

12. Forming Communities of Families

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A community united by spiritual bonds is a form of life and activity of the Church. This is the image of the Church's primitive community: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. [...]. All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Ac 2:42.44). Every Christian community must live in Christ, listen to the Word of God, pray around the Eucharist, and live in communion, that is, in the unity of hearts and minds and sharing their possessions. It should also live in communion with the universal Church and its own local Church (RMi 51).

The task of promoting, forming, and developing Christian communities is primordial because it expresses fidelity to the fundamental dynamism of the Kingdom of God, which is a community. This corresponds with the mission of Christ, who came "to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (Jn 11:52). Now, this task is more urgent than ever.⁴¹⁹ Spreading the spirituality of communion in the Church among families and communities is the challenge that imposes itself today (cf. NMI 43.46).

The Catholic lay sodalities⁴²⁰ are a great chance to renew the pastoral care of the family in contemporary society and to renew the parish community because they make it possible to transform the traditional model of the parish into a vibrant community of communities (PZNE 43).⁴²¹ Pope Francis considers the parish a family of families, in which small communities, movements, and ecclesial associations harmoniously participate (AL 202). Associations are, moreover, a place of fruitful catechesis (GDC 264), where Christian life is made possible and supported. Vatican II emphasized the importance of fostering communities, as bases for the formation and evangelization of church

⁴¹⁹ Cf. M. Metzger, *Que ton règne vienne. Jalons pour une spiritualité pastorale, à l'intention des laïcs engagés dans des tâches ecclésiales*, Paris, 1999, 104.

⁴²⁰ Alongside the fundamental ecclesial communities, the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* distinguishes groups, movements, associations, and religious communities, all referred to by the collective term "sodalities" (ChL 29). It seems that the best definition of family associations, reflecting their origins, is the term "communities of families." B. Mierzwiński, "«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,» AK 87:1995, no. 516, 229.

⁴²¹ Cf. B. Drożdż, "Zrzeszenia religijne miejscem urzeczywistniania się Kościoła," in: R. Kamiński (ed.), *Teologia pastoralna*, vol. 1, 159, 170; R. Kamiński, *Duszpasterstwo w społeczeństwie pluralistycznym*, Lublin, 1997, 102; A. Żądło, *Parafia w trzecim tysiącleciu*, Kielce, 1999, 63–73.

communities (cf. RMi 51).⁴²² There, Catholic lay people can easily discover and realize their vocation and mission.⁴²³

Concern for the formation and development of family communities, groups, and movements is an important task for the pastoral care of families (FC 72) and the Church's response to today's challenges, including pastoral problems such as the anonymity in big parishes, individualization, alienation, loneliness, and helplessness. The formation and the development of communities also counteract the disappearance of the community spirit caused by authoritarianism and the over-institutionalization and bureaucratization of church life.⁴²⁴

Movements and families of families carry out their own, approved formation programs. Their realization helps them to discover the divine plan for marriage and the family, to study the conjugal and familial spirituality, and to accomplish the tasks that the conjugal and parental vocations entail. Formed members of the family communities undertake apostolic, evangelical, and catechetical activities with other spouses, families, and church communities.

Who Should Create a Family Community?

Although family communities have already been established in the Church for some time, the climate for their development persists. The pastoral care of families stands before the task of setting up new family communities, coordinating work in the existing ones, showing the possibility of greater involvement of families, as well as developing cooperation between family communities and the hierarchy of the church.⁴²⁵

The practical formation of the family communities, despite its importance, faces some difficulties. Among the laity, passivity, a lack of initiative, the fear of engagement, and pressure coming from outside the ecclesial environment appear.⁴²⁶ There may be fears of breaching the essential conjugal intimacy,

⁴²² S.B. Clark, *Budowanie wspólnot chrześcijańskich. Strategia odnowy Kościoła*, Wrocław – Kraków, 1994, 39.

⁴²³ See ChL 9-10, 15-17; cf. H.J. Klauck, *Wczesnochrześcijańska wspólnota kościelna*, Kraków, 1995, 9-33; P.Y. Cho, *Grupy domowe a rozwój Kościoła*, Warsaw, 1992, 31-54.

⁴²⁴ Cf. R. Kamiński, *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła w teorii i praktyce pastoralnej*, Lublin, 2007, 163-6.

⁴²⁵ W. Śmigiel, "Zrzeszenia rodzin katolickich w Polsce," RPK 2010, vol. 2 (57), fasc. 6, 68.

⁴²⁶ These attitudes reveal the lethargy of the laity (the "sleeping giant") in the Church, and it is worth noting this state is also the result of limitation of the Catholic laity's action by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Cf. W. Śmigiel, *Uczestnictwo wiernych świeckich w budowaniu Kościoła-Wspólnoty*, 109.

because of the obligation to share, as well as misunderstandings about the notion of the perfection of the Christian spouse.⁴²⁷ Members of movements and communities often have the impression that the pastors do not understand their charism, that it is difficult to get a priest to assist them, and that pastors are indifferent or even have prejudices towards the community and embarrassing expectations.⁴²⁸ All of this frequently leads to discouragement. Although some of the clergy are distrustful and distance themselves from the members of lay movements and communities,⁴²⁹ there are pastors also who have difficulty in serving of communities of adults, married couples, and families.

These difficulties can be dealt with problematically by asking: Who should take the initiative for creating family communities? Should clergy or lay leaders do this? Are both well prepared? How can the current difficulties in creating and developing communities be overcome?

Both the clergy and the laity have the right and duty to participate in the apostolate and in building up the Church. In practice, family communities and associations are formed on the initiative of the families themselves and by representatives of the hierarchy.⁴³⁰ However, the formation of ecclesial communities primarily pertains to the Church's pastors. Vatican II includes the duty to form authentic Christian communities among the responsibilities of the pastors' office (cf. PO 6).⁴³¹ Bishops and priests should cooperate fraternally with the laity and surround themselves with lay people who can assist them in their apostolic work (AA 25).⁴³² Discovering God's plan for marriage and family is one of the basic tasks of the proclamation of Christ's message (PZNE 51). Pastors should strive to ensure that as many young couples as possible find their places in family communities, movements, and associations

⁴²⁷ B. Mierzwiński, "«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,” 231–2.

⁴²⁸ Cf. R. Bieleń, *Duszpasterstwo rodzin we współczesnej Polsce*, 281.

⁴²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*; B. Mierzwiński, "«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,” 231–2.

⁴³⁰ W. Śmigiel, *Uczestnictwo wiernych świeckich w budowaniu Kościoła-Wspólnoty*, 217.

⁴³¹ Cf. PPLPC 64–65.

⁴³² The Council's decree on the apostolate of the laity indicates specific tasks for priests engaged in the various forms of secular apostolate: "Always adhering faithfully to the spirit and teaching of the Church, they should promote proper relations between laity and hierarchy. They should devote themselves to nourishing the spiritual life and an apostolic attitude in the Catholic societies entrusted to them; they should contribute their wise counsel to the apostolic activity of these associations and promote their undertakings. Through continuous dialogue with the laity, these priests should carefully investigate which forms make apostolic activity more fruitful. They should promote the spirit of unity within the association as well as between it and others" (AA 25).

(cf. PŻMR 44). Pastors and their co-workers should inspire the formation of family communities within the parish.⁴³³

The low degree of development of communities of adults, spouses, and families, and the difficulty of serving these communities are due to the fact that priests are not sufficiently prepared to work with them. This situation should be changed firstly by preparing the candidates for the priesthood and priests for the pastoral care of the families.⁴³⁴ The Congregation for Catholic Education indicates the need and the way to prepare future priests to help spouses in their family's "domestic church."⁴³⁵

In pastoral care, a change of strategy seems necessary; the attitude of defensive anticipation should be abandoned in favor of more offensive care, by going out to meet the people in need of help.⁴³⁶ The method used by the pastor in the formation of family communities and to support their development should be based on discreet inspiration and dialogue with the faithful (AA 25).⁴³⁷

The presence of a priest in existing family communities plays a significant role.⁴³⁸ Priests have the task of surrounding the community with pastoral care, especially by nourishing them with the Word and celebrating the Eucharist.⁴³⁹ The priest's presence at community meetings ensures its ecclesiality. The priest, in communion with the clergy of the local church, ensures the family community's communion with the entire Church. He is the guarantor of healthy learning, a life of grace, the communication with the hierarchy, and a sign for the spouses, as well as their shepherd and father.⁴⁴⁰ The priest should also serve in the family community as confidant, spiritual director of the spouses, and moderator.⁴⁴¹

Christian spouses are also agents of the apostolate for married couples and families. Christian spouses and parents carry out the ministry of evangelization and catechetical ministry, in the family as well as in the parish and the diocesan community, as part of the Church's mission (cf. FC 53). The

⁴³³ B. Mierzwiński, "«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,” 232.

⁴³⁴ Cf. AA 25; ChI. 61.

⁴³⁵ Cf. FSMF 8, 14, 31, 35-36, 54, 64-65.

⁴³⁶ R. Hajduk, *Apologetyka pastoralna*, 90-91; cf. F.X. Kaufmann – J.B. Metz, *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Freiburg, 1987, 104-5.

⁴³⁷ Cf. R. Kamiński, *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła*, 169.

⁴³⁸ It is a sin of negligence to underestimate or impede the formation of associations by priests. The ecclesiology of associations implies their constant presence and ministry. PDV 16; W. Śmigiel, *Uczestnictwo wiernych świeckich w budowaniu Kościoła-Wspólnoty*, 224.

⁴³⁹ B. Mierzwiński, "«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,” 232.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. M. Kaszowski, *Postęga kapłana w stowarzyszeniach rodzin*, 22-6.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 27-38.

sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist are the source of the faith life and strengthen the lay faithful in their testimony. The marriage sacrament expresses their apostolic vocation and action, making them missionaries of love and life (FC 54).⁴⁴² By virtue of the sacramental grace of marriage, the Christian spouses receive a special apostolate in the field of family life, both in their own family and for others (FC 71). If the spouses lead a life fully in harmony with the Gospel and are models of Christian life, then they render a priceless witness to Christ, who accompanies and supports them through his Spirit (cf. AA 11; EE 91). The faithful and the family animated by love radiate beyond themselves and transform their environment in the spirit of the Gospel.⁴⁴³

The Council notes that spouses will be more likely to attain their apostolic goals together (cf. AA 11). Family associations, movements, and communities prepare lay people for the apostolate and effectively guide them (cf. AA 18). Catholic associations and movements are an indispensable means of apostolic formation of the laity (PVSM 15; cf. AA 28-32). Family movements and associations can carry out apostolic activities for the development of family communities, but they should do this in the same way they collaborate with pastors and under their guidance (cf. AA 24; EN 58). These activities should be coordinated in the parish. Now, this is possible when the community leaders are core members of the parish council.⁴⁴⁴

The Creation of Family Communities and Parish Ministry

The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* indicates that “every parochial community, must become more vividly aware of the grace and responsibility that it receives from the Lord in order that it may promote the pastoral care of the family” (FC 70). The pastoral ministry of the family, in the largest sense, generally cares for married couples and the family. It allows making family pastoral ministry into the first and most important path of pastoral ministry (cf. FSMF 12; GS 2) and directs it to all families.⁴⁴⁵ At the same time, the family communities must be developed and cared for, because they are the chance for the Church as well as for the married couples themselves (cf. SPMR 82).

⁴⁴² W. Przygoda, “Laikat i formy apostołstwa świeckich,” in: *Teologia pastoralna*, vol. 1, 397.

⁴⁴³ B. Mierzwiński, “«Wspólnoty rodzin – znakiem czasu»,” 238.

⁴⁴⁴ R. Kamiński, *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła*, 212–3.

⁴⁴⁵ SPMR 82.

New communities of married couples and families should be created and supported through parish ministry, and this requires the engagement of the pastors. The *Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family*, concerned about the presence of God's Word in the life of the family, urges all priests to refer to themes related to conjugal and family life in their Sunday homilies. It also recommends "making sure that the preachers speak about themes of conjugal and family spirituality in a broader sense not only during retreats for certain groups" (DDR 52). It is worth inviting members of movements and family communities to retreats so that they can share their testimony of life and meet interested spouses. These activities, addressed to all families, are an opportunity to proclaim God's plan for marriage and the family (PŻMR 2). At the same time, they can be catalyzers for the spouses who are in search of a deepened family formation.

The activities in the ordinary pastoral care for the family include meetings with the parents on the occasion of their children's Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation, as well as formation meetings for the parents of altar boys, choir members, and others (DDR 6.52).⁴⁴⁶ Adult catechesis⁴⁴⁷ in the parish—especially the catechesis for the young married couples and families—also provides the opportunity to create family communities.⁴⁴⁸ Experience confirms that wherever adult catechesis is conducted, large numbers of spouses and parents participate. After listening to them, some participants are interested in joining the community.

Organizing celebrations for marriage anniversaries in the parish—a common pastoral practice in our time—including sending invitations to certain groups of spouses (according to the length of their marriage, for example, 5, 10, 15, or 20 years) is a great opportunity for creating family communities. After the general meetings, the participants are invited to meet with animators of the communities, who share their testimonies of life and present the advantages and obligations connected with belonging to a movement or community. Then, the couples who are interested enter into the next stages of cooperation.

Engaged couples should already be invited to join a family community during their immediate preparation for marriage, especially at the retreat and during days of recollection (cf. DDR 27).⁴⁴⁹ The accompaniment by married couples, before and then also after the wedding, seems even more effective.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. R. Kamiński, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. P. Skiba, *Katecheza ewangelizacyjna w nowych ruchach i wspólnotach kościelnych. Studium katechetyczne wybranych ruchów i wspólnot kościelnych*, Lublin, 2006, 92.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. FC 69; EE 92; FSMF 50.

⁴⁴⁹ R. Kamiński, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. AL 207, 209, 217.

Parish retreats for families and especially for young married couples are also greatly appreciated (cf. PZMR 45). Likewise, retreats for engaged and married couples can be linked to community ministry. Practice confirms that these forms are better received by those who as children and adolescents participated in the formation of different movements and communities, took part in retreats, and as adults and spouses have not yet found their ecclesial community.

Due to the contemporary problems of the individualization of life, anonymity in big cities, loneliness in the social and spiritual sphere, pastoral visits are of great importance. It is also necessary to ensure that the visits are made more than just once a year and not reduced to short, formal encounters. The pastor's attitude towards the parishioners must be characterized by its openness and focused on the direct apostolic presence among the faithful in various life situations. This can help to increase trust for the Church, overcome the distance between the faithful and the priest, awaken the spirit of unity, and motivate engagement in the community.⁴⁵¹ The pastoral visits can be used for establishing contacts with the faithful, especially with the spouses who would like to develop their spiritual life and learn about the conjugal spirituality. Furthermore, the priest should invite the spouses to participate in retreats for married couples, indicate the movements and communities, and propose dates for retreats. At the end of the pastoral visit, the priest can plan a special visit to the spouses, suggesting that they join the family community, answer their questions, eliminate any doubts or fears. During the visit, he may also suggest that they come to meet with a few invited families and a facilitating couple who are creating a new community.

It should be emphasized that "no Christian community, however, is built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist; from this, therefore, all education to the spirit of community must take its origin" (PO 6). The Church receives her life from the Eucharist and is built up by it (cf. EdE 1; 21-25). The Eucharist is the principal cause of the Church and the source of the ecclesial communion in every community (cf. SCa 14-15). Celebrating Eucharist and adoring the Blessed Sacrament with the aim of reviving the spirit in the parish and establishing family communities sparks the action of the Holy Spirit, who stimulates the hearts of the faithful. All the initiatives intended to create communities should be connected with the celebration of Eucharist for these intentions, and the faithful should be encouraged participate in it. The intercessory prayer of the priests (cf. Eph 1:16-18; Col 1:9; Ph 1:4-6) and of the parish community as well as of the already existing communities and families (cf. Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:2-3) is very important.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. R. Hajduk, *Apologetyka pastoralna*, 92-5.

The Apostolate of Family Communities

The ecclesial movements and communities with increasing frequency offer adults catechetical courses focused on spiritual life. They have an evangelistic character and are often combined with the testimonies of members of the movement. The Neocatechumenal Way, the Charismatic Movement, the Chemin Neuf Community, and family movements such as the Domestic Church and Encounters of Married Couples, stand out in this area. There is notable interest in catechesis for adults, spouses, and parents directed by members of ecclesial movements and communities. They make it possible for the participants to continue their formation and for spouses to become members of the movement or community.

Family communities evangelize and provide formation at retreats during vacation time and winter holidays. This is a basic form of action for spouses who want to learn about conjugal spirituality and the community's principles. The participation of even a few of a parish's couples in a formation retreat is an opportunity for creating a new family community, which may also include couples who were not at the retreat. The Domestic Church Movement proposes a concrete path, composed of an initial meeting and subsequent encounters of the newly formed community with a priest. It is best for the priest interested in family issues to take part in the formation retreats for priests.⁴⁵² It sometimes happens that neither the couples nor the parish priests have been to a retreat but want to create a family community. In that case, the interested couples are invited to join the community and its formed spouses lead the first meeting.⁴⁵³

Movements also co-direct parishes retreats. A priest engaged in a family movement comes to the parish with a group of facilitators. The priest gives the talks to all parishioners, and then groups of married couples can meet facilitating couples in parish or school rooms. Often, after this kind of retreat, family communities are created in the parish.

Invitations are also addressed to couples by members of movements or communities who give "Sunday testimonies" in parishes. They share their stories after the Masses, and then, on the same day, those interested in getting to know the community better are invited to a meeting with them that may lead to other encounter and to the creation of a new community.

⁴⁵² Domowy Kościół, *Krąg rodzinny ruchu Domowy Kościół. Podręcznik pierwszego roku pracy*, 2nd edition, 5–6.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6; cf. Domowy Kościół, "List miesięczny do wspólnot rodzinnych Ruchu Światło-Życie," no. 17. *Diakonia par animatorskich*, XII 1978, 11–19.

There is a specific procedure for the formation of new Teams of Our Lady. In each area, the movement carefully chooses married couples to accompany the teams being formed. Piloting couples place high demands on the testimony of strong faith inspired by prayer, discretion, service, and humility. They play an informative and managerial role while helping married couples to discern whether this is the most appropriate path of spiritual development for them.⁴⁵⁴ Each team should have a priest who acts as a guide and spiritual advisor. He also proclaims the Word of God, administers the sacraments, and guarantees unity with the Church. However, he is not the team's leader and must stay on the back line. He is chosen by the team and must then be approved by the ecclesiastical superiors. The team has the right to change the spiritual advisor for the sake of its spiritual development.⁴⁵⁵

The spouses' living witness is always important and, in difficult conditions of evangelization, it constitutes the most important form of apostolic impact. It requires and flows from a close relationship between the spouses and Christ. According to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Christ is the source and origin of the Church's apostolate, and hence the fruitfulness of the laity's apostolate depends on their vital union with Christ (AA 4).

13. Marriage and Family Counseling

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In recent decades, the need for marriage and family has notably grown. The faithful are increasingly seeking help from competent clergymen and lay people.⁴⁵⁶ Counseling is a supportive personal contact, between a person looking for help and a counselor who provides assistance, in the context of the relationship created with that aim.⁴⁵⁷ It consists of giving encouragement and guidance to persons in problematic situations and facing difficult decisions. It can stimulate personal growth and development, help to deal with personal problems, conflicts, by controlling emotions better and abandoning harmful patterns of life. Counselors can help spouses and family members to solve

⁴⁵⁴ If a married couple is only looking for group therapy or psychological support, the guiding couple should be able to explain this and indicate that married couples who belong to the teams should seek Christ and His will for them., S. Wawrzyszkiewicz, *Małżeństwo drogą świętości*, 34.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40–5.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. G.R. Collins, *Christian Accompaniment*, Warsaw, 2005, 25–7.

⁴⁵⁷ W. Szewczyk, "Poradnictwo małżeńskie i rodzinne," SMR 343.