



Catholic Charismatic Renewal International Service

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR CHARISMATIC COMMUNITIES LEADERS

Building healthy communities

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Embracing Families and Young People

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Part 1

What do we want to do in this session?

Two parts: The first part is given by me – a member of a smaller community, Jerusalem, which is a member of a group of communities, the Sword of the Spirit (SotS).

The second part will be given by Tod, from the perspective of a large community, Alleluia in Augusta, Georgia (USA).

I will start by presenting myself and my community – who we are –, and I will share from our experience some things we have learned.

Then I will switch to the aspect of intergenerational community: families and young people, and what we have learned about it in the group of communities we belong to, the SotS.

I. I am a member of the Jerusalem community in Belgium

I talk from a West-European perspective.

Jerusalem is a Belgian community founded by Card. Leo Suenens in 1977, some 45 years ago; together with some American brothers and sisters (Steve Clark, Ralph Martin, and others) who were collaborating with him at the time.

Our covenant states that “As a community we will welcome each person that the Lord sends to us, rich or poor, whatever his culture, language, nationality of race. Jerusalem, which is a catholic community, wishes to be open to Christians of other traditions who will be recognized as full members and be able to count on our respect for living according to their faith. We want to live in that unity for which our Lord prayed, guided by the ecumenical directives of the Catholic Church.”

And indeed, today Jerusalem is a small community (around 100 people, children included), remarkably diverse, with brothers and sisters from 15 countries, from Austria, Italy, France, Holland, Scotland..., but also from India, the Philippines, Egypt, Russia, US, Canada, Lebanon, Mexico, Congo... and some Belgians...

Members ranging from 2 weeks old to 96 years old.

We have 3 official languages, Dutch, English, French, translating everything, ...



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We have families with 3, even one with 4 generations.

We are mainly Catholic, but we have also some Evangelicals, Russian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox among us.

How is this possible with only 100 people? I don't know.

But the simple answer: it is.

Because that's our call. It just happens. The Lord named us Jerusalem – the place where according to Acts 2, “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia... and so many other countries are gathered”.

The Lord calls us to be family, a sign of unity, in the midst of a divided and highly secular country in which family values which we hold dear are trampled upon.

That's who we are.

Some of the lessons we've learned.

The most important one is

1. My community is my family.

-not people I have chosen; not necessarily my friends. Many of us have quite diverse cultural habits; *but they're my family*.

Actually, for me Jerusalem is the best Christian community in the world. Why? Because it's **MY community**. It's the community I am called to. Called to serve, rejoice, cry, sometimes to suffer, where I have abundant life, brothers and sisters, a mission, you name it, I have it.

Jerusalem community is a perfectly imperfect community.

I hope you are living in the best Christian community of the world too. The one you are called to.

2. It's not easy, it takes effort.

-we have to get to know one another; we want to make that effort.

-why do we make this effort? Because the Lord has brought us together. It's his plan, not ours.

-yes, we have to be working at it, but



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3. There's grace for our call, for your call.

Brothers and sisters, you who live in community, you who lead community, whatever situation you are in, there is grace for your call. The Lord is with you. Grace abounds. Even if you don't feel it, grace abounds. Problems, crises, conflicts serve a purpose and -with the Lord- bring forth fruit.

4. We have gone through a couple of crises in these past 40 years. Living in highly secular environments keeps you awake.

But: we have more become who we really are.

Bonds of unity have grown.

"How can we survive this?"

Stand in your call so that we can grow into deep, deep bonds of unity, through suffering, human frailty, weakness, incomprehension. **Persevere!** The Lord is faithful.

5. Our community belongs to an extended family, together with other covenant communities -both large and small- called SotS. Time and again they have helped us to keep on track, caring for us, praying for us, as we do for them.

We stand with one another as (again) a truly diverse family, with communities from Costa Rica to Turkey, to New Zealand... and closer by, from the UK, Germany, Portugal... Some having Spanish, Polish, Tagalog, German, Armenian as their native language... all of this makes our life richer.

Ps. 133: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity".

II. I will switch gears now, and talk about an aspect which we think is crucial, an integral part of who we are called to as a community, and that is, intergenerational community.

A. Intergenerational Community

1. What do we mean with the word 'intergenerational'?

When we speak about **intergenerational** Christian community, **what we have in mind** is a community that consists of three generations (or more) living together the same way of life.

Not just a community that passes from one generation to the next, but one that spans generations at a given time.

The Christian community is a family, and that family includes children, the young, the middle-aged, the old; it includes generations.

Saint Paul writes in Ephesians 5:31-32 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh". (Gen. 2:24) 32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church..."



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Paul tells us that the aim of creating Adam and Eve was not only marriage and family (Gen. 1:28 Be fruitful and multiply) but *the ultimate aim* is *Christ joined to his Bride, the Church*: a people, one body, *one family* consisting of young and old.

2. Intergenerational community is something God has intended and honored from the beginning.

Intergenerational community is normal.

In fact, it's so much part of our human nature that I don't think anyone would have reflected on it much until recently. It's not so long ago that different generations lived together and cared for one another. And this is still the case in some parts of the world; but in our individualized Western culture not anymore.

The change originated in part in changes in education and employment. And ideology and commercial interests further fueled it. Many of us live in societies that don't support the family as God intended it.

But God has the intention to work with a people of different generations. We see this throughout the Scriptures. I will pick out a few places:

-The People of Israel: We see God's intention in the building of the people of Israel, as the first stage in his plan of redemption, after the Fall. It began with the call of one man, Abraham, but one man not in isolation: one man who is intended to be **the father of a multitude**.

Genesis 17:5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for **I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you...**

The promise and the covenant are not simply with Abraham, but with his offspring, the future generations. And **with more than one generation at a time** (which we may forget in our day and age).

-We see this when -later on in the story of Israel- Moses speaks to Pharaoh:

Exodus 10 8-9: So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God; but who are to go?" And Moses said, "**We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters** and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD."

3. The New Covenant

In the NT we see the same principles at work. **Now the notion of family is extended by grace and spiritual adoption: we are a spiritual family, which consists of the entire range of ages and generations.**

God **continues** to work through a people, even in the redemption of mankind. Jesus of Nazareth has a people, a genealogy, forebears, and a culture.

From Jesus, this family embraces men and women of every race, and language.



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As Mary jubilates in the Magnificat: “His mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.”

God builds on the natural factors of age and sex, which now form the Christian community, just as they shape and form natural family.

4. Men and women, young and old have characteristic roles, strengths, and weaknesses

Men and women, old and young, adults and children, **contribute in diverse ways** to the goodness and fulness of the life of a Christian community.

We see this in several places in the NT, where Timothy and Titus address the different generations (young and old) separately. (Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine. 2 **Bid the older men** be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. 3 **Bid the older women** likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, 4 and so **train the young women** to love their husbands and children, 5 to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited. 6 Likewise **urge the younger men** to control themselves).

Generations living and serving together is good, it's part of God's plan.

How rich is a life lived together, as psalm 148:12-13: says **'Young men and maidens together, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord!'**

Let me now switch to these 'Young men and maidens.'



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B. Young people

In this individualized, neoliberal, postmodern society family is under pressure; family values are threatened from all sides, you know it.

How do we respond?

Community itself is a response.

Teaching about marriage, family, raising children is a response.

Support groups for men and women are a response.

Parents desire to raise their children to become Christians deeply rooted in faith, to become disciples of Christ. That is often times **our greatest challenge** and we need to use our full arsenal of responses.

And **the community is committed** to helping parents care for their children, helping to raise them in the Lord, especially when they progress to puberty and young adulthood.

But... how do we do this? It's not easy, to say the least.

In our group of communities, the SotS, we have tried, struggled, failed, made mistakes... but after 50 years or so, we have learned from some of our successes and especially from our failures.

Let me share with you what we have learned.

Every young person needs to mature through distinct stages of life, from childhood to adulthood, and a SotS community seeks to support this process through providing a **Youth Bridge**.

What's that? It's a practical help, an approach a community puts in place to help children reach the goal of becoming faith-filled adult disciples of Christ.

This bridge goes from childhood to early adolescence, to mid-teens, to university aged till the young men & women are established in life.

Our strategic priority is the age group of 14 to 22, the age in which the influence of the parents has waned, and the young person starts making his or her own decisions.

Our concern: to help people reach the goal of becoming disciples of our Lord JC.

What helps youth across the bridge?

Our aim is that in this youth bridge there are:



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-**powerful conversion moments** that move youth to the next level of conversion (the lock principle), from “**my life is for me**” to “**my life is for Christ.**”

How? Through Yes retreats (14-17 in Europe), Boys camps, Mission years, Kairos Conferences (250 young men & women), Summer households (living together for a month), Mission Trips (serve abroad as a group) and the like.

-**community youth programs tailored to each age span**, giving to each the right environment, soil, and help, so they go from “**I got to keep my options open**” to “**it’s what God called me to.**”

-**peer friendships**, often with young people from other communities, because youth cannot make it across the bridge alone. It’s about lasting friendships versus loneliness. It takes one from: “**it’s my parents’ community**” to “**it’s our community.**”

-and connected to that is **giving them positions of responsibility and service in mission** so that they can find their **place of contribution**. Young people need to be needed.

-**listen** to them. Let’s be attentive to them, and to **what they are saying for our time**.

Parents have a vital role in this.

-By taking care of their Christian family life: e.g., having dinner together at least 5 times a week, praying together as a family, having a good ‘family’ communication...

-By supporting the Youth Bridge: send your children to high power events – support the local programs – promote good peers – encourage service opportunities.

A community needs all the good we can get from the young, their energy, zeal, hope, strength, input.



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C. A word about the Aged

There's a lot to say about the aged but time doesn't permit it. They have a special place of honor; a unique role in the life of the community; we owe them gratitude and we have obligations to them.

As the Holy Father said recently: "The elderly are ... living signs of the goodness of God who bestows life in abundance. Blessed is the family that honors the elderly!"

We esteem them for their wisdom, value them for passing on the tradition, are grateful for their past contribution, and we acknowledge that the young themselves will also one day will again be dependent on the care of others.

The command to honor parents is not simply, nor perhaps mostly, about obedience, but also returning care.

Jesus on the cross providing for his mother.

A short word about

D. Intergenerational Community and Mission

In the times and circumstances in which we live, **being an intergenerational community is in itself part of our witness and our mission**.

My conviction is that being an intergenerational community is going to grow in prominence and will give us the opportunity to make an important contribution to the church in the coming decades.

There is a lot of interest in finding ways to connect the generations, to live in a harmonious way as a people, to build traditions.

In part, this is due to a huge need among young people today.

They feel the pinch of high divorce rates, the loss of family customs.

Young people have a need for relationships of substance with older people.

It's also a topic of interest because a lot of parents find they are without resources or wisdom in this area.



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No set of parents on their own has the resources necessary to pass on a tradition: a tradition is communal.

And it takes long-term stable relationships.

In communities we have unique potential for **gathering wisdom** in this area.

Let's learn from one another. That's why we are together here.

We, like many others who are attempting to live community, have learned over time, as we have moved from being a predominantly single generation to an intergenerational community, to strengthen relationships between the generations, and we **are still learning**.

For us, being intergenerational is a test of spiritual genuineness.

To be truly intergenerational is to live as old and young, and in-between, in a godly, harmonious, fruitful way.

In all of our communities, let us find treasures in one another, take delight in one another, learn to esteem the youthfulness of the young; to venerate the wisdom and faithfulness of the elderly; and to take full advantage of those in their middle years.

End:

Actually, we are all grandparents, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers, family in community.

To all, but especially to the grandparents I say: PRAY! INTERCEDE!

Grandparents: We are the inter-generational generation par excellence!

We have had grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers and mothers and we have sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters. We're in between. Pray for them!

It is my conviction that we don't pray for our families, our kids, grandkids, our community will not be intergenerational and.... after some time.... will not be at all.