



Final Statement of the Plenary Session on The Family as a Relational Good: The Challenge of Love



1. *A renewed vision of the family.* – In the past, there has been a lot of talk about the ‘crisis of the family’, and even about the ‘death of the family’. However, at the international level, all the research in this field shows that the family always occupies the first place on the scale of values, as it is the most important value in people’s lives. What is quite true is that, on a worldwide scale, we are witnessing a pluralization of family forms. The family models of traditional cultures are undergoing deep changes, for a series of objective and subjective causes. We believe that, underlying these changes, is the contemporary world’s aspiration to create new ways of experiencing the family as a place of authentic love between the sexes and between generations. It is up to us to give specific answers and new hopes to these aspirations.

The pluralization of family forms is a long-term phenomenon based on a series of interdependent causes that converge to foster a strongly individualistic culture in the conception of human and social rights, to the detriment of solidarity and reciprocity between the sexes and between generations.

Fragmentation and internal conflict within families ensue, aggravating their conditions of poverty, both material and relational, because when the strength of family networks weakens, multiple social problems and pathologies are inevitably accentuated. There is certainly no lack of new forms of family solidarity, both in internal relations and in the surrounding community, to give support to those in need. But prosocial families are often left to fend for themselves and lack the social services and social policies that can support them.

It is therefore a matter of dealing with the everyday reality of families, as Francis indicates in his exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in order to understand the new relational dynamics in light of the search for deeper bonds of authentic love in family life and in the societal context at large.

2. How should we interpret current trends? – We are convinced that the current search for happiness cannot be achieved in superficial relationships that damage human dignity. It requires a relational family culture that is capable of humanizing people instead. There can be no true humanization if it is not based on the ultimate meaning of life, which is a response to divine creation and filiation as experienced in the family.

Although, on the one hand, media of mass communication tend to emphasize relational evils in families, such as violence, abuse, and discrimination, on the other, human and social science research can highlight the persistence and vitality of families in which the challenge of love prevails and generates relational goods for themselves and for others. The families that generate relational goods are those in which the relationship of the married couple takes the form and content of a joyful experience of growth in one's own difference through full reciprocity with the other. For a family, being a relational asset implies that men and women enjoy the same rights fully and equally. Likewise, parenthood turns out to be all the more beautiful, true and good the more having children responds to the need of reciprocating the gift of life, of which parents are only administrators and not owners. This vision of the family is what makes it a 'relational good'.

3. The family as a relational good. – We believe that, in the field of human and social sciences at large, greater attention should be paid to those ways of forming a family that configure it as a relational good in itself and for the community. The family, in fact, is and remains the source of a good society, because it generates those fundamental social goods, such as trust, responsibility, collaboration, solidarity, and the whole ensemble of human virtues that are essential to an inclusive, sustainable social life.

It is necessary to recognize the irreplaceable role of the family as a group and social institution at the intersection of the private and public spheres and, as such, as a reality that is fundamentally a communitarian social subjectivity, although it has some private and public dimensions. We can and must speak of a citizenship right for the family as such, due to the unique mediation that families exercise between individuals and community. Implementing this right belongs above all to culture, and in particular to educational and socialization processes, starting with the young generations. Nevertheless, the whole societal system must be involved in pursuing family-friendly policies in every sphere of life, work, civic activities, and entertainment, in which the rights of the family as such are concretized, that is, as a natural society that implements and completes inalienable personal rights. For this reason, a family-friendly culture needs to be supported by economic, social and cultural policies that favour family life as a relational asset for the entire community. In this respect, we wish to briefly explain the main objectives to pursue and who should implement them.

4. *What can be done?* – Our suggestions are as follows.

International Organisations

1. Make the promotion of family wellbeing one of the new UN Global Development Goals.
2. Raise the awareness of all political, economic, and social actors, including governments, on the impact that changes in demography, climate, technology and migration processes have on families. Adopt family-oriented policies that can adequately respond and address the negative effects of these megatrends, in particular to support the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 (IYF + 30), organised by the UN Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, provided that it adopts a definition of the family that conforms to the UN Charter of Fundamental Rights of Humanity.
3. Promote cultural initiatives that strengthen the family as a stable place for primary affections and living a moral life and, in particular, as a place for the education of the new generations and for the transmission of cultural heritage, with the support of UNESCO.
4. Take every possible measure to reduce the demand for those forms of exploitation that are damaging to families, and especially sexual exploitation.
5. Establish codes of conduct and a zero-tolerance policy towards family violence and abuse, providing care services to prevent these crimes and help the victims.

National Governments and Authorities

6. Inspire their policies on family-friendly criteria and pursue family streaming in all areas of their competence.
7. Prepare national action plans to help families meet their basic needs and implement them by allocating a significant amount of their budget to them.
8. Configure national plans in favour of the family as an active, rather than passive, social subject, by a) adopting tax systems for families based on criteria of equity, taking into account their composition by number of members, age, and social and health conditions, along the life cycle; b) supporting motherhood and birth, avoiding policies that use abortion as a means of population control, and any form of eugenic selection of embryos; c) providing specific programs to combat family poverty, and in particular poverty of children and minors; d) guaranteeing a decent level of income for families who are unemployed; e) regulating employment contracts with family-friendly criteria and, in particular, facilitating relational contracts that include family welfare; f) promoting social housing policies to provide for families who do not have a home.

9. Ensure the necessary political, legal and financial support to the courts, administrative offices and law enforcement agencies involved in providing protection and social welfare for families, acting against family violence and abuse with preventative measures, and restoring the victims to a safe family life.

10. Facilitate family reunification for migrants.

12. Combat child labour and all kinds of child exploitation.

13. Promote scientific research on the importance of family-oriented policies and programmes to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the rapid expansion of new technologies; at the same time, fund information campaigns warning of the negative impacts of new technologies on children and families;

14. Provide programs that empower parents with educational skills and tools to understand new digital technologies, and create opportunities to share good practices in the use of digital technologies for parenting, education and the family's general well-being.

Civil Society Organisations

15. Promote family associations that advocate for family rights, and in particular associations of adoptive and foster families and families with disabled members and non-self-sufficient elderly.

16. Create and support networks of associations of professionals who can provide psychological help and relational social work to families in need.

17. Urge civil foundations that fund non-profit, charity and social welfare initiatives to direct their interventions towards operational projects to promote the educational and welfare capacities of families.

The Business Community

18. Adopt codes of conduct and regulations so that men and women have the same rights at work and can enjoy a better family-work balance, with adequate parental leave to be able to share family life more as a relational good.

19. Raise awareness of the serious risks and damage involved in the "race to the bottom" to minimize labour costs, and combat forms of exploitation of families in view of maximizing profits.

20. Adopt codes of conduct and regulations so that the quality of goods produced for the market does not cause damage to families and is family-friendly, in particular with regard to media

industry and products – such as games – for children.

21. Ensure the effective involvement of the Bishops' Conferences, clergy, congregations, parishes, schools and media in finding out and taking action against market products that can damage marital and parental relationships.

22. Create working groups to address family-friendly employment contracts, focusing on concrete actions and preparing positions on key issues that could improve relations between families and businesses.

The Holy See

23. Propose a family global compact, understood as a global alliance for the family, in order to include the protection and promotion of the family based on marriage in the new Sustainable Development Goals.

24. Commit the Permanent Missions of the Holy See to international organisations to insist on the urgency of a global strategy to sustain the right to start a family, providing it with a decent standard of living in accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 16).

25. Promote initiatives to ensure the commitment of the Catholic Church, with all its religious and secular organizations, and of all men and women of good will to take care of families as relational goods and provide them with adequate services.

All Religions

26. Commit to collaborating with one another to build a global alliance for the protection and promotion of the family.

27. Reinforce inter-confessional and ecumenical networks locally, regionally and internationally in order to create an ever-growing pool of resources to promote family-friendly welfare services.

28. Educate people on the phenomenon and scale of self-reinforcing mechanisms of family deprivation through the generations, offering everyone opportunities to step out of the cycle of poverty.

29. Give poor and migrant families access to the facilities provided by monasteries, convents and religious houses and make every effort to assess their pressing needs.

30. Establish a World Day of prayer, fasting, action, and reflection on the importance of the family for a peaceful and solidary world.

31. Reach out to all women, men, girls, and boys and raise awareness of their moral duty to refrain from any activities, including any involvement in the sex industry, that damage the sanctity of family life.

All People of Good Will

32. Cooperate on forwarding these proposals, by acting together and sharing information, with the aim of promoting the family as the source (fons) and origin (origo) of a good society.

In short

Confident that International Organisations, National Governments, NGOs, Churches and Religious organisations are aware of the importance of the issue of the family in today's society, we deem that particular attention should be given to the following points:

- Families need the support of a firm culture of life, fostered by family-friendly economic measures
- Families are the first place in which individuals are humanised, where they develop their affective and moral life, and where cultural heritage is passed down. Their rights in the education of their offspring need to be protected.
- Families need the subsidiary help of society in preventing violence, abuse, and child labour, and in offering shelter to victims.