

The Gift of CFM to Families

Peter and Jane Buchbauer

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As Jane and Paul have told you, our methodology derives from the thinking of the great Cardinal Cardijn. But more than that comes to us from Cardijn. He was motivated to change the world around him in line with the great social teachings of the Church. He motivated others – students and workers, and ultimately families, to do the same. He was a prophetic voice. And a voice whose wisdom still needs to be heard today. And while the mission of CFM must be viewed as part of a family life ministry, it must also be viewed as a part of a social justice ministry.

The tension between those committed to family life ministry in CFM and those committed to social justice ministry has molded CFM during its first 54 years. A review of focus and programming over the years ebbs and flows between the introspection on the family, marriage, parenting, and the concern for the society around us, with focus on, among other things - racism, poverty, war and peace, economics and societal trends. The reality of CFM is that both are essential in defining what CFM is and what it is meant to be for the future.

In 2001 we began as a national board to revisit our mission statement. For many years the mission of CFM was to improve the quality of family life by reaching out. But to what and how was our movement to reach? What was our focus? What could we effectively impact? What should we impact?

When we began to review our mission, we were mindful of the historic tension which appears from a review of our past. With that in mind, the Board selected two quotes which form part of our statement and give it context.

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Chapter 1, verse 22 of the Letter of James instructs us:

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only.”

CFM requires its members to learn the truths of the Church and do what they command. CFM, as a movement, seeks to mold its members into the evangelists which the Christian laity is called to be. To be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in today’s world, is the call of the letter of James.

We also include a quote from an address from Bishop Anthony Pilla of Cleveland. Bishop Pilla addressed our National Convention in 1995 while he was Chairman of the National Bishops’ Conference Secretariat on Family, Laity, Women & Youth. In his address to our members, Bishop Pilla suggested the vineyard in which we are to work. He said,

“The Church speaks clearly of the duties of family members to one another that build a radiant faith. . . . But the Church does not stop there; it also speaks of the relationship between families and the larger culture, the duty of service, working for the common good, welcoming strangers, and giving voice to the Christian conscience. That is the message; you are the messengers.”

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Members of our movement are called to serve one another – family to family, family to community, family to church, and family to society. As family, we are called to minister, but we are also called to fulfill the great social teachings of our Church.

In 1999, the Christian Family Movement celebrated its Golden Jubilee with a National Convention at the University of Notre Dame. The occasion was truly special inasmuch as it drew together the pioneers of the movement and many current members. The presenters looked at the past, the present and the future. And in their words, the Movement gained better insight into what we were, what we are and what we should be about.

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We heard from Richard McCord. Rick is the Executive Director of the Secretariat on Family, Laity, Women & Youth for United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Rick challenged us to determine what role CFM could play in the Church in the future. He reflected on the changes which the Church, society and family had endured over the past fifty years and some of these reflections are relevant as we look at our role today.

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First, when Vatican I ended in 1870, U.S. Catholics wrestled with the question: **how to be truly American and still be Catholic?** After Vatican II, the question was reversed: **how to be truly Catholic and still be American?**

He notes that CFM was one of the important stepping stones on the bridge U.S. Catholics (at least of the middle class) traveled into being truly American. He asked, what role might CFM play in helping people become more truly Catholic, while remaining American?

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Second, 50 years ago CFM, the Church and society could count on a great amount of family stability as the starting point for people acting to transform society; the family itself was not at issue. For the most part, it could be taken for granted as a strength, as a resource for the task of evangelization of society. Today, that is no longer the operating norm. Since the late 1960's we have witnessed a gradual but decided unraveling of family life. With that unraveling new issues popped up. As McCord notes:

“Today, to deliberately work on one’s marriage and the quality of one’s family life has now become part and parcel of transforming society. Family renewal is itself a work of social renewal; a task with definite social implications and consequences.” So what role might CFM play in fostering Christian marriage and family life?

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McCord views CFM as part of the Church’s public work and witness to the importance of marriage and family life. He notes that CFM has specific strengths and resources in this work and witness. He mentions our teaching and theological tradition – marriage is a vocation, marriage is a sacrament, the family is the domestic church; our pastoral practice – religious education, sacramental preparation, formation in lay

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movements and groups, small Christian communities and our record of advocacy for public policy and laws favoring marriage and family. However, as important as family is, the most important goal for all is discipleship. What role might CFM play in fostering disciples?

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Discipleship for most of us begins in the formative environment of family life which is meant not to be a cocoon, but a school of Christian living that releases its members into the world outside with thoughts, ideas, energy and action to transform not only the family and its members, but the greater society. It can be through CFM that families become that school of Christian living – that place where children learn to observe, judge and act by positive transmission of Christian values, not by word alone, as in a classroom, but by the example of the active living of Christian values; living values which uphold marriage. Living values of service to others, of working for the common good, of opting for those less fortunate, of welcoming strangers. Living values centered in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

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Those who attended at Notre Dame also heard from Dr. Juan Hinojosa, who at the time was the Director of the Hillenbrand Institute in Chicago. As our Keynote Speaker, he spoke about the Mission of CFM for the next 50 years.

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He made a profound distinction between the Church gathered and the Church scattered and noted that the Church in America does a pretty good job as the Church gathered – Mass, sacraments, religious education; but that we need to improve as the Church scattered – home, work, little league, the polling place. It is in the Church scattered that CFM can find its mission.

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Hinojosa called on CFM to discover its charism. CFM's charism is that which we are uniquely able to provide, either because of talent, history, training or disposition, in response to the Spirit's prompting and enablement. It is the thing that sets us apart from other lay organizations. It must lie at the heart of the movement and it is a unique gift and calling from God.

While we must Observe, and then Judge, the key to CFM is Action – an action that eventuates in God's kingdom coming, in us, in the family and in the world. Our first Chaplain, Msgr. Hillenbrand said it best: "Only actions make apostles."

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So what is the call and gift of CFM as we move into the third Christian millennium? Our fulfillment – and our freedom – is not found in choosing whatever we will, but only in choosing what God wills for us.

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So what is the charism of CFM? Hinojosa says it is a lay enablement movement, focused on the family. It is dynamic, it is small group oriented, it is a like to like ministry – family to family. It is oriented to transforming the medium in which the family exists. It is primarily local, but not neglectful of the bigger social and cultural realities that call for Christian action and mission, all through a methodology that empowers the laity. It is involved with what Christ charges the laity to be about as being Church in the world. This is what we are to be about – it is our past, our present and our future.

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Hinojosa also reflected on what has been lost by CFM during its first 50 years and talks about what he feels must be recovered. We must rebuild our awareness of our intrinsic connection with the Mystical Body of Christ. This theology of the Mystical Body of Christ was a core value in the hey-day of CFM. The loss of focus on this rich and impressive teaching of the Church has led to the faltering of many lay movements. CFM grew out of a strong sense of the liturgical tutoring that moves to action in the world. It grew out of a profound connection with the apostolic ministry as found in the social teaching and a connection to the bishops – the official apostolic ministry. As a movement, Hinojosa suggests, we must recover a strong sense of the Body of Christ – of our part in it, of the hierarchy's part in it and of CFM's mission within the context of that. In other words, at some point in time, we lost some of our theological focus. Program books from the 50's and 60's do much to teach the concept of the Mystical Body of Christ. This teaching of the Church recognizes that each of us is called to do our part in building up the Kingdom. Each of us has talents and the appropriate place to utilize them. At some point in time, many people lost sight of that. There is a distinction between the laity and the clergy, between those in the hierarchy and those in the pews – or in the world, if you will. We need to regain insight into our role. We need to work with one another, each in his or her rightful place, to fulfill our mission. For the eye cannot speak, the ear cannot see and the heart cannot walk. We must work cooperatively within our charism to build up the Mystical Body and bring forth the Kingdom of God in our homes, in our parishes and in our communities.

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Hinojosa closes with his thoughts about the mission of CFM – how God intends us to use our charism. As a movement, we need to continue to enable the mission of the lay apostles – in their calling, within the family; we need to be the vanguard of Christ's burning concern for the structures, institutions and culture that either promote healthy families or destroys them; we need to discern what it is we can do, because we cannot do it all; and we must develop a careful communal reflection to bring focus and concerted action. We must be deeply connected to the vine that is Christ and his Church so that what springs forth is the fruit of gospel living.

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As individuals and individual families, we can transform the world, one family at a time. By transforming our own families and influencing those with which we have contact we can by example show others how to live their faith in the world. We are all

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called to be a domestic church, but also to be Church for the world. It is our responsibility to minister to the Church scattered and thereby make a difference in the lives of our family members and the communities with which they interact.

With these thoughts and reflections in mind, our Board embraced a new Mission statement which it adopted here in Chicago last year. The Mission is then given a more defined voice:

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To promote Christ-centered marriage and family life;

To help individuals and their families to live the faith in daily life;

To improve society through actions of love, service, education and example.

How can CFM be a gift to families today?

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CFM has developed and promotes programming and experiences designed to promote Christ-centered marriage. Programs like Your Marriage: The Great Adventure and the Covenant Experience are helping couples come to a more profound understanding of their marriage and the essential role which God plays in this special relationship of husband and wife. The divorce statistics prove that persons who are “religious” are less likely to divorce. People who are religious and share the same faith stand an even better chance of bucking the trend to marital dissolution. Why? Because of a shared commitment to something divine. In understanding the role which God plays in marriage, couples are better able to celebrate the good and weather the bad.

CFM is actively networking with groups who share our interest in family life. We participate in meetings of NACFLM and have been observers at the meetings of the USCCB. By networking with the institutional church and like-minded organizations, we can better inform our members and influence others regarding the issues of marriage and family life on which we place importance.

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Through its programming designed to build a faithful people, a people who observe, judge and act, CFM promotes Christ-centered family life. It provides opportunities for growth, as individuals, couples and families to take what is taught on Sunday and apply it in every day life. It builds apostles to evangelize the marketplace, the workplace, the soccer fields, the schools. It has programming like the Everyday Christianity series which can help form and promote Christian living in accord with the suggestions of the Bishops.

The very structure of CFM groups should reflect and promote Christian living by providing living examples – one family or couple to another, one son or daughter to another – of the transformative power of gospel living. A group builds leaders, but also provides mentoring in marriage, parenting and evangelization.

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Finally, through its process rooted in the wisdom of Cardijn, a process which is at the heart of our charism, we develop individuals who learn to observe the world around them, judge what they see in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ and then, most

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importantly, act to transform the world around them. These actions are do-able by all. Every family finds itself at a different place, but all can do something for -- as Hillenbrand taught -- only actions make apostles. We have to learn how better to observe, without judging. We have to learn better how to judge in accord with Christ's teachings, and that requires us to know what those teachings are. We have to learn how to act -- to improve marriages, our Church, our communities and our culture.

You cannot tell us that you cannot make a difference! Do not tell us that our culture is so far gone that our values and ideals are lost! Only forty years ago, much of what now passes for acceptable conduct was criticized -- cohabitation, promiscuity, divorce, abortion. Today it has become a norm. But simply because it is a norm does not make it right. When it comes to truth -- majority opinion does not rule.

We can make a difference by living faith-filled lives. We can make a difference by learning more about the truths of Jesus Christ and his Church. We can make a difference by reaching out to others to support them in their struggles as families, as couples, as fellow companions on this journey. Today, we need to develop a new generation -- knowledgeable about the great social justice teachings which are our Church, courageous enough to stand up and be counted, by their words and deeds, and committed enough to redefine what marriage and family truly is as taught by Jesus Christ.

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The Christian Family Movement holds the ability to be the catalyst, to be the leaven in the bread, to be the light to a world sometimes mired in darkness. It is a gift to families in this time, and in this place. The challenge is clear. Will we give this gift? The future lies in our response. Will we be apostles who act? Or will we accept the world as it is -- for families, for marriages, for the poor and disadvantaged?

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What will your choice be? What is your personal charism? How can you do more to touch more and share the gift which is CFM?

There are innumerable ways in which you can answer God's call.

You can lead a group, lead a parish CFM organization or help the Board with programming and logistical assistance. You can volunteer to serve on the National Board of Directors and shape the future of CFM.

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Take what you have learned today, and take it back to your local groups. Start a new group in your parish. Reach out to a neighboring parish and offer to start a group there.

Mary Lou Gorman, a former National Board member from Chicago, believed that the way to expand is simple -- "Each one, reach one." That is the challenge to you at this time and in this place. Can each one of you reach someone who is not in CFM? Do we understand the value that is in CFM enough to pass it on to others?

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God is counting on us to make the difference. Thank you.