

ECHOES

The Council of the Family



16-22 September 2019

Martillac - FRANCE





The Council of the Family, organized by its Permanent Committee, (members) was held from 16 – 22 September in Martillac, France on the theme “Let Us Dare To Be and Create Family Today”. The leadership teams of the five vocations of the Family were present at this event.

The seven interactive days, started with an opening celebration, and the program comprised the following elements:

An evaluation of the impact of the last Congress of the Family 2015

Deepening our identity as a charismatic family

“Family, in the intuition of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles” – an exploration of the Scripture texts chosen for us by the Founder

A trip to Bordeaux in the footsteps of our Founder – in view of celebrating the bicentenary

Discernment of the calls heard by the group and taking up commitments as Family today,

To deal with information on divers subjects and the closing ritual.

The assembly started with the two coordinators; Eithne HUGHES (Apostolic Group) and Jean Louis DESPEAUX (Priest Associate) giving a general introduction to the session, presenting the theme and the objectives. Then followed the introduction of the members of each vocational group by its leader.

Opening prayer:

The thematic opening prayer expressed our Founder’s dream of one big FAMILY. The story of a 2-century-long journey began with one single heroic man in the person of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles and 3 young but daring women around him; today our Family has grown, to be a big TREE, with firm and deep roots in God and in the heart of the society in which it is planted. The reality of our growth as Family was depicted in the metaphor of a mighty oak tree coming from a tiny acorn, and with enough patience,





we let what seemed almost an impossibility become a reality.

The memory of our journey in becoming a big family over the past 200 years – a family with 5 vocations is a dynamic one. We begin to recognize that the fruits we enjoy today are only by the gift of God.

To express this above concept, symbols were brought to the prayer corner from the five vocations: a pot, black soil, sand, pebbles and water. These elements were prepared for seeds (acorns) to be planted by all members as a sign of growing together.

Keynote address given by Ana Maria ALCALDE - the Superior General of the religious institute.

She began her talk connecting to the theme of the session “daring to be and create family” and emphasizing the challenge before us - ‘not to remain with the memory of the past but, on the one hand to stay connected to the roots, which give life to “The Holy Family tree” and on the other, to look at the society of our time, which has gone through great changes since 1820.’

The second point highlighted the fact that our Founder, aware of the rapid changes in the society of his time and inspired by God, began the Association as a “new form” in response to the needs of the society.

“Today, we are going through profound changes, which are affecting all cultures, societies, religions, and creation... When the conviction grows that we are moving towards a new civilization, we have to ask ourselves, how can we respond together to the new emerging civilization?”

Ana María also specifically addressed the participants, saying, “We are the Council of the Family of P.B. Noailles, gathered together in collegiality, and responsible for the whole Family. It is a privileged space in which we can experience ourselves as a ‘whole’ and as a ‘part’ - that we exist in communion and accept that we are different.”



She continued saying, “We are ‘A FAMILY’. We take that for granted. If we do not stop to think about what we are from time to time, we run the risk of losing its deep meaning and we remain at the level of words without realizing the enrichment.”

Comments expressed in the assembly in response to Ana Maria's words:



Realizing and seeing a new a society which emerges in today's civilization should be the main reason of our existence as a Family; to continue our journey into our 3rd century - this responsiveness needs to uphold and guide our decisions, all these can be done only with the working of the Spirit.

Being accountable to our own vocations

The Founder's dream is alive today, seeing the number of our membership - 4,128! This is an invitation to renew our commitment, deepen the desire to belong to A FAMILY with a common mission; this consciousness requires us to explore, to question, to become conscious of our charism – which is at the heart of our ongoing mission.

Being member of this Family is not a title but a task – the mission we have to live must be shared, the present and the future of the FAMILY must be understood and lived by each member.

Grouping:

The process included inputs, personal reflection, small group sharing and plenary sessions. There were three main categories for different types of group sharing - continental, language and vocational, used according to the needs of the process. In the plenary, chances were opened to interactive conversation on some essential issues, with a view to focusing energies on communal discernment on the specific areas.



According to the basic objective of this council; **“to give an account”**, an assigned time was given to each vocation group to echo the impact made in the groups, in living the commitments of the last Council of the Family 2015.

After listening to the sharing from each vocation group, of their lived experience, the participants worked in small groups and brought to the assembly the identified **strengths** and **weaknesses**.

Strengths:

Perception of Family: Sense of being Family - respecting the participation of the Family as a whole; aware of living each one's particular vocation yet belonging to and growing as a family - opens us to moving together as 'a part' and 'whole.'

Common Formation: Being serious about our common formation, moving forward in the fields of listening, discernment and active involvement

Communion and prayer: increased awareness of being in communion, living the same mission and same spirit and united in prayer

Active communications: Social media, Family publications and blog

Being aware of present day challenges:

Emergence of the youth, seeking meaning on the one side and being distracted by various avenues open to them. Hence the need to accompany them. Ways to involve in present day challenges, and respond to them as family

Weaknesses :

Lack of discerning together as family to respond to today's world
Lack in decision-making process, involving all the vocations for communal discernment

Poor initiative by all vocations – more initiative comes from the Apostolic group, other vocations tend to depend on Apostolic Sisters

Insufficient Communication - not sufficiently developed among different vocations and within every vocation
Lack of knowledge, lack of sharing information

Poor autonomy of some vocations at the level of formation and finances

Tapping young energy:

Lack of openness ... to welcome the young and to move with them from where they are, not having trust in them, also being unable to attract them.

Lack of renewal - no increase of vocations - due to a wrong idea of discretion regarding the consecrated secular life.

Visibility of Holy Family:

The Holy Family is not well known - we are slow in making ourselves visible; the Holy Family is hidden in certain parts – almost anonymous members in the society where we live. We hesitate or are shy to speak of ourselves – our Charism and Family.

FOLLOWING THIS, THE BICENTENARY TEAM WAS ALSO INVITED TO SHARE ITS OWN EXPERIENCE.

This team, including members from each vocation group, was created by the Permanent Committee, in view of Bicentenary celebration in 2020. The membership consists of Winifreda WASALATHANTHRIGE (Apostolic), Pedro AVILA (Coordinator), M^a Pilar SERRANO (Consecrated Secular), M^a Dolores SANZBERRO (Contemplative), Anne Marie SIBILLE (Lay Associate) and Fr. Jerosin KATTAR (Priest Associate).



M^a Pilar SERRANO, one of the team members who was present in the assembly shared her experience, speaking about the process of intense preparation organized by the team for the years 2016 - 2018.

Some key elements of their engagements were;

Meeting of all the 6 members for the first

time in Rome in 2016, where they agreed upon a 3 year plan.

- ◆ Logo
- ◆ Bicentenary prayer
- ◆ Choosing the theme
- ◆ Creation of Blog, PowerPoint on Martillac, history of each unit and of our family
- ◆ Humanitarian project (youth for change)
- ◆ Annual Reflections based on a chosen theme

In addition, Pilar expressed that the spirit of oneness thrived among them during the whole of the 3-year journey together. Though at times communication and progress of work took a long time, yet, as a team they were able to accomplish all the tasks entrusted to them.



On the second and third days the assembly moved to the two major reflections; Living as a charismatic family today, Being and creating Family. These two sections were prepared and presented by Micheline KENDA (Apostolic) and M^a Pilar SERRANO (Secular)

Living as a charismatic family today:

The above subject was symbolized by fire; "called to light a fire at the heart of the world"

Micheline began to explain what charismatic family means, quoting from the Apostolic letter of Pope Francis to all consecrated persons, on the occasion of the year of Consecrated life. It says "...around each religious family, every society of Apostolic life and every secular institute, there is a larger family, a "charismatic family", which includes a number of institutes which identify with the same charisma, and especially lay faithful who feel called, preciously as lay persons, to share in the same charismatic reality..."

Today when we discover more strongly that the charismatic family has its particular value in the mission of the church,

what can we say about ourselves belonging to Holy Family of Bordeaux, born out of this same kind of vision 200 years ago?

The Charism, the gift that God has given to the church through Pierre Bienvenu Noailles, is the Association. The term "Association" encapsulates the vital force that has engendered us and which inspires us as members: a charism that is family striving towards communion.

To live in a charismatic family means placing the charism at the center. 'Let this fire of charism burn within us and set the world ablaze' was the concluding tone to the entire subject.

Being and creating Family:

The above slogan was chosen for this Council of the Family. M^a Pilar SERRANO presented this subject to the assembly.

Dealing with "being family" she focused on having God as the centre of everything as we are the family of the children of

God. We are called to follow Jesus who was totally centred on God and God's mission. Our being is limited and we need to sustain ourselves by going to the Source every day. Nourished and animated by the Spirit we are united to the other members of the Family thereby Communion is created. Each one's being enriches the other and forms community.

Aiming towards this, we are invited to follow the perfect Family in the life of Trinity where total communion of love is lived in the diversity of Persons and Holy Family of Nazareth, the gentle image of the Trinity, living a communion of life and love.

Concentrating on "creating family", she connected it to poverty, planet and formation. Jesus, who being rich, became poor in order to enrich us by his poverty. Thus, his good news was to the 'poor', which included the oppressed, the marginalized, the elderly, and the sick.



On the fourth day, Maria Jesus AMUNDARAIN (an apostolic sister from Spain) presented a reflection on "FAMILY, IN THE INTUITION OF PIERRE BIENVENU NOAILLES."

This area focused the spiritual experience of the Good Father, which is entrusted to us as a treasure. This is a sacred ground from where God has manifested himself to our Family and continues to do so.

The little ones and all those who are considered and treated as the least in society.

Creation, which is God's gift, is good and beautiful. But we see how our planet, our common home is being destroyed. It is our responsibility to care for it, using it for the benefit of all with great respect and gratitude.

If we are to live as true children of God, we need common formation – a formation that should touch people's hearts – the sacred space where everything begins, where God is present.



The Good Father, in his works never failed to give the first place to scriptures. The series of biblical texts that the Founder has chosen to accompany his writings depict the plan of God to create a Holy Family.

She also mentioned that the Founder tries to explain what should be the behavior, the attitude that one needs to have, to belong to the Holy family, highlighting the way of life adopted by Jesus. We

are to live the spirit of God Alone like Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and have the aim of extending and strengthen the faith, like first disciples.

At the end of her input, the participants were invited to take a few hours in silence and prayer with the Biblical texts of the Founder. After personal reflection and prayer, they came together to share their insights during the general assembly.

Walking in Bordeaux following the footsteps of our good father:



On Friday 20th, all had the great pleasure of spending time with our Founder by walking in his footsteps. Together with members of the council of the family, some Apostolic and contemplative sisters joined to have this time out. This pilgrimage was more than just a historical tour

but a part of the bicentenary celebration.

To walk in the footsteps of our Founder, is to make ourselves identified with the same spirit of him whom we closely follow. It is to assume humbly his attitude and reconsider our lives in the light of the values he himself lived.

In the Cathedral of St. André

Fr. Pierre Meunier (Priest Associates also the Administrator of the Cathedral of St. André) explained to the group, all historical past of the cathedral, its architecture and the famous historical events hosted in the cathedral. He also touched on some incidents of our Founder's life connected to the cathedral: his baptism, during his time as a priest, and then as the Founder of the Holy Family of Bordeaux.



12 rue Saint Onge:

During Founder's time, this place became an important boarding school for girls - the college of Our Lady of Loreto. The school is now the college of the Holy Family. There are no longer Sisters working in it but they are still on the board of governors.

Two reasons to specifically mention this place – it was a moment of recalling happy memories of the past, enjoying the nature while refreshing ourselves with lunch but more important was that the group joined in prayer to mark the event, which took place in New York, 20 September 2019.

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old prophetic climate activist, with other young activists led the biggest youth climate action ever. This march was to get the attention of the leaders as they arrived in New York for the UN climate summit. During the Council of the Family, urgency of responding to climate change was a strong call, so the pilgrim group connected themselves with this great event by keeping two minutes silence and joining in prayer, in solidarity with the young people fighting for the future of our beautiful planet.



33 Rue Paul Louis Lande

Then we continued walking to **rue Paul Louis Lande** and entered no 33. It was where the General Administration had been from 1855 to 1957 and where the founder lived and died. At present, it is a hostel for young male and female workers and students, and is called "The Leaven".



The director of this Centre Mr. Marc ROBERT, and his wife warmly welcomed us; he was eager to explain the present condition of this hostel, as it had been renovated with necessary facilities to accommodate more members, exclusively poor middle-class students and workers. He invited us to visit specially

The Church of St. Eulalie:

The Good Father was a curate here from the time he left the seminary in August 1819 until the middle of 1823.

After a great day of experiencing Noailles's sights in Bordeaux, we had a meaningful Eucharistic celebration at St. Eulalie church, celebrated by our priest Associates. Together with the group, Sisters from Bordeaux and Martillac communities, well-wishers, people who continue serving the world having some connection with Holy Family joined this service. All expressed their joy of this union where all five vocations were represented.

September 21 2019 - the day was to discern the calls heard by the group and taking up commitments. Ana Maria ALCALDE and Pedro AVILA facilitated the Assembly.

The process followed was:

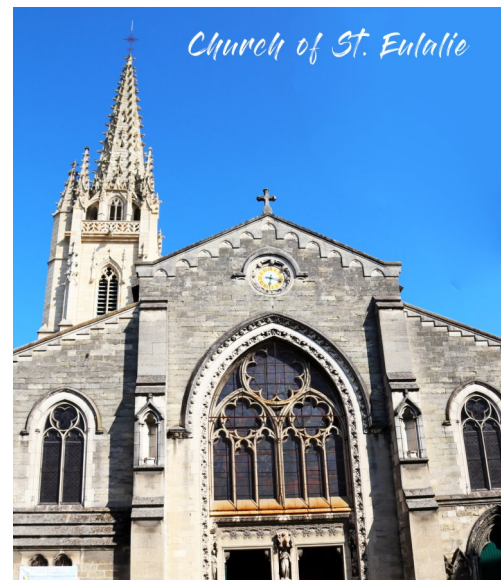
First, presenting of the drafted synthesis of the calls shared by different groups to the Assembly, There were 6 major calls.

- Charism
- Planet
- Projects
- Communication
- Formation
- Youth

Then, a time of conversation, to decide on how many calls to be chosen as vital, to be focused until the next Council of the Family. A majority of 17 among 26, agreed to go with 3 major calls as commitments of this council of the Family.

the renovated areas. It was indeed a well-equipped, comfortable and pleasant place to live.

We were pleased to know that this house continues the spirit of the Founder, in reaching out to the youth in need and is blessed by its service.



A- Charism B - Planet E - Formation

After agreeing upon the commitments, they moved to work on a plan of action - every language group accepted to deal with one call. The module of the action plan was explained by the facilitators.

- Spanish group - Charism
- French group - Planet
- English group - Formation

After planning out the goal, objectives and the responses to WH questions (who, where, whom, when and how) , they came back to the assembly with enriching interventions.

Final day:

The first part of the last day was dedicated to continue the previous day's work; to finalize the calls and the action plan, which each group worked on.

Next, the Assembly discussed two important issues: creating an **International Intervocational team** to be responsible for common formation, and the possible formation of Intervocational community or communities. Ana Maria invited the participants to share their opinion.

Suggestions:

- ◆ International Intervocational team
Need to have common formation, as well as management of common projects
- ◆ The intervocational team will be named by the Permanent Committee.

Intervocational community

After much discussion, the assembly decided the way to implement this plan

is to first experience it in different units at local level.

Also, the members spoke of creating "an Identity Card" – an informative flier/booklet to introduce the Association of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. Though there are some already in use there is a need to update and provide clear information as we begin our third century. This responsibility was given to the Permanent Committee with the consent of whole group.

After this, Ana Maria briefly shared some news and the present situation of the Cause of the Beatification of our Founder.

In the afternoon, time was allocated to share about the forthcoming General Chapter of Apostolic and Contemplative Sisters, also a brief sharing on present reality of Martillac – as a renewal center to all who belong to the HF of Bordeaux.



Closing ritual of the day:

First, the opportunity of hearing Ana Maria's closing address, in which she re-emphasized "our aim of having this meeting is not an end, though this is our last day, our task is not finished. It is only inaugurating a new step. With greater awareness of our responsibility as Council of the Family, we are called to rekindle the 'fire', to live the mission of the Family".

Referring to the 3 commitments made, she said that they point to the way forward for the coming years. She put a challenging questions asking - "what fire are we going to kindle in the family to live "Family"?"

Quoting the words of the Founder Ven. PBN, - "gratitude is the memory of the heart" - she invited all to be grateful to what God has done during the past 200 years and these days of the Council of the Family.

The first part of the Final Prayer held in the assembly hall, included a brief sharing of lived experience throughout the

assembly. Time was taken for each one to note down what they take home as their personal calls, contributing to implementation of the commitments that were encouraged during this assembly.

Silent Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in the Monstrance of the Eucharist Miracle, was the crowning point of the closing ritual. From the reception hall, the group went in procession towards the Chapel, carrying their personal Commitments. As they entered, they placed them at the tomb of our Founder. At the end of the prayer, representatives from each of the five vocations read out the commitments common to all.

A resounding "Magnificat" echoed through the chapel as, with renewed vitality, the leaders of the Council of the Family turned once more towards their role in their own context, gifted with this experience of dialogue, discernment, and commitment in our Charismatic Family, and ready to bear witness that communion is possible for this Family on mission.



Some Photos to remember ...

The Hermitage...



Coming soon...



"Daring to be and Create Family"

The Council of the Family Meeting Point 6 will be out in the next few weeks...

On the way to the Hermitage...



St. Eulalie...



Adoration Chapel...



INFO/COM Service