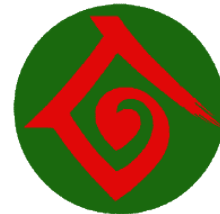


United Nations Day of Families – 15 May



Theme: "Mothers and Families: Challenges in a Changing World"

This week we have celebrated Mother's Day. Franciscan men and women are united in the vision and partnership of St. Francis and St. Clare; bringing a unique charism to their ministry in the care of all creation. Each day Franciscans throughout the world are inspired to bring dignity and love back into the lives of women who are discriminated against, abused, forgotten and down-trodden.

While individuals are challenged, structures and social institutions must be changed in order to create conditions where women are equally valued and allowed to exercise their gifts and skills in social, political and economic life.

When Francis wrote the message that is known as *The Form of Life Given to St. Clare and her Sisters*, he stated: *"I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as I have for the."* (Form of Life, 2, as translated by Regis Armstrong in Francis and Clare: The Complete Works).

This statement is amazing coming from a man who lived in an era in which the struggle of women for equality was not recognized and the role reserved to a woman, as her only natural goal, was wife and mother. Nonetheless, Francis was clearly impressed by the strength of women like Clare and her companions. Perhaps it is her actions that encouraged him to read the signs of his time differently.

From Franciscans International:

The United Nations has never attempted to define the "family", perhaps this is too difficult. However, it is universally recognized that the family is the basic unit of society. During the International Year of the Family in 1994 the United Nations promoted efforts to strengthen family life while recognizing that families were changing.

Issues of education, culture, peace, and globalization were all seen as challenges to the future of families. Links were made between families and social development. We celebrated families from every culture with their different customs and urged the creation of a peaceful environment, essential for them to flourish.

Extended families, multigenerational families, and single mothers were all recognized and analysed. The effect of crime with the incarceration of adults and the

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custodial detention of younger persons were all dealt with during the Year. Migration, and its insidious impact on the structure of the family, was touched upon. The plight of the elderly was yet another issue.

There are many events that impact on families today. Continual wars separate and cause hurt to the family, both through death and economic hardship. Globalization has taken many forms and brought challenges and opportunities to families. At the same time the loss of jobs, migration for new opportunities, and the corporatisation of the world been unfavorable to the development of families.

There certainly have been positive steps forward. Often we need global answers even for national and local situations. Special emphasis can also be placed on a type of spirituality that lends cohesiveness to family life.

What can Franciscans do?

Franciscans live and work at the grass roots level and continue to live and work in the midst of family issues for a very long time. In this context, we should remember the Secular Franciscans, who are by far the largest group within the Franciscan family, are in the main family people (many are married and raise families). A number of Friars are associated with the Secular Franciscans as their Spiritual Assistants. You might like to meet with them and others in your local area and ministries to share family issues, such as the meaning of fatherhood, the different types of families, and religious aspects.

Creating an awareness of other people's problems – locally, nationally, and globally – and joining together to work on just a single issue at all three levels would undoubtedly contribute to the betterment of the world.

The blessing attributed to Clare:

***May the Lord be with you always
and may you be with the Lord, always
and in every place.***

Other significant days:

20 May – Independence Day for Timor Leste

21 May – World Day of Cultural Diversity

Source: Adapted from Mary Theresa Plante FMM – a volunteer UN representative of Franciscans International in New York since the founding of the office.

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