

The Pastoral Expressed in the Life and Mission of the Holy Family Institute

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I can easily fulfill my task for this talk simply by enumerating the pastoral activities listed in the Statutes of the HFI. But then, I will also be describing many good, married and widowed Catholic individuals **in general**, because, on the surface, nothing externally distinguishes a member of the HFI from other good people who attend to their family, civic and religious duties responsibly and conscientiously. In order to do justice to the breadth and depth of the HFI vocation, in support of God's plan of salvation, I have to go back to the beginning, to the heart and mind of our Founder.

Fr. Alberione said that God wished to restore all things in Jesus Christ and that the work of Restoration began from the family. He stressed that there was a reason why the Son of God, coming into the world, desired to be born, to grow and to labor in an ordinary human family. Also, our **blessed** Founder knew from his personal family experience that from within the family, united in the sacrament of Matrimony, new generations of apostles, disciples and saints are formed.



So, in 1960, when Fr. Alberione obtained Vatican approval for the Pauline Institutes for single men, single women and diocesan priests, he also obtained **general approval for the concept** that married couples might also make vows that would extend baptismal consecration. After all, married people profess sharing of goods, mutual self-care and mutual obedience. These vows would be infinitely enriched by the evangelical spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience.

In the interest of time, we fast forward 33 years later. Fr. Alberione's ideal and dream for married and widowed Catholics became a reality. The Statute of the HFI received definitive approval from the Church, to be administered and spiritually directed by the Society of St. Paul. (This is what "Aggregated Institute" means.)

But, **more importantly**, this Church approval meant that **as an institute of consecrated secular life** HFI members, inspired by the Holy Family of Nazareth, could increasingly strive to grow in authentic conjugal love: for their personal holiness (or wholeness), for the wholeness of their family, of the Church and of the world. Furthermore, as a full branch of the Pauline Family, the Institute participates with a powerful spiritual bond in the work of the world-wide Pauline Priests, Brothers and Sisters. The simple morning offering of our ordinary day is magnified in our "Pauline Offertory" prayer and in the

evangelizing activity of our Pauline Religious utilizing every means of social communication. These elements, hidden before human eyes yet profound realities in the mystery of God, are what set us apart from other good, but generic, married Catholics. To be "set apart" is not to make us prideful by comparing ourselves to others. Rather, it makes us humbly grateful for this gift of vocation that empowers us to live our baptismal consecration now in a far better manner than we ever did before.



As consecrated members of the Pauline Family, we in the HFI strive to live a coherent, consistent and God-oriented lifestyle in and through the daily challenges of marriage and family life. Most of us are not directly engaged in evangelization, much less media work. Unlike monasteries and convents, our homes are not usually conducive to formal prayer at regular intervals. Neither do we find ourselves in situations alluded to in St. Paul's first letter to Timothy (5:9) of "holy widows" devoting all time to "prayer and good works". The rhythm of our lives, especially for those

HFI members with young children, is more often chaotic and not always predictable. Nevertheless, **and only if there truly is extra time away from the demands of home and regular work**, daily Mass, Adoration and parish ministries are routinely taken part in by many HFI members. Some who live close to a Pauline congregation take active part in their apostolate. But it needs to be emphasized that for the HFI pastoral life and activity is exercised principally in the midst of their earthly reality: at home or in the place of employment.

In the HFI, we learn and understand that we grow closer to God by facing the tasks of each day, **very close to the side of Jesus, like Mary and Joseph**. The monotony, the boredom, the contrasts, the contestations, the refusals, the rejections, and all the jetsam and flotsam of which family and married life is full - all are occasions for "Christification", the Founder's special word for transformation in Christ. When we allow the light of Jesus, Truth, Way and Life, to penetrate the dark corners of our mind, will and heart, we open ourselves to the "living of Christ" that enables the subsequent "giving of Christ", a theme our patron, St. Paul, speaks about so eloquently in his letters. When HFI people strive to grow the love of Christ in their hearts and in their homes, **as Mary and Joseph of Nazareth did**, they are able to give Christ to others and to the world.



When mutual respect reigns in the home, when our own example of chastity, modesty, filial love and hard work is the foundation of the Christian formation of our children, when we strive to overcome self-centeredness with patience, understanding and forgiveness; when we bear the lows and the highs, the failures and triumphs, the sorrows and the joys encountered in day to day living, **united with the Holy Family**, we go through

a paschal dying and rising that makes us experience the ongoing healing power and joy of the Gospel.

Because it is an institute of consecrated life, by the grace of God, every good word, thought and action in the HFI is now directed towards the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Each day spent, even if not specifically religious, becomes a continuous act of love, praise and worship of God. On the outside nothing has changed and we are just like we were before. But in fact, as HFI members, our ordinary Catholic married life has acquired a new meaning, a clearer purpose and a profound spiritual value.

Immersed in the secular environment, there exists for us a pernicious challenge to persevere with the conviction that the seemingly insignificant and ordinary existence we lead **IS** the sure path for making the best possible use of our chosen state in life. The instruction, direction and support we receive from the Pauline Religious, principally from the Society of St. Paul, is inestimable in our proper formation and perseverance. Our delegate director, Fr. Tom Fogarty, has equipped my husband and me, and all of us in the HFI, with a solid theological and spiritual grounding that serves us well in the day to day living out of our special Pauline vocation. As an aggregated institute, divine Providence gave us this invaluable gift for safeguarding the evangelical call and mission and for enthusiastically sharing it with others desirous of a way of perfection in their married or widowed state.



In the years that passed and to this very day, we become increasingly aware of the prophetic character of our Founder's insight, on the role of families for God's glory and the salvation of souls. Pope Francis has called for an extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family to be held in October. It will address pastoral challenges facing the faithful on critical Catholic teachings regarding family life. I am sure many of us have not been spared the moral suffering caused by divorce and remarriage, co-habitation, contraception and abortion, perhaps even among our own children, relatives, and friends.

Who among us do not know of a son or daughter, a brother or a sister, a niece, nephew, grandchild, cousin, close friend - people we know and love, who left the church because they felt rejected and unloved by God simply because of their sexual orientation? How do we bring all of them back to the healing embrace of our One, Relational, and Trinitarian God who is Pure Love?

One reason we find our society in this situation is the pervasive effect of the current relativistic culture that is promoted unquestionably by the media. Those of us who are called upon to offer ourselves "for our sanctification, for the sanctification of families, of all Christian families and of the world", and to share God's message of love in the context of social communication, have our work cut out for us.

And beyond any doubt, our pastoral activity in these challenging times of changing mores and values can be effective only if we unite them with the compassionate, merciful

and reconciling love of the One, True, Divine Master and Shepherd of souls and entrust our meager efforts in the hands of Mary- our Mother, Teacher and Queen.

In closing, I want to give the last word of this talk to the then Superior General of the SSP, Fr. Silvio Pignotti, who on the occasion of the definitive approval of the HFI Statute in 1993 left us with this hopeful note (cf. Statute and Directory of the Holy Family Institute - presentation page).



"Married people will conquer these challenges only if they know how to hold their lives together with the teaching of Christ and remain at his side, utilizing all the great graces guaranteed by their sacrament of Love. "