



REVIEW ARTICLE

FAMILY APOSTOLATE MISSION OF THE FATRI –A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute (FATRI) stands for the families. It has a significant role for uplifting the families in the society today. In 1987, the congregation of Holy Family started FATRI at Velur, Kerala in order to equip the members more adequately to respond to the challenges of the modern world by empowering the family. FATRI is grateful to the people who molded it into the form of today. FATRI implies the families towards Holiness and Wholeness. In the current scenario, families are sick and unhealthy due to various reasons. FATRI diagnoses and researches the problems of family, guides and directs towards a blissful family, motivates and inspires to live a model family, empowers and strengthens the relationship of the family and helps to harmonize and unite the people. FATRI has contributed its share to wipe out the tears of the people, reinforce to practice new ways of life and steer to uplift the spiritual life of the modern man. FATRI provides a range of training courses in family apostolate, counselling, and psychology which helps the individual to cope better with life.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the era of 'use and throw' or 'disposable culture (Grace Veliath and Team, 2012)'. People throw away old and used items and replace with new and sophisticated things. The newness of today's world becomes old tomorrow. In this modern time, as people run after the latest, not only things but individuals, families and family members are also become part of this modern culture. To have a remedy for this fast spreading contagious sickness of 'use and throw' culture, people must grow in values and integrity. The family has remained a central social institution (Patel, 2005). Family is the foundation stone of our life. The Family is a basic institution of society (Peer, 1996). Therefore, it is the vital need of today to build the families to form a better society, changing the attitude of the entire human race. The nuns of Congregation of Holy Family (CHF) are trying to protect the nature life and to grow in a value-based life. The vision and mission of Bl. Mariam Thressia, the Founder of the CHF Congregation "sanctification of families" is continued through various activities (Fatri, 2012-2013) of the Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute (FATRI), an organ of the CHF Congregation. FATRI stands for empowering and uplifting the families and individuals through its training, researches, and various other activities.

Origin and development of CHF

Holy Family Congregation, which had been founded by Blessed Mariam Thressia in a remote village called Puthenchira in Thrissur district, in the year 1914 (Charithrathiloode, 1989) had an inevitable role in the church and society today. Bl. Mariam Thressia, an inborn missionary, dedicated herself for the ministry of family renewal after the model of Holy Family which is essential for the Christianization of families. Her apostolic zeal for the families and the preferential love for the poor became the charism (The spirit and aims of the founder of the Congregation is called charism) and the apostolate of the congregation. The vision is the congregation is to be identified with the Crucified Lord and be empowered to impart His compassionate Love. To share with everyone the merciful love of Jesus through Family Apostolate, especially with the poor and the out castes (Vincy Kannappalli, 2003) is the mission of the congregation. Family Apostolate was an unprecedented event in the socio-cultural set up of Kerala of that time. It is noteworthy that in the case of Sr. Mariam Thressia, her entry into the Congregation, perpetual commitment and appointment as the Mother Superior of the new Congregation happened on the same day (Joseph Vithayathil, ?). Rev. Fr. Vithayathil was appointed as the chaplain of the convent (Charithrathiloode, 1989). The foundress threw herself right into the heart of the society, i.e., the families, where she sought the field for the new apostolate.

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Empowering to Expand and Experience

In 1960s when the educational field was widened, more nuns were engaged in this field. Naturally this weakened the family apostolate. Realizing this, the general council organized classes, courses and seminars to make the nuns aware of the importance of the family apostolate. To equip the nuns with the needed expertise in the field of theology, liturgy, formation, counselling and social work, the nuns were sent to the Religious institutions in Madras, Goa, Mangalore, Bangalore, Pune, Rome and Germany. Besides these, to be skilled in the healing ministry and the educational field, the nuns were sent for nursing, medicine, etc. They were also sent to America to get training for the special school to look after the mentally and physically retarded children (Maria Domittila and Committee members, 2008).

At present the Congregation has nine provinces and two regions in India and in Africa. Now there are more than two thousand and five hundred nuns in the Congregation who serve in India and Abroad, which begins with four members including Mariam Thressia. Following Bl. Mariam Thressia, with fire in the heart and wings on the feet a C H F nun Christianizes the families by engaging herself through family apostolate, social apostolate, healing ministry, education apostolate, parish ministry etc. these apostolate sow the seeds of Gospel values, virtues and the moral values in the hearts of every human person.

The Ecumenical Council of Vatican II

The Ecumenical Council of Vatican II dealt elaborately with the life of the church and its relationship with other churches, religious and the world at large. Since religious life is an essential part of the church showing forth the various aspects of the mystery of Christ it is treated in the Constitution of the Church as well as in a separate decree called "Decree on the up-to-date Renewal of the Religious Life" (Perfectae Caritatis-PC) (Perfectae Caritatis is the Decree on the up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life) Promulgated on 28th October 1965.

The main theme of the Decree is, to up-to-date renewal of religious life. The renewal of the religious life, envisaged by the Council is not an isolated action by the religious alone, but it is a part of the renewal of the entire Church (Flannery, 2007). Vatican II demands the renewal of the way of life, of prayer, and of apostolate in harmony with the present –day physical and psychological condition of the members.

General Renewal Synaxis

General Renewal Synaxis was conducted in the generalate 23-31 August 1985. Fr. Bernard Perreira CSSR and Fr. Thomas Aykkara CMI were the moderators of the synaxis. Discussions made it clear that the apostolic activities are the overflowing of charism (Decisions of 7th General Synaxis, CNo.76/85, p.3). They made it clear that the family apostolate and social work are not the same, but complimentary to each other. Moreover they got the awareness that the Holy Family nuns were bound to give leadership and training on the family apostolate not only in India but also in the whole world. It was the unanimous decision of the synaxis that the Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute (FATRI) should be started on the general level, to conduct research and promote the family apostolate (Ibid).

It was also decided that an Integrated Family Development Forum (IFDF) be started in each province under the guidance of the FATRI.

Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute at Velur

In 1987, the congregation started a Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute (FATRI) at Velur, Thrissur in order to equip the members more adequately to respond to the challenges of the modern world by empowering the family. FATRI trains the individuals, heals the brokenness of family relations, unites the couples and guide them to be human (Interviews with Cicy Jacob, Old Student of FATRI at Velur). Regardless of cast and creed, it serves the society by giving training, conducting research and dealing and mending the broken relationship through counselling. The Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute is carrying out this apostolate in three different ways (Thylam, 2012).

The objectives of FATRI are to act / function

- First as a training centre for counselors and the workforce of family apostolate;
- Second as a research centre on emerging social and psychological issues;
- Third as a counseling centre for individual, married couples, family and group counselling.

The motto of the institute is the "wholeness and holiness of families and its goal is to develop skill in the field of family apostolate and counseling (Flower Jose, 2014). Aiming at the good of all, the FATRI is open to nuns from other congregations, priests, and laity who seek training in the field of family apostolate.

FATRI the Registered Society

The FATRI was registered as a society on 1 March 1990. There shall be various administrative units such as governing body, advisory body, general body and executive body for the efficient working of FATRI. Arrangements for the smooth running of the FATRI: the General councilor in charge of the family apostolate activities of CHF made to act as the director of the FATRI. The assistant director takes charge of the family apostolate activities of the institution and the Principal of academic activities. FATRI should have a team to give leadership for the publications. The FATRI functions as training institute and research centre (Flower Jose) for family apostolate, a family counselling centre, an institute for training students in counselling and a post-graduate center for counselling and psychology.

Different Programmes offered by the FATRI

FATRI conducts number of courses and seminars¹⁷ for the improvements in the field of family apostolate. In all courses and seminars their main focus is family and family based subjects.

Family Apostolate Course (FAC-Three Months)

FAC is a three months course, affiliated to Christian chair, Calicut University. This course helps the candidates to make a thorough study of modern family system and acquire more scientific and effective mode of Family Apostolate.

It helps them to bring 'Wholeness in Family'. Classes, demonstration, speech, assignments, exam, house visit outing are the main activities of the programme of this course. In the beginning, from 1987, this course was only for CHF nuns; thereafter from 99 different congregation's 2409 nuns have completed this course from this institution.

Advanced Course in Family Apostolate (ACFA-One year)

ACFA helps the trainee to understand the various aspects of family life. This one year course was started in 2005. The advanced course in Family Apostolate is affiliated to Christian Chair; Calicut University provides the trainees more confidence and knowledge to deal with the problems effectively and to bring wholeness in families. The sessions on group dynamics, emotional maturity, self-management and well being etc. helped them to know more about themselves and to improve their relationships. One month hands on experience known as home mission at any parish of any dioceses and counselling are the most important part of this course.

Advanced Course in Guidance and Counselling (ACGC-One Year)

ACGC promote personal development and help the trainees to understand various theories, techniques and applications of counselling, and family therapy. This course was started in 1992. Anyone below the age of fifty and with the minimum qualification of +2 or pre-degree without any discrimination can attend the course. Through counselling, within these years, 1,10,600 person's lives were lifted up by the students of this course. They had one month practicum in school counselling. According to the need of the school, course participants conduct counselling and seminars on different topics in different schools.

Degree Courses- M.Sc and B.Sc

For uplifting and serving the families, they started Degree courses which functions as the study center for Distance Education. This institute conducts courses for M.Sc. Applied Psychology and B.Sc. Counselling Psychology (FATRI, 2011-2012) and also provides all possible modern facilities for an effective learning and experimental environment. There is no age limit for getting admission to M.S.c and B.S.c., but at the same time any degree is must for M.S.c and +2 or pre- degree is needed for B.S.c. The degree course of B.Sc. Counselling Psychology, in the beginning known as B. Psych School Counselling was started in 2004.

Without caste, creed and sex everyone can attend these courses. FATRI got the permission in 2007 from Bharathiar University Coimbatore, to start, M.Sc., P.G. course. Two years P.G. course is done in four semesters (participatory programme that is equivalent to regular course) is aimed to train competent and effective professionals in psychology and counselling. It helps the students to enrich themselves with therapeutic knowledge and practical skills.

Seminars and Classes

Different types of classes and seminars are arranged by FATRI at any time, for priests of different dioceses and religious congregations, religious nuns of other congregations, seminarians and students in different schools (Decennial

souvenir of FATRI, op.cit.). The highlights of these for example are: one day seminars for different congregations and family counselors, two day seminars take place for the energizing team, three day seminars and programmes offered to family apostolate animators, parishes and diocese. The FATRI also gives Family apostolate oriented classes in different dioceses. In addition, they offer individual counselling. FATRI has a well maintained computerized library system containing books, thesis and dissertation on the subject of psychology, counselling, theology, family apostolate and range of encyclopedias both in English and in Malayalam. It is open to all, including outside students. It has also a good collection of staff and students on different topics.

Publication

More than most other social groups, the family is the first social institution within the civilized larger society²⁰. In some ways, media images of families have changed dramatically over the years; in other ways, though they are remarkably similar. FATRI publishes a monthly magazine namely 'Holy Family Message', which is a source of inspiration and knowledge to every member of a family. It includes current news and issues that are faced by the families in this modern age. Experts write articles from their specialization and help to enrich the readers. The aim of this publication is for the well being of the family. This publication gives awareness to the families concerning the use of social media like television, computer and internet, mobile phones etc. During the year 2012-2013, 8900 copies were circulated. FATRI is now taking the shape of three tire system that is FATRI (Family Apostolate Training and Research Institute), IFDF (Integrated Family Development Forum), and DFA (Direct Family Apostolate).

Integrated Family Development Forum (IFDF)

The IFDF is an extension of FATRI in each province in order to more widely conduct courses on family apostolate and to offer counselling for all people regardless of any religion. IFDF coordinated the activities of family apostolate such as house visit, jail ministry, different types of work of mercy²¹ etc. Basic counselling course is aimed at imparting basic knowledge on various techniques, theories, and applications of counselling and all these promote personal growth. The course is recognized by the Christian Chair of the University of Calicut. Focusing on the vision of the Mother Foundress for the Christianization of the families by sharing the compassionate love of the Lord, the nuns went with fervor to the remote areas spreading the love of God through the family evangelization known also as 'Home Mission'. City evangelization is also a part of family apostolate. There are three or four nuns live in a city / town leading a life of prayer and engage in family apostolate. Such houses are called "Mariam Thressia Ashramam" they spend long hours before the Eucharist in adoration especially at night. Their only ministry is family visiting and related apostolate.

Conclusion

Family visit and counselling of families in the earlier years were simple 'good will ministry' and it did not demand any scientific training or systematic formation. But presently the most sophisticated and complex life situations of the families and society, necessitates professional training for the field workers to make their function more fruitful and successful.

In these circumstances, family apostolate really needs scientific and systematic training. Fatri has contributed its share to wipe out the tears of the people, reinforce to practice new ways of life and steer to uplift the spiritual life of the modern families. The world has become a global village through the advancement of science and technology. At one's finger tip or click of the mouse the whole world can be reached in an instant. But the social distance between individuals and family members are widening day by day. In such a context it is an urgent need, as the church invites the religious to take to take up the apostolate in families. This was envisioned a century ago by the foundress of the CHF Congregation the Blessed Mariam Thressia. Deeply rooted in the charism of the congregation, the members pursue that the main goal of its existence is the sanctification of families.

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