



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

REF: PG/288/2024
Circular No. 22

10 May 2024

The CMI Year of Family, Youth and Children

Dear and Loving *Koodapirappukale*,

Greetings in our Lord!

After having a meaningful celebration of "*the Year of Communitarian Living*" at the different levels of our congregation, we are entering into the *CMI Year of Family, Youth and Children* (11 May 2024- 10 May 2025) as part of the *Bicentennial celebrations* of the foundation of our congregation. Our Lord is guiding us in the right perspective and direction to make sincere efforts at the personal and communitarian levels to live up our commitment to the Vision-2031, revitalizing ourselves to be a *Grace-filled Presence for a Transformed World*.

The XXXVIII General Synaxis of our congregation has accepted "Communitarian Witnessing Beyond Borders" as the theme for the term of current six years and we have been engaged in the efficient and effective actualization of it in all spheres of life. "Accompaniment of children, youth and families," one of the five major thrusts of GS 38 has rightly found a place in our thoughts in the context of the preparations for the CMI bicentenary celebrations 2031. We have decided to dedicate and rededicate our CMI commitment to the special care and welfare of the families, children and youth in this year.

Family always in the Heart of the Church

The family is the first natural society. It is the foundation of society and is central to all social life. It is a place where different generations live together and experience affection, solidarity, appreciation, unselfish commitment, help and justice. The vocation and mission of the family, and ministry to the family are important concerns of the Church. The family and youth have always been at the centre of the Church's theological reflection and pastoral care. This can be seen especially from the last decade of the 19th century, beginning from *Aracanum Divinae Sapientiae*. As Family is the basic unit of the ecclesial community, the second Vatican council presents it as domestic Church where living with each other will provide with an experience of Eucharistic sacrifice. With all the joys and trials that become indispensable part of family life, family becomes primary and fundamental "school of humanity" (GS (Vat. II) 52).



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Pope John Paul II has written a beautiful "*Letter to the Families*" in the Year of the Families declared by UN in 1994, where he spoke about the "civilization of love" and presented the family as the "cradle of Love."

Two recent Synods on the Family (2014 & 2015) by Pope Francis and the subsequent Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* are the latest responses of the Church to the challenges faced by the family in the changed context of today.

The CMI Legacy of Family Ministry

The family, the children and the youth, the agents and beneficiaries of our mission, have been the foci of our apostolates from the very beginning of our congregation in 1831. Ministry to the families is our charism. The reality of family was very close to the heart of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and the Mannanam movement. His great devotion to the Holy Family - *Thirukudumbam* inspired him to choose the name Kuriakose Elias of the Most Holy Family at the time of his religious profession. His expression *Koodapirappukal* reveals his deep appreciation of the bond that should exist among the family members. The Testament for the families or *Nalla Appante Chavarul* is a standing testimony of his intense concern for the families and their holistic welfare. Inspired by the vision of *Chavarul*, the GS 37, chose "Renewal of Families after the Model of St. Chavara" as one of the four thrusts.

GS 38 Acts reminds us that "accompaniment of the children, youth and family invites us to have a special place in our ministries and mission for them as the reality of family was very close to the heart of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara. Today there is a pressing need of our pastoral involvement to strengthen the families, especially with regard to the faith formation of the children and youth. Since educational apostolate is one of the strengths of our congregation and offers platform to contribute in the development of children and youth. After the model of St Chavara, we shall have a distinct approach of our own to these critical segments of the society."

Vision of the Chavarul and Our Mission to the Families

The Chavarul (Testament of a Loving Father), a letter written by Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara to his parishioners on 13 February 1868, continues to inspire the Church's vision of the family and its commitment to the family. It presents the Christian theological vision of the family, various challenges and problems the families face, and gives practical guidelines for living together rooted in love. It is basically pastoral in nature, instructing the married, founded on Christian virtues, for the upbringing of children, and for a healthy social and economic life of the families. The ideal vision of the family is presented; at the same time, it is contextual and practical taking into consideration the actual problems and difficulties that the family faces. St Chavar's vision of the family based on the biblical vision and affirmed by the Christian tradition is this: "A good Christian Family is the image of heaven, where



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members live together by the bond of blood and affection, duly respecting and obeying the parents, walking peacefully before God and people, seeking eternal salvation according to each one's proper state of life".

The Chavarul presents family as the part of the plan of God founded on love, rooted in prayer and sacraments. The Chavarul gives very practical useful precepts on right living and conduct of the family life. It urges to void extravagance, advocates justice, promotes just wages and encourages to have healthy interpersonal relationships. This guideline for parenting and mentoring youth is one of the most important features of the Chavarul and it presents the Children are sacred treasures entrusted to the parents by God Almighty. Friendship, freedom, modesty of children are meaningfully depicted and positively encouraged in the grooming of children and this should be a guiding light for us in our ministry.

The Contemporary Challenges faced by Families, Children and the Youth

In today's world we find, of course, a deterioration in the life of a family at the spiritual, emotional and physical levels. This awareness of the Church is reflected in the recent Church document *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) which highlight some of the challenges of family today, namely: Individualism, wrong notions of freedom, weakening of faith, separation and divorce, pornography, misuse of the internet, addiction to TV, affective immaturity, consumerism, poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, violence on women, gender discrimination, commercialization of the female body, decline in the number of children are some of the challenges faced by the modern day families and are symptoms of erosion of values in Christian families and in the larger society. The families with disabled/differently abled children, often face perplexing and painful situations in life. The number of the elderly, especially those who are alone, are often unattended or not properly taken care of.

Sexual exploitation of children is at the increase and the cries of the innocent are often unnoticed and unanswered. Unemployment, economic inequality, and migration are some of the major issues the youth faces today. Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* acknowledged with sorrow that "many young people today live in war zones and experience violence in countless different forms: kidnapping, extortion, organized crime, human trafficking, slavery and sexual exploitation, wartime rape, and so forth. Other young people, because of their faith, struggle to find their place in society and endure various kinds of persecution, even murder. (72).

Pope presents "migrants as an epitome of our time", and recalls the many young people involved in migration. "The Church's concern is focused especially on those fleeing from war, violence, political or religious persecution, from natural disasters including those



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caused by climate change, and from extreme poverty" (91). *Christus Vivit* remarks that though the digital world connects and helps to communicate, it can also be a place of "loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, up to the extreme case of the 'dark web'. The document notes that the "online relationships can become inhuman" and immersion in the virtual world has favoured "a kind of "digital migration", involving withdrawal from their families and their cultural and religious values, and entrance into a world of loneliness" (90).

The covid-19 and the post-Covid crises have affected the economic, social and spiritual life the family and the youth. We need to enhance our pastoral acumen to address the genuine concerns of the families.

Our Response Today

In spite of the challenges and problems, let us remember that, "families are not a problem, they are first and foremost an opportunity" (AL, 7). The changes in life-style and values only invite us to understand the context better and to find more creative ways of responding to the challenges. We should find out more important places, among others, for encountering the children and young people where they are, and accompanying them and offering them the light of faith in our context, enabling them to be partners in the mission of the Church today. We should find out specific initiatives more appropriate to attract the interest of young people and to foster their faith and vocation, so that they can fully grow as persons. Some practical ways and means to rededicate ourselves for the care and welfare of the families are suggested here which shall be implemented in the general, provincial and local levels of our congregation in this Year of the Family, Youth and Children:

1. It may be good that we arrange facilities for family counselling along with our monasteries and institutions where our trained members in counselling can help families in need. Besides, it may be good to make available the service of religious sisters who are trained in family counselling, and lay counsellors. Our ministry for the separated, divorced and divorced and remarried is a significant one as it is becoming a trend that causes concern today.
2. A team consisting of CMIs, Religious Sisters and Lay people can be formed under the auspices of the Pastoral Department in each province to accompany the families, children and the youth.
3. Seminars, Workshops and sessions on family, challenges to family, parenting etc., are arranged in our institutions, especially through educational institutions.
4. Our Schools and Colleges can become centres of family ministry: Besides, the service of Family Counsellors can be made available in our schools for parents who would like to make use of such facilities.



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5. The number of the elderly who are living alone is on the increase and therefore, we need to envisage a pastoral plan for them like organising senior citizens' forum or *Pakalveedu* etc. They can become effective collaborators in our mission.
6. Both migrant families and migrants who are living apart from their families need our care. The families with disabled/differently abled children, widowers and widows, single parent families etc., need to be in our priority list of our ministries today. The different schemes like, "Heal a Family," "Adopt a Family" etc. Are initiatives that are to be promoted by our houses and institutions.
7. Value Education and Religious Education classes in our schools are to be made mandatory where sessions are held for vocational discernment, the Christian vision of family, healthy man-woman relationship, etc.
8. In the multi-religious context of India, we have also think how we can extend our care to families, youth and children of other faiths as well.

Our personal involvement in the family ministry is important. We need to update ourselves with the developments in the Catholic vision of the family, marriage and sexuality, the challenges and problems today and the response of the Church to those challenges and problems. We need to involve others, collaborate with others, providing our vision and support.

Conclusion

It is amazing that almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, which marks a paradigm shift in the theology of marriage, St Chavara presents the family as an image of heaven, a place of salvation and dedicated himself and inspired others to be the guardians and mentors of the families. As CMIs, let this *Year of Family, Youth and Children* be an occasion for us to rededicate ourselves for continuing the great legacy of St Kuriakose Elias Chavara and other founders, who handed over such a vision and pioneered the mission to the families. May the Holy Family, bless us in our efforts to accompany the families, youth and children. May St Kuriakose Elias Chavara, of the Most Holy Family, the Patron of Families, help us to make each family on earth an abode of heaven!

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