)

- *Enhancing the public and mediatic representation of the family and the role of the media in proposing models and values/disvalues*
- *Developing and supporting the implementation of storytelling and communication models that give voice to the family as social capital and as "good news"*
- *Helping to develop and implement training courses for media professionals and family association representatives, with a focus on digital use*
- *Developing adult/parent ethics formation proposals to educate children to listen critically to mass media and social messages about sexuality, marriage, and family*
- *Promoting parental formation on the prevention of child abuse in the digital world (cyber-sex, cyber-bullying)*

POINT 3. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

3.1 Public policies for families: why?*

Challenges

The family is a political player, an interlocutor and a social subject. This means that it is not merely an assembly of individuals, but a collective entity with its own specific identity. In this sense, public policies must place families at the center of their activities in order to have the family, and not an individual subject, as the recipient of their services. However, families are not always considered as interlocutors when it comes to defining social measures with respect to health, education, living and working conditions, which are often designed and implemented, aimed at the sole individual, outside his or her primary relationships, as the recipient. In this sense, too often families are not a priority on the political agendas of States.

The difficult situation of families in the contemporary global context requires state intervention through clear family policies that take charge of their development and well-being. This need is greater for those families facing greater and more diverse difficulties due to poverty, social isolation, and illness.

Moreover, public policies cannot be designed or implemented in a *family-friendly* way by a single central authority or administration. Instead, what is needed is a multi-level governance model that helps to consider the different levels of policy intervention, ensuring appropriate responses to the reality of people in the concrete condition in which families live.

Suggestions

Families must be considered priority social players in social policies. A family policy must be conceived as a policy with and for families. It must be based on the participation of families in the definition, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of family support policies and practices. Policy orientation should therefore have the evaluation of the impact (direct or indirect) of various measures on family welfare as a transversal reference point.

This implies considering the various relationships that make up the family as well and evaluating them in legislation. Marriage, motherhood (mother-child relationship), fatherhood (father-child relationship), parenthood (mother-father-

* [...] *This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. The family is good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected. In protecting these rights, “the Church has always held it part of her mission to promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them”, especially today, when they are given scarce attention in political agendas. Families have the right to «to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains». (AL 44)*

child relationship), inter-generational relationship (elderly parents-adult children) are all relationships that the legislative system must take into account.

Specific actions

- Carrying out research and surveys, with the participation of families, to effectively identify, analyze, and address the most pressing problems and needs of families and individual members at the territorial level
- Reviewing - and if necessary revising - existing legislation so that it effectively responds to the more complex situations of families and true needs to protect family relationships and necessities
- Strengthening and improving support for families in situations of severe economic precariousness
- Increasing the resources earmarked for family policies
- Preventing domestic violence and protecting children
- Protecting and promoting motherhood
- Building alliances with other social actors who have direct relationships with families, such as Catholic and non-profit organizations

Coursework for family-focused university research (family policies)

- *Deepening the knowledge and comparison of national welfare and family policy models*
- *Carrying out analyses and evaluations on public policies and practical actions, at the macro and micro social levels*
- *Helping to design and implement formation for policy makers to focus on families, motherhood, and intergenerational relationships*
- *Planning and implementing models and interventions for evaluating the impact of policies on the well-being of families, but also on the individual relationships that make up the family (motherhood, fatherhood, care-giving intergenerational relationships)*

3.2 Families and the economic system *

Challenges

The connection between family, common good and economic life is very strong: economy comes from *oikia-nomos*, the art of managing the family, the household, in a macro-economic sense. Common good is an expression of the dignity of the person in the social dimension. It implies the responsible pursuit of the good of others as if it were one's own. The logic of the common good is that of a system, which must be pursued by all social actors: individuals, families, businesses and the government. It imposes the pursuit of an equitable distribution of goods. It is not an end in itself, since it serves to achieve a person's ultimate goals. It cannot therefore be reduced to mere socio-economic well-being.

Instead, today's dominant principle of profit maximization is a distortion of an economy that does not put the person at the center and leads neither to individual happiness nor to the common good, just as it does not guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. What is more, very little is allocated to those who have so far been left behind: the poor, the marginalized, those who have been struggling for such a long time. Individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the market over human labor, characteristic of Capitalism, as well as a totally centralized regulation of the economy in many socio-political contexts distorts social bonds and harms family relationships.

The family is not considered as a social player in current economic systems. The responsibility of economic decision makers cannot continue to neglect the conjugal family and the original relationships that constitute it: maternity, paternity, filiation, intergenerational ties, as well as the weaker individuals who make it up, people with disabilities, children, the dependent elderly, the sick, who are forced to give up the family context in order to be cared for.

The problem of inflation afflicts the family *first and foremost*, affecting the possibilities for the education and development of the younger generation.

* Many young persons «postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, [...] the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together. (AL 40)

Furthermore, «the decline in population, due to a mentality against having children and promoted by the world politics of reproductive health, [...] but also the danger that, over time, this decline will lead to economic impoverishment and a loss of hope in the future. The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on the birth rate». [...] Consumerism may also deter people from having children, simply so they can maintain a certain freedom and life-style». (AL 42)

Families have the right to «to be able to count on an adequate family policy on the part of public authorities in the juridical, economic, social and fiscal domains». (AL 44)

It was highlighted that evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors – such as the excessive importance given to market logic – that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields». (AL 201)

Suggestions

In the economic system, it is necessary, not optional, to safeguard relationships and, first and foremost, the leading role of the family, i.e., where primary relationships necessary for a person to be able to fully realize his or her personality, identity and life project are found. For this to happen, however, it is necessary for the system to change its outlook toward two subjects:

- with regard to the individual, who is not just an individual, rather a subject in relationship with other subjects with whom he/she has strong ties, which he/she must be able to assert in the social economic system in order to see his/her relational goods safeguarded and, therefore, for the pursuit of his/her own happiness;
- towards the family, which is not a burden or a cost, rather the main engine capable of generating stability, security, as well as virtuous, supportive and complimentary approaches that can virtuously fuel the economic system.

Specific actions

- abandoning the individualistic concept of the person: each of us is a family subject in a relation. These relationships and the roles people have in the family must be taken into account by the economic system so that people can be happy and feel fulfilled; this is how the common good is built;
- recognizing the subjectivity and social priority of the family as the foundation of the common good;
- promoting working conditions and mechanisms for redistributing the balance between care and professional roles in the labor market, so that men and women do not have to abandon the family and especially the plan of having a family;
- promoting economic growth that takes into account people's basic relational and family needs.
- promoting renewed economic models also based on personal conversion and generosity toward those most in need. Show the virtuous mechanisms that are generated by an economic system that also puts the family at the center. The common good puts us all in relation. We need to work so that sharing, solidarity and communion become the principles of a market as a space for people to come together, governed by trust and transparency.

Guidelines for family-focused university research (economic system)

- *Investigating and developing economic mechanisms whose economic subject may be the family*
- *Developing economic models also based on the relational goods that the family generates and that can positively affect market mechanisms*
- *Developing economic models that assess the impact of economic and financial choices on the family and propose them as economic policy criteria*
- *Developing models to counter the effects of inflation on households*
- *Studying economic mechanisms to support businesses that foster the development of relational assets in the family*
- *Study a more equitable tax system that takes into account the number of children*
- *Studying efficient models for extending paternity leave*
- *Studying mechanisms of labor remuneration proportionate to the household in the weaker segments*
- *Studying new reforms for international economic and financial institutions so that they can promote equitable relations between rich and poor countries*

3.3 Subsidiarity: policies on the family/policies with the family *

Challenges

Both in countries where the welfare state prevails, with its lib-lab welfare model and an individualistic approach to social policies, and in the pluralist model, the family is not seen as generating primary social capital.

Instead, it generates specific relational goods that stem from fully reciprocal relationships, between sexes and generations, and inter- and intra-family solidarity.

In their relationship with the State, families can be considered as groups of individuals who are passive recipients of public action, or, on the contrary, they can be considered and treated as social subjects, holders of their own ability to act and generate relational goods. In this second interpretation, intervention takes on a logic of empowerment, insofar as it recognizes that families play a priority and irreplaceable role in the well-being of society as a whole. However, this second meaning appears lacking in many places and situations. The very relationships that are foundational to the family - marriage, motherhood, fatherhood, fraternity) are neglected in the political and economic systems of many countries. Without family well-being, there can be no collective or individual well-being.

A relational family policy, which attributes protagonism to families in their relations with the State, does not intend to disassemble the welfare intervention system of the welfare state, but rather to define a new configuration of the connections between the State, the market, the third sector and the families themselves as active players. Therefore, identifying the proper and specific areas of family relations entails respecting the family's freedoms in decision-making on issues that directly challenge them: choosing the services they can use, being able to influence how they are provided, and participating in the management of services that affect them, for example, in the areas of education, health and sexuality.

** Families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions. The negative impact on the social order is clear, as seen in the demographic crisis, in the difficulty of raising children, in a hesitancy to welcome new life, in a tendency to see older persons as a burden, and in an increase of emotional problems and outbreaks of violence. The State has the responsibility to pass laws and create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family». (AL 43)*

«One of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today's cultural reality and the powerful influence of the media».

«The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian initiation, through welcoming communities». At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a «most serious duty» and at the same time a «primary right» of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programmes in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. (AL 84)

Suggestions

Family policies must result in a set of measures that make families more capable and more autonomous in generating relational goods. Policies must activate and promote the role of families as active contributors to social and community well-being. For families to be able to do their work, they must enjoy their own rights, complementary to the individual rights of their members, without the State replacing families in aspects that affect them intimately. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the rights of citizenship for families.

Specific actions

- Clearly defining the fields and scope of the State as a provider of the common good and family welfare, in relation to other agencies that produce the common good
- Considering the non-profit sector as a partner in appropriate public policy and, as a result, supporting non-profit sector initiatives aimed at families, such as daycare centers for families with limited economic resources or for single mothers
- Supporting social initiatives that open spaces for coexistence and education, which create supportive communities with families with limited economic means
- Promoting models of social and family intervention that involve families in co-producing responses to their needs
- Promoting the establishment of family associationism
- Promoting mechanisms that allow families freedom of choice regarding the type of education they desire and consider most appropriate for their children

Guidelines for family-focused university research (subsidiarity)

- *Exploring and promoting the knowledge of the principle of subsidiarity, its place within the Social Doctrine of the Church, its generativity within social dynamics, with an interdisciplinary approach*
- *Developing analyses and assessments of the degree of subsidiarity of micro and macro public policies in the regions of the world*
- *Developing and promoting organizational and operational models of welfare based on the principle of subsidiarity*
- *Analyzing and promoting the role and specific characteristics (added value) of non-profit entities*

3.4 Family and employment*

Challenges

One of the main problems in today's scenario is job insecurity. Entering the labor market is not always enough to satisfy material needs. Many jobs are poorly paid, irregular, short-term and precarious, and people face great difficulties in covering the costs of adequate housing and their families' basic needs. This is the situation of the *working poor*. Women are predominantly in this condition, affecting families and, with greater impact, single-parent families with a female head of household.

On the other hand, the massive inflow of women entering the labor market, along with the qualitative and quantitative increase in their formal and higher education in many countries, has brought the difficulty for families to balance work and family life to the center of public debate. Women have the right to be able to develop their work and career paths without having to give up their plans for a family and motherhood.

Although co-responsibility for children is becoming increasingly important in our societies, the contribution to childcare on the part of fathers and mothers still remains highly unequal. Care still falls more on women than on men, and the need to harmonize work and family still remains a task especially for mothers. Family abandonment by many men, who move abroad in search of work, where they start a new family, constitutes an immense social problem due to the high number of women alone in the task of supporting and raising children. This is also reflected in the fragility of male-female unions and in particular the legal institution of marriage.

** Families, in particular, suffer from problems related to work, where young people have few possibilities and job offers are very selective and insecure. Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day». (AL 44)*

There are those who believe that many of today's problems have arisen because of feminine emancipation. This argument, however, is not valid, «it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism». The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women. (AL 54)

Men «play an equally decisive role in family life, particularly with regard to the protection and support of their wives and children. (AL 55)

«In our day, the problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father so much as his absence, his not being there. Fathers are often so caught up in themselves and their work, and at times in their own self-fulfilment, that they neglect their families. They leave the little ones and the young to themselves». (AL 176)

Suggestions

Social protection measures must take into consideration the precariousness of work that directly affects the welfare of families: it is not only a matter of improving wages, but also the conditions under which jobs are performed.

The *work-life balance* policies should address the problems of inequality between men and women, both within families, by promoting co-responsibility between fathers and mothers, as well as in the labor market, by preventing motherhood from penalizing women's professional development.

When speaking about harmonization between work and family, reference should be made to all those who need care (children, the elderly, the disabled, the sick). In this sense, it is not the family that must adapt to the characteristics of the production process, and technological progress must increase the family's range of freedom and autonomy.

Businesses, too, are therefore called upon to rethink their models from a more family-friendly perspective that supports families, motherhood and fatherhood. **Businesses have a social responsibility (corporate family accountability) to families, to whom they owe appropriate responses.**

Specific actions

- Promoting decent, non-precarious work, with special attention to young people
- Implementing family policies that facilitate family-work harmonization, making work time and responsibilities toward children and toward married and family life compatible
- Creating public policies with a family perspective that promote sharing of care-giving responsibilities, to strengthen family networks and intergenerational solidarity
- Promoting a work culture in business organizations that is mindful of, respects, and promotes workers' family relationships
- Implementing public and community services that strengthen social support for caregiving tasks and responsibilities. For example, daycare centers, childcare education centers or summer camps for childcare
- Promoting consciousness-raising courses for fathers on co-responsibility in care and education
- Promoting specific attention to prevent discrimination against ethnic and social minority families, as well as minors.

***Guidelines for family-focused university research
(family and work)***

- *Studying and promoting a legislative framework that can generate harmonization between family and work that is functional to families' development tasks*
- *Analyzing and evaluating the quality, type and outreach of services that facilitate work-life harmonization*
- *Promoting family-friendly business organizational models*
- *Developing analyses and assessments of gender gap situations, whether women/mothers are penalized in the work environment*
- *Promoting anti-discrimination studies and models targeted toward ethnic minorities*
- *Gathering and promoting the implementation of best practices at all levels*

3.5 Family and poverty*

Challenges

Economic inequality is one of the structural features of contemporary global society. Since the pandemic, we live in more unequal societies in which the distribution of wealth is unequal. The gap between rich and poor is increasing more and more and can be found at different levels of society, both between nations and within individual territories.

Economic inequality as well as in accessing basic resources and services are found at all levels of the social ladder, and to the extent that we go down that ladder, people's education, nutrition, and health worsen. The social and political implications are significant.

Families who live in poverty develop domestic conflicts due to problems with a scarcity of material resources and inability to access basic services (water, food, internet connection, educational services). There is a direct relationship between material shortages and marital problems. Similarly, many families fail to have the desired number of children. This generates great frustration because their living conditions do not allow them to match social expectations of care and nutrition.

A specific aspect of poverty that affects children and young people with particular intensity is educational poverty. The situation of poverty and exclusion from which families suffer more and more is hitting school-aged children the hardest. Educational poverty refers to the inability to learn and develop under optimal conditions. Quality, inclusive and equitably accessible education is the key to combating poverty and inequality.

On the other hand, many elderly people, members of separated families, migrants and unemployed youths suffer from isolation and social exclusion, and fail to promote their family project (relational poverty and loneliness).

A large percentage of immigrant families also experience a situation of poverty and risk of social exclusion. In the case of immigrant and single-parent families, situations of greater vulnerability are encountered both in the country of origin and in the country of arrival.

* *“There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end up crushing families [...] “one symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness” (AL 43),*

At times families suffer terribly when, faced with the illness of a loved one, they lack access to adequate health care, or struggle to find dignified employment. «Economic constraints prohibit a family’s access to education, cultural activities and involvement in the life of society. In many ways, the present-day economic situation is keeping people from participating in society». (AL 44)

Suggestions

In order to combat poverty, it is necessary to plan and implement processes of action that go beyond the economic sphere and focus on intervention in other areas such as nutrition, health and education. Repairing the material conditions of families also leads to improved social and family relations.

Specific actions

- Promoting the creation of formal and stable employment, especially for women
- Facilitating access to comprehensive health and adequate nutrition for all, especially children
- Supporting initiatives by associations and foundations to promote concrete measures on food security, such as promoting sustainable forms of agriculture
- Creating public infrastructures and services in rural and remote areas to ensure services, access to basic goods, and development
- Promoting active participation and formation of families, especially in disadvantaged areas, to make and implement the best decisions for their own health and the welfare of their children
- Promoting prevention services and accompaniment of families for risky behavior (alcohol, drugs, smoking, anti-social behavior, self-injury...)
- Promoting motherhood economically
- Implementing social policies that have as their explicit goal combating poverty in general and educational poverty
- Analyzing and supporting community initiatives already underway aimed at addressing school-based needs resulting from family poverty
- Supporting micro-entrepreneurship initiatives, economic activities managed at the micro-social level with the aim of producing sufficient income for family support, including through a widespread revitalization of micro-social credit

***Guidelines for family-focused university research
(family and poverty)***

- *Broadening the notion of poverty in academic studies to include new forms of poverty related to lack of education, health, relational and emotional skills*
- *Deepening the knowledge on the spread of poverty and its family dimension*
- *Studying ways to provide economic and social support for motherhood*
- *Developing analyses and assessments of the multidimensional nature of poverty*
- *Training pastoral agents to assist and accompany families affected by problems related to various forms of poverty*
- *Analyzing the phenomena of social exclusion and marginalization and their intertwining with economic poverty*
- *Analyzing models of intervention (economic support, services, fiscal) and testing their impact on family resilience*

POINT 4. A CHALLENGE FOR ALL

The *Family Global Compact* is a project that primarily challenges Research Centers dedicated to the family within Catholic Universities and/or inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church, with the aim of triggering and promoting adequate and up-to-date insights concerning the anthropological, juridical, economic and social relevance of the family, and providing trained human resources (the new generations of university students) and support material for the Church's evangelization work. There is an urgent need for more adequate formation on family and life issues for lay people who are engaged in proclaiming the beauty of marriage, family and human life. There is an urgent need for interdisciplinary work of empirical and theoretical research, training courses on new issues and with new methodologies of investigation, taking into account new variants and new factors that systematically affect the unhinging and fragility of marriage, family and are the cause of an attitude of discarding human lives, at every stage of existence.

In various ways this project also challenges all the social actors to whom the *Family Global Compact* will be able to offer arguments and reflections based on rigorous empirical evidence, investigated and interpreted within an explicit anthropological perspective, relational and personalistic in nature, firmly inscribed in the Social Doctrine of the Church.

4.1 A commitment for universities

The *Family Global Compact* is both an expression and a task of a network of structured research centers on the family, which, in a multidisciplinary perspective, internally develop specific and systematic investigative activities in the legal, anthropological-philosophical, sociological, bioethical and moral fields with particular attention to the social and relational condition of families and public policies. These Centers operate in universities that are either direct expressions of the Church community worldwide, or otherwise academic institutions that make explicit reference to the Social Doctrine of the Church.

There is hope that research centers dealing with economics will also extend specific attention to the family, with lines of research and courses of study determined for that purpose.

First and foremost, the *Family Global Compact* calls on these entities to form and strengthen themselves as an international network of family research centers (also as a "network of networks," enhancing existing networks), including through formal commitments to collaboration and dialogue. From here what appears to be a priority is:

- promoting an interdisciplinary approach. To this end, it is important to address the theme of family not only on single projects, but especially on broad "lines of research" that are stable over time, precisely because a line of research can be approached from different disciplinary viewpoints;

- supporting the network through the promotion of itineraries including conferences, exchange and shared research projects among multiple partners/countries;
- initiating and sustaining shared communication, including digital communication among the centers, to promote the circulation of news and best practices, study models and reflections on family and life issues;
- in addition to the "diagnostic" and proposal part, enhancing and communicating the experiences and interventions to support and promote families encountered in the territories, with the aim of verifying whether they are "good practices," measurable and repeatable in other contexts.
- dedicating themselves to the formation of family pastoral workers so that they know how to manage services to meet the needs of families in various areas (relational aspects of the couple, openness to life, inter-generational relationships, problems of abuse and violence, education, poverty, employment, bioethics training of families...)
- dedicating oneself to the training of those professional groups that can act concretely to promote marriage and family in the public sphere (politicians, lawyers, teachers, social workers, entrepreneurs, volunteerism)

This international networking effort may also foster the involvement of additional university partners to collaborate in pursuing the commitments of this *Family Global Compact*.

Finally, and more specifically, the shared commitment of the university world dealing with the family may develop on different paths of research and study by:

- Studying family and social relationships and describing their social generativity
- Assessing the impact of public policies on families
- Accompanying/fostering innovation in intervention models "with" families
- Setting up structured and systematic research on the reality of families while keeping a clear strategy for reflection, research and construction of shared and public thinking on marriage, family and the promotion of human life.
- Envisioning individuals to connect universities and departments dealing with family and human life with the local and national churches to develop pastoral projects in synergy, benefitting from the contributions of experts

It is indeed crucial that the links and synergy with the Church, in particular with family ministry, be created or strengthened. The university's outlook is necessarily scientific – diagnostic and therapeutic – and interdisciplinary, but it is essential to keep its perspective on the reality of the territory, in dialogue with the concrete actions of family pastoral care and the local Church in order to respond to the needs that the latter will manage to periodically highlight⁸. Catholic universities will thus be able to implement that **function of service** that is their duty in order to support

⁸ Cf., in particular, the rich and innovative testimonies of the families, the protagonists who animated the Tenth World Meeting of Families (Rome, June 22-26, 2022), significantly entitled "*Family love: a vocation and a path to holiness*."

the presence and voice of the Social Doctrine of the Church in the public sphere and in the political-legislative commitment in various countries to protect marriage, the family and human life.

4.2 A challenge for other social players

The university community's commitment to research and scientifically investigate further on the family, that is inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church, thus finds in the *Family Global Compact* a tool to relaunch and give renewed responsibility at the service of other social players as well. In the new scenarios offered by university research they can find new operational challenges for enhancing the family as a resource.

Each social player faces distinct problems and tasks depending on his or her own internal dynamics and how families interact with them. The challenge is to identify ways in which each social player can become more *family-friendly* and *make his/her contribution so that families are made more aware of their driving role within society*.

Politics

The rules of social living obviously play a decisive role in making families' lives more or less easy. Particularly today, the priorities seem to be to:

- Attributing importance and priority to stable households as a resource of freedom, social cohesion and integral development of individuals
- Reclaiming the social and legal value of marriage as a fundamental institution for social cohesion, order and social peace
- Recognizing and support families' openness to life, birth and the protection of life, from conception to natural death, at every stage of life
- Supporting and promoting the active role of families in every field so as not to crystalize forms of welfarism that do not solve any fragilities
- Counteracting structural (economic and social) inequality at the international level, protecting the most vulnerable
- Governing levels of public intervention with suitable *family-friendly* harmonious policies (national, regional, local/community development policies)

Businesses/world of work

Economic activities, the business world, work experience, and the generation and distribution of wealth are all essential elements of human action, social organization, and family life. Much can be done in this area to become increasingly *family-friendly*. In particular:

- Recognizing, enhancing and supporting the family as an economic player and system (where economic choices, consumption, savings, investments are

- made), also by means of financial education
- Building organizational models capable of supporting family tasks with appropriate balance between work and life
- Activating family social responsibility on behalf of businesses

The non-profit sector

In the *non-profit* sector, the family is both an active player, including in its associative forms, and a recipient of interventions, support, and aid. Therefore, the *non-profit* sector should:

- Consider the family (including those who are vulnerable) as an active partner and interlocutor, not as a passive subject to be assisted (*empowerment*): overcoming the merely welfarist perspective, promoting family relationships as a social asset
- Enhance the specific features of family associationism: associating families, giving voice and representation: «families unite with other families to do their best and to become stronger as families in society»
- Promote in the public arena subsidiarity and plural welfare that is also inclusive of families

Cultural system/mass media

The impact of the cultural and communication systems on family relationships and their daily lives is certainly significant, both positively and negatively. In general, in this area of social life, it is necessary to first:

- Abandon the catastrophic scandalistic model (without concealing critical issues)
- Promote the "good news"
- Give space/tools/values to storytelling produced by families. Make room for relevant themes from the point of view of the values involved in enhancing family relationships: motherhood, fatherhood, fraternity, spouse, protection of human life and frailty.

The subject - and not the object - of the Family Global Compact are the families of the entire world who, made aware of their driving-role within civil society, the economy, law and culture through the synergistic and shared action between the academic world and other social players, must once again feel challenged by Pope Francis, just as he addressed them on the occasion of the Tenth World Meeting of Families:

*Dear families,
I invite you to continue your journey
by listening to the Father who calls you:
you who are further along, be companions on the journey for others.
You who are lost because of difficulties,
do not be overcome by sadness,
trust the Love God has placed in you,
plead daily with the Spirit to revive it.
Announce with joy the beauty of being family!
Announce to children and young people the grace of Christian
marriage.
Give hope to those who have none
Act as if everything depends on you,
knowing that everything must be entrusted to God.
Be you who "sew" the fabric of society and of a synodal Church,
creating relationships, multiplying love and life.
Be a sign of the living Christ,
do not be afraid of what the Lord asks of you
nor be generous with Him.
Open yourselves to Christ, listen to Him in the silence of prayer.
Accompany those who are most fragile,
take charge of those who are alone, refugees, abandoned.
Be the seed of a more fraternal world!
Be families with big hearts!
Be the welcoming face of the Church!
And please pray, always pray!
May Mary, our Mother, come to your aid when there is no more wine,
be a companion in the time of silence and trial,
help you to walk together with her Risen Son.*



FAMILY
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COMPACT



IN COLLABORAZIONE CON

