

CONSECRATED PERSONS AND PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

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Abstract

The Christian family, referred to as a domestic church”, the first and vital cell of the society, the first school of life and formation house for all vocations has received a lot of attention from the church of recent because of the challenges she is facing in carrying out a very important role in the education, formation and evangelization of her members. Consecrated persons who are part of the church share in the church’s concern for pastoral care for the family. Since 2015, a year Pope Francis dedicated to consecrated Persons, the Religious have taken time to deliberate, reflect and make a conscientious’ effort towards providing a systematic and effective pastoral care to families. In this paper we hope to articulate some key pastoral challenges the family is facing and practical ways in which Consecrated persons by virtue of the witness of their lives, charisms and life-transforming apostolates can offer pastoral care to families that is holistic, effective, God-centred, love – driven and value – based in our challenging and ever changing globalized world. Consecrated persons have all it takes to keep Christian families ‘alive’ in faith, hope and joy of love in marriage and family life.

INTRODUCTION

The family is one of the fascinating masterpieces in nature that is extremely familiar among all our social institutions. As a domestic and miniature church as well as the first and vital cell of the society, God established the family for the common good of its members and that of the society. However, within the family lies a paradox: a heaven on earth and a place of violence and abuse. As whatever we make out of the family goes, so goes the nature and inconsistencies we find in nature, be it in politics, morality or in religion are simply reflections of the state of our collective families. To address these in the society and in the church, we have to go back to the family which is a link to our past, and a bridge to our future blossoming.² This is what the catholic church is out to achieve as she intensifies her attention on the family and her vocation and mission of evangelization. In 2014 – 2015 the Roman Pontiff, Pope Francis called for two synods on the family. In these synods the numerous contributions and interventions of the Synod fathers which reflected the problems faced by families throughout the world as well as other legitimate concerns and honest

questions on the family were thoroughly discussed. At the end Pope Francis issued a post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “Amoris laetitia”, which put together the contributions of the two Synods on the family while adding other considerations as an aid to reflection, dialogue and pastoral practice, and as a help and encouragement to families in their daily commitments and challenges.² Alongside these developments in the church. Pope Francis dedicated the year, 2015 to Consecrated life. As consecrated persons we are part of the church that is concerned about the family. It is in this context that our Major Superiors of male and female Religious Congregations in Nigeria enjoined their members to reflect more deeply on our mission of giving adequate and systematic pastoral care to families.

Consecrated persons are members of the church who by profession of evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience make a total gift of themselves to God in love

and for His service. Inspired by divine love and the charisms of their founding Institutes they give quality care and support to family, the “domestic Church” to empower her live her specific mission in the church and society.

In this paper, we will attempt to articulate the concept of Consecrated life and its replaceable place in the life of the church.

Secondly, we will discuss what constitutes the family and identify some key pastoral challenges that confront her and suggest some practical ways in which consecrated persons can offer pastoral care to families to stimulate holistic growth in all spheres of human existence leading to self-actualization and holiness of life.

2.1 CONSECRATED PERSONS AND PASTORAL CARE OF FAMILIES

Religious life is total self gift and total service to God: it is a special mode of consecration to the Lord³ In His apostolic exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* (Gospel witness) Pope Paul VI says the central objective of consecrated life is “the constant search for God” (No.3) in which the whole life is dedicated to God. The religious follow Christ, consecrating themselves totally to Him. More beautiful is the definition that describes the religious as those who respond to the call of God to follow Christ more closely through the practice of evangelical counsels and who through a total life-long gift of themselves, live more and more for Christ and for His body which is the church.⁴

This teaching of Vatican II Council implies that consecration is the foundation of religious life and religious life is defined from the perspective of its purpose in being and not principally from the view point of the service that religious render. The primary reason for the consecration is close relationship with God (To first and foremost, belong totally to God and strive to be Christ-like i.e. holiness) and in a secondary manner its objective is apostolic action or mission. Consecrated life has its source and origin in the life and teachings of Christ. It is from God and has an irreplaceable place in the life of the Church.

3. perfecta Caritatis 1.
4. Ibid.

Consecrated persons are a great sign of God’s (e.g. presence and kingdom in the world. They are called to have the same mind and ‘tastes’ that Jesus had and passion for God and for leading people to God (Philippians 2:5, John 4:34-‘35)

Seeking God is the only reason that makes sense of religious life. Therefore the first and most essential purpose of consecrated life is to be committed God-seekers. Without a committed pursuit of God in contemplation, all kinds of good activities lose all purpose and relevance. ⁵

A survey was conducted in one renowned Catholic country in the western world many years ago on the Laity’s expectations of Consecrated persons. The Laity were asked, “what do you expect of consecrated persons”? Their answer was simple. Over 85% of respondents said, “we expect consecrated persons to point to God. We expect them to be prophets of their times pointing to God, holiness and eternal realities”.

The foregoing highlights the fact that what consecrated persons are called to be and do is to witness to God by actualizing His kingdom of love, justice, peace, truth, reconciliation, compassion in the world whether they are “being” or “doing”

People expect the religious not to be simply efficient administrators or competent professionals but first of all “spiritual guides” who not only show the way but “walk the

talk.” They look for humble and happy religious with a deep spirituality rather than just achievers, specialists or professionals⁶

Pastoral care of people is a very significant aspect of the consecrated persons’ living of their prophetic role in the church’s mission of evangelization. Their founders and foundresses shared in Jesus’ own compassion when he saw the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Like Jesus who compassionately spoke his gracious word, healed the sick, gave bread to the hungry and offered his own life in sacrifice, so their founders and foundresses sought in different ways to be at the service of all those to whom the spirit sent them. They did so by their prayers of intercession, their preaching of the Gospel, their works of catechesis, education, their service to the poor and the infirm---. The creativity of charity is boundless, it is able to find

5) Kaitholil George, *Consecrated life, Challenges and Opportunities* P. 172- 173

6) *Ibid*, P 173

countless new ways of bringing the newness of the gospel to every culture and every corner of the society.⁷

The love of consecrated celibates should include an intense apostolic spirit. That love should be manifested in lively desire, prayer and activity for the good of fellow humans. On account of their deep communion with Christ, they, like Christ, spend themselves for the benefit of others. They set aside their abilities, time, talents, work, the sweetness and goodness of their hearts all for the service of others. Their love is rich, lively, kind, merciful, heartfelt and ever ready to share in the joys and sorrows of fellow human beings. The religious who love for the love of God make divine love visible and experiential in the midst of the society. Their words, their messages, the way they comfort the sorrowing and wipe the tears of those in pain are Gods gifts and ways of expressing divine love ⁸. By the quality of their prophetic life and committed involvement in a variety of Apostolic fields namely: education, health care, social and Pastoral services consecrated persons offer integral pastoral care that caters for the needs of the human family in various aspects of their existence. As Consecrated persons what makes their teaching, nursing, counseling, social services etc different from their lay counterparts is the pastoral approach (mystical and prophetic dimension) they bring to their ministries. They minister to the totality of the human person. Their pastoral approach to ministry promotes the redemptive presence of God which makes love, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, good Christian marriage and family life, collaboration in ministry possible in the church and society. Mother Teresa of Calcutta in her pastoral care for the poor of the poorest in India asked one of the sick persons she served with so much love, “do you know Jesus?” In his response he made this remarkable statement, “I don’t know him but I know you.” Mother Teresa took care of not only his bodily needs but the spiritual and psychological needs as well. She was able to meet his greatest need, hunger for love which made him whole. The love he received opened his eyes to see Jesus in Mother Teresa. This is what motivated Pope Francis to charge Consecrated Persons to wake up the sleeping world ⁹ to the challenges of God’s ways godly truths and living.

⁷ Pope Francis, *witness of Joy*, Apostolic letter to all consecrated persons --- 2015:10

⁸ Kaitholil George, *Challenges and opportunities*, p. 23

⁹ Pope Francis, *Witness of Joy*.

Today more than ever there is a greater awareness of the need for catechizing and forming people called to vocation of marriage for their delicate and fundamental mission in the church and society. For this reason pastoral ministry to marriage and family life has always been to the church a main concern. All recent church statements on marriage and family life have directed Bishops and all pastors of souls to promote the sacred character of the married state and of catholic family living. It is not only the sacredness of marriage that is at stake, the advancement in holiness of the Christian Spouses and their children must be promoted. Thus the richness of God's love will be made manifest in their lives and they can successfully bear witness to the world of the fruitful love that exists between God and His people, between Christ, the Lord and the company of those redeemed by His blood.^{10 3} Speaking to the Bishops of the world in 1968, Pope Paul VI, said "we implore you to give a lead to your priests who assist you in the sacred ministry and to the faithful of your dioceses in devoting yourselves with all zeal to safe guarding the holiness of marriage, the better, to guide married life to its full human and Christian perfection. Look upon this mission as the most important work and responsibility committed to you"¹¹

Pope John Paul II emphasized the need for effective training of priests, religious and lay people for improved pastoral care for marriage and the family. He said *a shared progress (in marriage) demands reflection, instruction and suitable education on the part of priests, religious and lay people engaged in family pastoral work: they will be able to assist married people in their human and spiritual progress. "Familiaris consortio 34-VI)*

In His apostolic exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, the Holy Father Pope John Paul II placed the utmost emphasis on the pastoral care of marriage and the family. He stressed three main phases of marriage preparation and established appropriate criteria for each. The Pope also enjoined on the Episcopal conferences of the whole world to develop a preparatory course and enrichment courses for marriage and the family living structuring them in such a way that those preparing for marriage and those already married will receive not only intellectual understanding but also a real motivation to enter actively into the church community as conjugal witnesses to holiness¹²

In talking about the importance and need for effective pastoral care of families, Pope Francis in "Amoris Laetitia", a post-synodal exhortation on the family called for "a more adequate formation --- of Priests, Catechists and other Pastoral workers. " this will enable them offer rich and adequate pastoral care to those called to vocation of marriage and family life and will enable them to deal with the complex problems currently facing families.¹³

So far the church has stressed the need for pastoral care for marriage and family if the family is to effectively carry out her onerous and delicate mission in the church and society. The total and progressive nature of the pastoral care families require must take on a collaborative nature that involves all pastoral agents in the church namely, Bishops, Priests, religious men and women, other pastors of souls and the families themselves.

The contribution that can be made to the apostolate of the family by men and women, religious and consecrated persons in general finds its primary, fundamental and original expression precisely in their consecration to God.¹⁴ This is a simple way of saying that consecrated persons' pastoral care for Gods people is the heart of their calling. Their life of celibacy embraced for the sake of the kingdom of God makes them ever more available to dedicate themselves to the service of God and to works of the apostolate. Their presence, words and activities lift people's face towards God and His kingdom and bring so much life, peace and consolation to them especially those in difficulties. Hence the possibility for men and women, religious and members of secular institutes and other institutes of perfection, either individually or in groups to develop their service should families with particular

solicitude for children. They can also visit families and look after the sick; they can foster relationships of respect and charity towards one parent families or families that are in difficulties or are separated; they can offer their own work of teaching and counseling in the preparation of young people for marriage, and in helping couples towards truly responsible parenthood; they can open their own houses for simple and cordial hospitality, so that families can find there the sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection, and see the practical examples of lives lived in charity and fraternal joy as members of the larger family of God.¹⁵

¹³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, Post – Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the family, 2016 P. 139, n 202

¹⁴ Pope St. John Paul II - *Familiaris Consortio* No. 74

¹⁵ Ibid

Pope St. John Paul II concluded the section on pastoral care for families by religious with a passionate appeal to Superiors of Religious congregations saying:

I would like to add a most pressing exhortation to the head of institutes of consecrated life to consider always with substantial respect for the proper and original charism of each one the apostolate of the family as one of the priority tasks, rendered even more urgent by the present state of the world.¹⁶

3.1 THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY

The family is described by Akubue (2002) as a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption and consists of a single household. It is the smallest unit of the community, the primary, smallest, closest and warmest social institution. The family can be nuclear or extended.

The traditional African family is generally understood as the extended family as opposed to the western concept of a nuclear family (father, mother and children). The extended African family includes grandparents and what the western world calls uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins etc.

The Catholic Church understands the family as an irreplaceable and precious unit of social living. God is author of marriage from which the family springs. The “conjugal partnership” of Adam and Eve, created by the Almighty God, is the beginning and basis of human society, the first and vital cell of society. It is in the family that “new citizens of the human society are born.”¹⁷ It is also in the family that the formation and quality of each member of the society is promoted and nourished

¹⁶. Ibid

¹⁷. Lumen Gentium No. 11

In his Apostolic Exhortation, (*Familiaris Consortio*, 42) on the family, Pope St. John Paul II stressed the vital role of the family when he said, “the family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its’ foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service of life, it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of social virtues that are the animating principles of existence and development of the society itself.” The family, ‘the heart’ of church and society is far more than a legal, social and economic unit. It is the first church, a place where evangelization

begins. It is where members are given the basic orientation about who they are what they should be and do. In other words it is where God is introduced; faith, Gospel, cultural, social and spiritual values are taught and transmitted and members are made saints. The family's role is so vital in the education, formation and evangelization of its members that the second Vatican council fathers describe the family as the "domestic church"

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children form a family --- in creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution ¹⁸". Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation on the family, *Amoris Laetitia* states that, the marriage encounter relieves man's solitude, gives rise to new birth and to the family. Significantly, Adam who is also the man of every time and place, together with his wife, started a new family.¹⁹"

¹⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992:471

¹⁹ Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*

The family is the true measure of the greatness of a nation" so said St. Pope John Paul II. Not the size of the army, nor the gross national income, nothing but the quality of family life.²⁰ From the above sound teachings of the church on the family, it is clear that the family is a divine community made of husband, wife, children and other relations open to life and love²¹. The family is the "first school of life" and formation house, "the heart" of church and society, the power" house of love where members are called to encounter divine love and live out their vocation of love by sharing the gospel of love with all God's children.

3.2 CHALLENGES FACING CHRISTIAN FAMILIES TODAY

One of the major concerns of the church in the world today is Christian marriage, family life and how the church can adequately and effectively provide pastoral care to couples to assist them live their vocation of marriage and family life to the full in our ever changing and fast growing society. The following are some of the key outstanding pastoral challenges families face today:

3.3 Poor Catechesis:

Experience has shown that many Catholics are poorly catechesized and as a result are weak in practicing the faith in the family. Majority of adult Catholics in Nigeria learnt the Christian doctrine through the question and answer approach and rote memorization. The effect of this on the faith they profess as adults today are enormous. The aftermath of this mal-formed, faith, deficient faith and a weakening faith.²²

In addition to poor catechesis many families today have very little knowledge of the church's teachings on marriage and family life. Many young people marry without God's purposes in marriage and acquiring skills for developing strong, marital relationships. When the Church organizes seminars, workshops or retreats or provides "know your faith" ford to enlighten Couples or young people on the above vital issues, very few will avail of such opportunities.

²⁰ Pope St. John Paul II: in *The power to heal*, Peter Byrne. C. Ss. R. 2007:38

²¹ Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, Abuja 2015

²² Rowland O. Monica SSH, *Challenges to Faith- Forming in the family: the African experience in the family and the new evangelization*, Cath. Publication 2016: P.407

3.4 POOR AND INADEQUATE FORMATION IN CHRISTIANS FAMILIES

Many parents have a poor concept of formation and as a result the cannot give what they do not possess. Poor parent-child relationship, poor mentoring in the homes, family togetherness, and failure in family members performing their responsibilities in the home are out-shoots of poor formation in the family. Many parents are hardly home. They are too busy to be home to carry out their apostolate of presence, example, friendship, teaching and mentoring to the extent that today house helps, drivers, television stars, footballers, artists, actors etc become role models for their children and youth instead of parents and saints.

3.5 POOR MARRIAGE PREPARATION

Poor marriage preparation is one of the key formation challenges in families today. Most of the problems that marriages and families experience are traceable to the time before marriage²³. Many prospective spouses often make the mistake of rushing into marriage. They do not take pre-marriage classes seriously; hence they go into marriage unprepared.

John Burk, SMA a renowned author on Christian marriage aptly captured this reality well when he said, every one prepares for the wedding but very few prepare for the marriage. Scarcity of marriage formators and natural family planning instructors is another key challenge families face in the area of marriage preparation. The church needs to train more of these formators to help give effective formation to those called to the vocation of marriage.

3.6 “CULTURE OF LIFE”

Promoting the “culture of life” in a society that promotes “culture of death” in the name of population control and family planning is a big challenge to many families. While some families do all they can to promote the sanctity of marriage and culture of life by saying no to abortion, contraceptives and artificial means of birth control, some families see nothing wrong with these practices.

²³ Ossai Jude, *OSA Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. Paper Presented at Jos Archdiocesan General Assembly 24th - 28 August, 2015

3.7 RELIGIOSITY/CRISIS OF FAITH

The family as “domestic church” is the primary place of evangelization and parents are considered the first teachers and evangelizers of their children. All members are expected to encourage and support one another to journey together and grow in faith and spirituality. Unfortunately, the secular nature of our modern society characterized by endless or crowded activities and social functions makes it difficult for families to live a prayerful life that promotes meaningful encounter with God and balanced spirituality. This is what often leads to crisis of faith in the family.

Religiosity is another challenge that easily leads to spiritual paralysis. Some families are prone to spending long hours in prayer, observing vigils, attending meetings of numerous church organizations and yet their spirituality is skin-deep. There is a gap between faith and life in such families. Religiosity and crisis of faith are challenges that could easily frozen the

faith of families leaving them spiritually lukewarm. Such families should receive the sacraments without encouraging Christ or having inner conversion or transformation.

3.8 POOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Very little or lack of sexuality education can lead to misuse or abuse of sexuality in the family or society. Today stories of incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, same-sex unions, prostitution etc have suddenly become the order of the day.

There are other challenges such as loneliness, less demonstration of love and care, childlessness, breakdown in communication, absence of social outings, infidelity, poverty, ill health, effects of war and insurgency, cultural differences that tear families apart and rob them of the joy of loving and nurturing marital and family relationships. Other challenges which seem to throw many families into crisis are increase in divorce, individualism, negative effect of social media and globalization, unemployment, moral decadence, gradual erosion of some of our good traditional family values, migration to large and impersonal cities in search of work and wealth and use of artificial family planning methods that endanger conjugal love, matrimonial intimacy and unity.

3.3 CANONICALLY IRREGULAR “UNIONS” AND “MARRIAGES”

By canonical irregularities we refer to different forms of “marriage” and “unions” that are not in conformity with the canonical regulation of the church. Such unions and marriages include cohabitation, defacto unions, persons separated or divorced or divorced and re-married ²⁴ etc.

4.1 PRACTICAL WAYS IN WHICH CONSECRATED PERSONS CAN OFFER PASTORAL CARE TO FAMILIES

The most effective and urgent pastoral care consecrated persons can offer families is in the areas of education, catechesis and formative accompaniment. What those called to the vocation of marriage and family life need is adequate, effective and systematic formation for life. Such a formation begins at birth but the mistake many families make is to wait until three months to the time when their adult children are about to wed before they frantically scout for crash pre-marriage course or programmes to help prepare them for marriage. Such families would even go to the extent of pressurizing marriage formators to use “hit and run” approach in catechizing their children for such an important life commitment their children are called to. The truth about poor preparation for marriage is that many young people go into marriage today ill-prepared as discussed earlier on. This explains the high rate of divorce, lack of happiness and fulfillment, poor marital relationship characterized by selfishness, arrogance, unforgiveness, anger, secrecy, poor communication, impatience, lack of demonstration of affection, resentment, hurts etc associated with Christian marriage today.

A lot of Christian young men and women go into marriage without knowing clearly God’s purpose for Christian marriage as stated in Gen 2:18-24 – unitive purpose (companionship and friendship) and Gen 1:27-28 – Procreative purpose (procreation).

²⁴. Ibid

Worse still many of such young people do not acquire skills for building healthy and nurturing relationship in marriage that will enable them live marriage in Christ and promote the reign of God in marriage and family life.

Consecrated persons can provide a qualitative education, catechesis and formation to children, youth and parents that is God-centred, love- driven and value based. When this is done on the initial and ongoing formation levels, it will lead to deeper knowledge and living of the catholic faith, growth at all levels of human existence, self – actualization, greater commitment to living of marital vocation and one’s responsibilities in the family, church and society. Many spouses will live marriage and family life from the heart with inner conversion or transformation as its end result.

4.2. SCHOOL APOSTOLATE

Schools run by consecrated persons be made nursery for all vocations. As agents of evangelization they should give holistic education and formation that will equip and empower pupils and students to establish and maintain a worshipping , trusting and submitting relationship with God through Christ and healthy relationships with humans. Consecrated persons should “give them a kind of education that forms not only the mind but more importantly the heart.” The heart of education is the education of the heart ²⁵

Formation for the various vocations must begin and continue in the home/ family and all through life. The schools, church and society can build on that later.

²⁵ *Our Daily Bread*, Jan 14TH, 2001 Edition.

4.3 INITIAL FORMATION PROGRAMMES:

Consecrated persons should participate actively in organizing initial formation programmes such as marriage preparation programmes at parish levels to help equip the young with theology and spirituality of marriage and family life, and skills for building strong and nurturing relationship in marriage. Through such programmes young people going into marriage can be helped to keep their love and passion for each other alive.

As stated by Pope Francis, the young in the early years of marriage be helped to see marriage as a lifelong project and themselves as “unfinished” products, needing to grow, a work in progress. He further said, the greatest mission of two people in love and marriage should be to help one become respectively, more a Man and more a woman. They should be patiently and in a spirit of understanding keep “forming ” one another at every stage of the marriage. This would help them to build a solid foundation for marriage and family life and a mature union and a future of the marriage together. ²⁶

4.4 MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT PROGRAMMES – (service and maintenance of Christian marriage)

Today there is a good number of couples who are married for many years and have not had opportunities for “servicing” their marriages regularly. The marriage or families of such couples could apparently appear to be physically together and alive but in reality they could be emotionally and spiritually, crippling or dying.

Programmes for servicing of marriage are in great demand today. Programmes such as “Couples dates/ dinner nights”, “show me your spouse”, “regrateable discoveries after I do” etc have led marry a couple to renewal of love in marriage and family life. Such programmes provide opportunities for ongoing formation of couples – couples are helped to discover themselves and the joy of early years of their marriage; service their marriage, grow in deeper understanding of their vocation of marriage as well as celebrate Marriage and family life.

When these programmes are organized by consecrated persons in collaboration with priests and marriage formators whether at parish or Diocesan levels can easily turn Christian homes into healing homes or heaven on earth.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 2016, no 217,218,220,221

4.5 FORMATIVE ACCOMPANIMENT

Formative accompaniment is a very vital aspect of formation consecrated persons can offer families. A lot of couples get hurt, confused, feel used or betrayed, frightened, discouraged, lonely, not loved enough or not given enough attention to the extent of losing a sense of the presence of God in their lives and marriages. Such persons need consecrated persons to listen to them share their pains, hurts, doubts, woes, confusion, and help them process these hurting experiences and live through them gracefully. This is where spiritual direction and counseling services are handy for such troubled spouses especially when they are given on regular basis. In some extreme or deep psychological cases they service of Psychotherapist could be employed to help spouses with serious emotional and psychological needs.

4.6 TRAINING OF MARRIAGE FORMATORS AND NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING INSTRUCTORS

Training of marriage formators and Natural family planning instructors is an area of great need for effective pastoral care for families in Nigeria today. There is need for more consecrated persons to be trained in this area to enable them function comfortably and effectively. The few that have been trained are doing well and their pastoral efforts are yielding positive results already in some Dioceses in Nigeria.

Other formative programmes such as retreats, workshops and seminars on marriage and family life can go a long way in strengthening families and helping them to remain strongly bonded and blended.

4.7 HOME VISITATION

Home visitation is one of the effective means consecrated persons use to bring home to families joy, divine mercy and healing. Lay people are always happy to be visited by Consecrated persons and Priests especially in moments of need. They often feel loved, cared for and accepted by the Church as a result of such visits. Home visitation is the only sure way of getting to know families. Special effort should always be made by Consecrated persons to visit especially the sick, aged and lonely families.

4.8. RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS AND FAMILY APOSTOLATE

This article is a wake up call to Superiors of religious congregations to respond to the loud cry for family apostolate to rescue the collapse of marry Christian families. They should consciously help their members to come to terms with the need for involvement of religious in family apostolate.

Superiors should invest interest, time, personal and resources into family apostolate to give adequate, efficient and total pastoral care to families. They should ensure that formation in pastoral ministry is given to their members both at initial and ongoing levels. Opportunities could be given to some of their members to avail of the new evangelization training in Issele uku diocese or other programmes offered elsewhere, for instance the OLF Sisters' family alive training in Jos, Nigeria etc.

CONCLUSION

Pope St. John Paul II, addressing African families, underlined the fact that no group plays so decisive a part in the future of the world as the family. The family, the first place of worship, self actualization, encountering love and spreading the gospel of love, a suitable place for grooming good citizens and saints is today being plagued by challenges and problems that weaken her in carrying out her role effectively and optimally in the church and society. The church calls on all agents of Evangelization especially Consecrated persons to give urgent attention to pastoral care of the family. Pope Francis calls on religious in particular to wake up the sleeping world. Religious by virtue of their religious consecration, charisms, institutions talents and educational qualifications have all it takes to wake up families in faith, love knowledge and joy of the gospel of marriage and family life. It is my prayer that consecrated persons will respond to this call with a new passion for family apostolate. They should open the doors of their hearts and communities to welcome families, teach, form and accompany them as friends, teachers, formators, prophets, spiritual directors / guides to God, wholeness and holiness.

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deeply spiritual woman, a motivational writer, a teacher, Retreat giver/ Conference speaker. Sr Gidado has been involved in Family Life ministry for many years and is currently the Coordinator of her Congregation's *Family Alive Centre*, Sha'aka village, Jos, and the National Sister Adviser to the Ladies of St Mulumba, Nigeria.

- 1) Isidielu wenceslus CMF, Editor in Chief, the Insight To bear witness to the earth .
- 2) Pope Francis, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Family, *Amoris Laetitia*, 2016: 3

¹⁰ Kaitholil George, *Consecrated life, challenges and opportunities*, 172-173.

¹¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humane Vitae*, 1968, No. 30

¹² Gbuji, A.O. *The Pastoral care of marriage and family life in Nigeria*, Mumbai St. Paul's, 2006