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# THE OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN IN THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

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The family-outreach branch of the Light-Life Movement



FR. JAN MIKULSKI

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## INTRODUCTION

The understanding and full grasp of the role of a priest-chaplain in the Domestic Church movement has developed over the past few decades, starting with the first Oasis family retreats offered by the Venerable Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki in 1973 in Kroscienko by river Dunajec, as well as first Domestic Church circles which formed in Poland as the fruit of the experience of summer Oasis retreats and Evangelization meetings organized on behest of Fr. Blachnicki by Sister Jadwiga Skudro and Krystyna Kegel in dioceses of the families who attended the summer retreats in the years 1973-74.<sup>1</sup>

In the 81<sup>st</sup> issue of the *Letter to family communities*, Sr. Jadwiga recalls that during the initial development stage of the Domestic Church, it was the priest-chaplains who would lead many of the circles since the animator couples had not yet been sufficiently formed. *“The Movement owes them quite a lot. I think the Movement would not have grown if not for the deep understanding of the charism and the generous help of these priests. However, as time progressed and the animator couples became mature and able to take on their service, things changed. The animator couples became responsible for the running, the administrative duties, and for the fidelity to the charism of the Movement.”*<sup>2</sup> It was then that the function of the priest-chaplain in the circle changed, but it had not lessened.

Just like in the case of forming married couples, the Domestic Church benefited from the experience of the international movement of married Catholic couples, Equipes Notre-Dame (END), in defining the role of a priest-chaplain in a circle. END, many years before the Vatican II Synod, recognized a unique path of **marital spirituality** which inspired the specific formation of the married couples in the Domestic Church. The discernment of this new path was made possible by the collaborative partnership of the founder of END, Fr. H. Caffarel, and four married couples. In 1938, Fr. Caffarel was approached by four French couples who desired to enter a path toward holiness through their spousal love and life. They asked Fr. Caffarel for guidance and explanation of what this path to holiness looked like and what it depended on. The answer they received should guide us towards a primary understanding of what the relationship between the chaplain and animator couple should be: *“I don’t know how to explain this to you right now, but I would like to suggest a partnership, a collaboration: you – as the married couple – will supply your experience, I – as the priest – will supply my theological knowledge.”*<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent discoveries of the collaboration of these couples and Fr. Caffarel were confirmed by the Church with the rich documents of the Second Vatican Council, as well as post-Conciliary teachings, specifically those of Pope John Paul II. The Council brought a new appreciation for the role of laity in the Church and reminded the priests

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<sup>1</sup> J. Skudro, “Priests in the Domestic Church”, LDK 81/1999, pg. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pg, 51

<sup>3</sup> “The role of priest chaplain in Domestic Church circle”, 1985

that, “(f)or this reason they should work fraternally with the laity in and for the Church and take special care of the lay persons in these apostolic works..”<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, specifically in his apostolic exhortations *Familiaris consortio* and *Christifideles laici*, as well as in many of his other writings, referred back to the Second Vatican Council’s concern with the laity and emphasized the apostolic vocation and mission of the laity in the Church. In a special way, he highlighted the vocation to marriage and family life, which has “*identity as the primary social nucleus, and its basic role in society, so that it might itself become always a more active and responsible place for proper growth and proper participation in social life.(...) For this reason the duty in the apostolate towards the family acquires an incomparable social value. The Church, for her part, is deeply convinced of it, knowing well that “the path to the future passes through the family”(Familiaris consortio 48).”*<sup>5</sup>

In 1985, Sister Jadwiga Skudro wrote a pamphlet entitled *The function and office of the priest chaplain in the circles of the Domestic Church*. The pamphlet was based on many years of END expertise as well as the shared experiences of the priests and laity in the circles of the Domestic Church. It outlined the guidelines and good practices for priest-chaplain and animator couple’s collaborative service on behalf of the Light-Life Movement families. Ten years later, Fr. Marian Kaszowski, who was then the Domestic Church national chaplain, wrote a new edition of the document devoting more space to the particular function of the chaplain in ecclesial family communities, including the Domestic Church community.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent years of work in circles brought new and deeper understanding resulting in other documents which addressed the reality of the charisms of the Light-Life Movement and its family branch, the Domestic Church.<sup>7</sup> Based on those documents and experiences this edition attempts to detail the function of a chaplain in a Domestic Church circle, with special attention given to the mystical exchange of gains which occurs during the collaborative work of the priest-chaplain and couples in the movement. This exchange, flowing from the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony, is possible because the meetings of the circle or any other retreat gatherings are formed in the spirit of the words of St. Paul, “*Carry each other’s burdens*” (Gal 6:2), and thus there is a mystical meeting of two sacraments which bestows graces to both the married couple and the priest who serves as a Domestic Church chaplain – a spiritual adviser and a guardian.

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<sup>4</sup> Vatican II, *Apostolicum Auctositatem* 25

<sup>5</sup> *Christifideles Laici*, 40; per *Familiaris Consortio*, 42-48

<sup>6</sup> M. Kaszowski, *The function of a priest in ecclesial family communities*, Przemysl 1996, pg. 27-44

<sup>7</sup> On March 23, 2004 Bishop Wiktor Skworc, KEP Delegate for the Light-Life Movement, approved and adopted *The Rules and Bylaws of the Domestic Church*, which describe the principles of operation of the Domestic Church, a family branch of the Light-Life Movement. In March 2005 the Polish Bishops Conference adapted and approved the Organizational Charter of the *Diakonia of Light-Life Movement*.

Introduction to the American Edition of “The Office of the Chaplain in Domestic Church” by the Reverend Ruben J. Buller  
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***“The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’...At that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit.” (Luke 10: 17, 21a)***

I recall this passage came to my mind after I was involved with the Domestic Church Movement in the United States for some time. The joy of the Lord when the disciples realized that only in His Name was found salvation was a joy that I began to understand. “They understand and they want to try!” Since then, many other priests have experienced the same type of joy in Domestic Church. It is the joy of seeing committed married couples striving to grow in holiness together.

How each priest became involved with Domestic Church is a different story, but there are elements that each share. For me, the story is about wondering how to connect beyond the church building. Having been ordained for about five years, I thought I had figured out the rhythm of priesthood. Everyone said that the first five years were challenging. They were. Between learning a schedule of the day, the unexpected phone calls in the middle of the night, and the tragedies that I witnessed; the obstacles were many to only name a few. One of the greatest challenges I had as a priest was wondering if people were really trying to live the Message of the Gospel and strive to conform to the Church and her teachings. Yes, there were the exceptional people who attended daily Mass, came to every parish event, and were the first to volunteer for anything they could. What about the other ninety-nine? After moving to a new assignment, a friend of mine who had been in seminary formation, had discerned a call to marriage, and was now married and working fulltime in lay leadership in the Church approached me to ask if I would consider assisting with a new movement in the Diocese of Lake Charles. I had been involved with countless other movements. They ebbed and flowed, and many times went out when the new fad washed onto the shore. Would this be different? I agreed and asked what I needed to do to prepare. His response was, “Nothing. You can just show up to the meeting, eat, listen, and be present.” Skeptical, I went to my first Domestic Church Circle meeting. He was right! The simple brilliance of the movement is found in the brilliantly simple way that it is conducted. Several couples and a priest gather monthly, eat together, share joys and concerns, pray together, and then speak honestly of their daily commitments to the Lord. I just sat, listened, prayed, and offered my experience as I shared my commitments which were the same as the commitments of couples in Domestic Church. Ten years later, I must note that there has been no washing away of the movement, but rather a commitment of its lay leadership to strengthen the movement, share their experience, renew their commitment, and share what has strengthened their marriages to the priests who they invite into their lives and marriages.

There is an active striving to live out the call to marriage and family life that comes from the daily striving of the seven commitments. Any person who has been involved with Domestic Church knows well the seven commitments: Daily Personal Prayer, Regular Reading of Sacred Scriptures, Daily Spousal Prayer, Daily Family Prayer, Monthly Spousal Dialogue, a Rule of Life, and, at least once a year, participation in a Formation Retreat. As the *Domestic Church Rules and Bylaws* remind us, these commitments are not an end but the means to the end. The end, as we know is the universal call to holiness that comes through our Baptism (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1268).

The role of the priest-chaplain is a necessary and vital element of the Domestic Church movement. It is necessary because it keeps the couples involved in the circle connected to the Church. As priests, it is our role to be co-workers with the episcopacy (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1562). Thus, the presence of the priest at circle meetings helps to ensure the presence of the Church with the priest as the cooperator with the local bishop. The presence of the priest is vital because he brings with him the teaching, worshiping, and governing aspect of the Church (*Catechism*, 1592) for the holiness of each member of the circle.

The particular role of the priest in the circle meetings becomes clearer when one remembers the beforementioned and recalls the unique work of Domestic Church. The role of leading and governing the circle is the responsibility of the animator couple. Domestic Church is chiefly a lay movement that is enhanced by the presence of the priest who sets the boundaries of Church so that the life and family of each couple can grow in grace. Analogously, the priest should always recall that he is first and foremost a father. As a good father, he sets the boundaries for his children to play. It is the duty of the animating couple then to set the course of the adventure as long as the boundaries are not violated.

The holiness and fidelity of each circle priest is something for which he must strive for personally as well. Considering the seven commitments mentioned earlier, what of these commitments are things that we as priests cannot do? We should delve always into the Word of God. We must have our own personal regimen of prayer. We should enter the Eucharistic Sacrifice daily coupled with the Liturgy of the Hours praying with the Universal Church in the one prayer. We should dialogue with the local parish and our bishop regularly so that we know the voice of the Church. We need to have a Rule of Life that keeps us grounded and is moderated through regular spiritual direction and Confession. Lastly, we are required by the law of the Church to go away with the Lord yearly for our own holiness. These are the commitments that we bring and speak about honestly to our circle. It reminds me of the adage of an older priest that I knew who said that the holiness of a parish depended upon the example and dedication of the parish priest. Should we be embarrassed to let our circle know that we pray or celebrate Mass? Can we not admit our own struggles with obedience, but also how the experience of obedience brings about understanding through our dialoguing with our bishop? Do we recognize the joy and peace

that comes from the days when we are alone with the Lord in our annual retreat? These are our commitments, and these are ours to share for the complimentary call of the priest and the circle couples to grow in the holiness that God has given us through our individual living out of the sacraments of service that He has called us to live.

The document that follows has been translated from Polish into English to help guide the priest-chaplain of each circle in his role. At this stage, it has been literally translated and some of the thoughts are strictly for the Polish Domestic Church such as the central retreat house references and the dialogue with the overall Life-Light Movement (which does not have representation here in the United States). Life-Light and Domestic Church base their documents on the teachings of the Church especially found in Sacred Scripture, papal teachings, teachings of the Church Councils, and the wisdom of the saints, especially Father Franciszek Blachnicki, the founder of Life-Light and the Domestic Church Movement in Poland. The differences that we can see illustrated in the document that follows are due to the years that Life-Light and Domestic Church has had in Poland. The movement in the United States is young (only ten years old as of 2021). The wisdom that we receive from our brothers and sisters, and our brother priests, in Poland is something that we should treasure and strive towards. For this reason, we have made the deliberate choice as a National Circle to leave the document as is as translated from the fine work of Father Jan Mikulski. Would that we will grow in the way that Life-Light and Domestic Church has grown from the 1950s until today here in our own native United States!

The gift of Domestic Church fulfills a longing that many priests have expressed, namely: Is my work or ministry bearing any fruits? In the intimate dialogue of commitments and the understanding of the formation, we enter a great adventure to become saints. Like proud fathers, we can see our children play joyfully as they grow further in love with each other and the Lord. Saint Paul masterfully expresses this in Ephesians 5 when he speaks of the love of husbands toward wives and wives toward husbands. He ends this section of his letter by calling it a great mystery “in reference to Christ and the Church” (Ephesians 5: 32). We are given a great privilege to see this in our individual circles.

May the grace sustain us as we enter into this great adventure and may God preserve us all that when we come to our final breath, we may be what we have been created to be, married and priests, saints for Jesus Christ.

Praise to Him for forever!

## 1. Theological-pastoral aspects of the collaboration between the priest-chaplain and the married couples

In the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II asserted that, “Without priests the Church would not be able to live that fundamental obedience which is at the very heart of her existence and her mission in history, an obedience in response to the command of Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt. 28:19) and “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19; cf. 1 Cor. 11.24), i.e.; an obedience to the command to announce the Gospel and to renew daily the sacrifice of the giving of his body and the shedding of his blood for the life of the world.”<sup>8</sup> In these words of the Holy Father we discover the deepest motivation of priests who enthusiastically involve themselves in different types of pastoral care, including very specialized ones, with the view to attend to and serve the lay ecclesial movements. These movements are inspired by the Holy Spirit not only for the good of a particular people, but also for the good of families, different social groups, as well as the whole Church. In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II urged, “One should therefore recognize and make good use of each one in relationship to its own characteristics, purposes effectiveness and methods-the different ecclesial communities, the various groups and the numerous movements engaged in various ways, for different reasons and at different levels, in the pastoral care of the family.”<sup>9</sup> The point is that the Church should answer the call of Christ to evangelize not only by the efforts of the hierarchy, but also with the apostolic endeavors of the lay faithful, especially the actions of that smallest unit of the Church, the family, with its identity described in the documents of the Second Vatican Council as the *domestic Church*.<sup>10</sup>

The Council Fathers affirmed, “Whether the lay apostolate is exercised by the faithful as individuals or as members of organizations, it should be incorporated into the apostolate of the whole Church according to a right system of relationships. Indeed, union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule His Church (cf. Acts 20:28) is an essential element of the Christian apostolate.(...) The hierarchy should promote the apostolate of the laity, provide it with spiritual principles and support, direct the conduct of this apostolate to the common good of the Church, and attend to the preservation of doctrine and order.”<sup>11</sup>At the turn of the last millennium, John Paul II stressed that the ministerial priesthood of Christ should always remain the ideal and repeat itself in all period and times in history, however, simultaneously, “the life and ministry of the priest must also “adapt to every era and circumstance of life.... For our part we must therefore seek to be as open as possible to light from on high from the Holy Spirit, in order to discover the tendencies of contemporary society,

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<sup>8</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 1

<sup>9</sup> *Familiaris Consortio*, 72

<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11

<sup>11</sup> Vatican II, *Apostolicum Auctositatem*, 23-24

*recognize the deepest spiritual needs, determine the most important concrete tasks and the pastoral methods to adopt, and thus respond adequately to human expectations.*"<sup>12</sup> The above statements of our Church give us a basis for asserting that the ministry of the priest on behalf of different ecclesial lay movements and communities of the Church cannot be seen as a marginal or insignificant responsibility, but should become an essential part of the priestly service, since it is as important as the other ministerial duties in the parish.

## 1.1 The complementarity of the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony

In the already mentioned exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* we read, "*The Church is indeed the body in which Christ the head is present and active, but she is also the bride who proceeds like a new Eve from the open side of the redeemer on the cross. Hence Christ stands "before" the Church and "nourishes and cherishes her" (Eph. 5 :29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church.(...) in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the head and shepherd, the priest stands in this spousal relationship with regard to the community. (...) In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love toward the Church, his bride.*"<sup>13</sup> The place where this tremendous call can be realized and gain a particular significance is the priestly ministry on behalf of married couples joined together in family movements like the Domestic Church. The heart of this ministry is the accompaniment on the road to holiness. Thanks to the pastoral care, married couples and their families receive spiritual aid and encouragement in discovering and fulfilling the basic duties which flow from the received sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Marriage. In turn, the priest is given a witness of spousal love lived and realized in the context of marriage and family. Thus, he receives a particular and specific guidance in conforming himself to Christ's spousal love toward the Church, to which he is called to by his vocation to the priesthood.

Therefore, the mutual effort and collaboration of priests and married couples in the Domestic Church community forms a ground where we can witness the good fruit of the complementarity of the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony which share a nature of communion as one of the marks of their sacrament. "*(T)he priest minister is the servant of Christ present in the Church as mystery, communion and mission. He is a servant of the Church as communion because - in union with the bishop and closely related to the presbyterate - he builds up the unity of the Church community in the harmony of diverse vocations, charisms and services.*"<sup>14</sup> The married couple, through the dynamics of their Sacrament, are continuously animated and supported in their spousal and family love and that leads them to a *deeper and stronger communion* which is the base of their authentic

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<sup>12</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 5

<sup>13</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 22

<sup>14</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 16

community of persons.<sup>15</sup> Hence, as the Sacrament of Marriage by virtue of being a sign of Christ's spousal relationship with His Church, enables the authentic mutual love of the couple patterned on Christ's love for His Church, so does *"the Sacrament of Holy Orders by virtue of the consecration to a bridal union with the Church provide the grace for the threefold mission of Christ to be made more fully present as the communion of God and His people."*<sup>16</sup>

The complementarity of the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Matrimony also shows itself through the charisms of both sacraments. Both, the priest and the married couple, receive in their sacrament a special gift of the Holy Spirit which enables them to build a Church community – in the parish or in the family respectively. *"In priestly Ordination, the priest has received the seal of the Holy Spirit which has marked him by the sacramental character in order to always be the minister of Christ and the Church. Assured of the promise that the Consoler will abide "with him forever" (Jn 14:16-17), the priest knows that he will never lose the presence and the effective power of the Holy Spirit in order to exercise his ministry and live with charity his pastoral office as a total gift of self for the salvation of his own brothers."*<sup>17</sup> For this reason Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state.(7) *By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus, they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God."*<sup>18</sup> Therefore, both the priests and the married couples fulfill their missions truly and effectively when they remain in communion with the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is a seeding for a *marital spirituality* which ensures a secure building and formation of marital unity. Analogous to this is the *priestly spirituality* which grows from the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Between the two spiritual paths there are marked differences, nonetheless, some aspects that flow from the Sacraments of Initiation are shared. *"However, it must be mentioned that the differences between the priestly and marital charisms have to be seen in unity/harmony of those graces in service to the building of the entire Body of Christ – the Church. The Church, as a community of communities, grows through and thanks to the rich bridal-hierarchal-charismatic structure, wherein both the bridal and hierarchal nature are also the charisms of the Holy Spirit. And just as one cannot switch one body part with another, since all body parts have their unique duty/task to fulfill, just so, it is not possible to dismiss or substitute a particular spiritual path and charism with another."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Per Lumen Gentium, 18

<sup>16</sup> M. Kaszowski, *The function of a priest in ecclesial family communities*, pg. 11

<sup>17</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, #8

<sup>18</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 48

<sup>19</sup> M. Kaszowski, *The function of a priest in ecclesial family communities*, pg.16n

## 1.2 The priest as a sign of Christ and the Church

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* points out that in ecclesial ministry of each priest, “it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, act in persona Christi Capitis.”<sup>20</sup> So then, when the priest proclaims the word of God – it is Christ who speaks through him; when the priest administers the sacraments – it is Christ who performs the work of salvation through the sacred liturgical symbols; when the priest gathers around himself a community of faith and love – it is Christ that bestows the Holy Spirit on those gathered and like a shepherd leads them to a safe haven. All this is done with the power of the Sacrament of Holy Orders which models the priest after Christ “by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for his Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in his triple office of priest, prophet, and king.”<sup>21</sup>

The presence of Christ in a priest should not be understood as an insurance against all human weakness, such as a desire to rule, error, or even sin. The power of the Holy Spirit does not give an equal guarantee to all actions of the priest. “While this guarantee extends to the sacraments, so that even the minister’s sin cannot impede the fruit of grace, in many other acts the minister leaves human traces that are not always signs of fidelity to the Gospel and consequently can harm the apostolic fruitfulness of the Church.”<sup>22</sup> This is why John Paul II wrote in his book *The Gift and Mystery*, “Christ needs holy priests! The world today cries for holy priests! In our increasingly secularized world, only a holy priest can be a lucid, unambiguous witness to Christ and his Gospel. Only in this way can a priest become a guide and teacher for people on their way to holiness, and people – especially young people – wait, look for such a guide. A priest can be a guide or a teacher only as much as he can be an authentic witness!”<sup>23</sup>

A priest who is an authentic witness to Christ becomes a distinct and clear sign of Christ within the community of families, a sign that cannot be treated with indifference. Sometimes, he is a “sign that will be spoken against” (Luke 2:34) but most often he is for others the final reference in times of doubt and uncertainty in accordance with the words of Jesus: “Whoever listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects me. (Luke 10:16) Many years ago Fr. F. Blachnicki wrote, “a priest is a privileged representative of Christ. Through the sacraments, he personifies Christ – Savior. Through his participation in the meetings of a circle, he guarantees a particular presence of Christ and His Church, and

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<sup>20</sup> CCC 1548

<sup>21</sup> CCC 1581

<sup>22</sup> CCC 1550

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *Przesłanie – i wy badzcie radosni*, Krakow, 2005

*thus guides the community to a more profound growth and a fullness of life in the understanding of its identity as a member of the Church, Mystical Body, whose Head is Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup>*

Without the mediation of a chaplain, the *marital spirituality* would fail to develop, and the spouses would be deprived of the supernatural and sanctifying presence of Christ in their community of love. Through the sacramental covenant which the couple enters into by virtue of the shared common priesthood of the faithful - which in turn is made possible by the sacramental priesthood – the spouses and their family create the smallest unit of the universal Church: *domestic Church*. Without minimizing the role of the spouses as those who *minister to the like*,<sup>25</sup> the priest, in unity with the local Chancellery of the Church, also ensures the communion of the family community with the whole Church. This assurance concerns three most important matters, those of: sound teaching, life of grace, and hierarchical structure.

The priest, united with Christ through living His Word and the teachings of the Church’s Magisterium, as a co-worker of the Bishop who is the guarantee of orthodoxy in faith, and as his vicar, ensures that the truths of the faith transmitted by the couples who serve in positions of responsibility/authority within the Domestic Church align with the teachings of the Church. This is because, *“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>26</sup> St. Peter spoke about this, when he said, *“no prophesy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation”* (2 Peter, 1:20).

The presence of a chaplain in the Domestic Church circles is also important because it ensures a life of grace for the families. *“The priestly liturgical-sacramental ministry reaches its full effect only when the married couples and the families, fervently and with trust, through their cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit, contribute to the growth of the many fruits of God’s love. Priestly sacramental ministry is the consequence of the ministry of the Word because the latter “leads to the sacraments and Christian living”. All attempts to limit priestly ministry – John Paul II reminds us – to only teaching or preaching wouldn’t take into account the fundamental condition of this ministry, since the sacraments are administered with the proclamation of God’s Word and thus strengthen the faith and augment it through grace.*<sup>27</sup>

The presence of a chaplain in communities desiring to build in their families a *domestic Church* is required by the very nature of the universal Church, which relies on hierarchal structures on the will and command of Christ. The Head of the Church – Jesus

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<sup>24</sup> F. Blachnicki, *Animator couples and priests – chaplains in the Domestic Church community*, in “Domestic Church – letters to family communities”, edited and published by Light-Life, Krakow 2003, Ch. 2, pg. 377n.

<sup>25</sup> *Humane Vitae* 26

<sup>26</sup> CCC 85

<sup>27</sup> M. Kaszowski, *The function of a priest in ecclesial family communities*, pg.23

Christ, by entrusting the keys to the kingdom to Peter, entrusted him with the authority over the entire apostolic body and the whole Church. Today, the apostolic body is made of the bishops who work side by side with the priests to further their apostolic mission. In this way, the presence of Christ is assured for all of God's People. The connection with a priest – a representative of the diocesan bishop – who remains in hierarchic communion with the apostolic body and its Head, gives the family community a guarantee of full union with the entire Church.

The theological aspects of the meaning of a priests' presence in different family communities outlined above give sufficient justification for the need for chaplains in the circles of the Domestic Church. This presence is unique because of the mentioned mystical communion of the two sacraments – Holy Orders and Matrimony – as well as because of the rich charism of the Domestic Church. The gift of the Holy Spirit enables couples to surrender their lives to God's light on the path to affecting the fullness of marital spirituality, which consequently leads to taking responsibility for their vocation as it refers to their family and marriage, but also their apostolic effect on their parish community.

## 2. Preserving the charism of the Domestic Church

From the very beginning, Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki saw the charism of the Domestic Church as a gift to Christian married couples, one that supported even the most simple and basic tasks which flowed from entering into the Sacrament of Marriage. The goal of the Domestic Church formation, stated quite clearly by the founding members of the Movement, was the attainment of the Synodal vision of the Christian family, so:

- ~ the fortification of the dignity of married love, established by Christ in the image of His unity with the Church, which has its source in God's love<sup>28</sup>;
- ~ the discovery and encounter of the family as the "sanctuary of domestic Church", in which love between the members and shared/united prayer play a crucial role<sup>29</sup>;
- ~ creating in the family a good condition for the experience of a family catechumenate, which mainly consists of the parents (through example of both words and actions) becoming the primary messengers of faith on their children's path towards mature faith<sup>30</sup>;
- ~ embracing of the apostolic functions/tasks of the family towards the parish community for which the Domestic Church feels responsible<sup>31</sup>.

The attainment of the above formation goals requires a mature cooperation between chaplains and those in position of responsibility in the Domestic Church during both, the circle meetings and all different formation retreats. In both cases, the cooperative work has different aspects, however, it should always stay in service to and true to the charism of the Domestic Church and the entire Light-Life Movement. The experience of those doing formation in circles speaks to the many good fruits and blessings, in marital unity as well as in the local and universal Church, that result from the fidelity to the charism.

### 2.1 The essence of the Domestic Church formation

In the course of implementation and fulfilling of the vision of the Second Vatican Council in regards to family, the Domestic Church engages in the formation of married couples as outlined in a program *based on Catholic Church teachings, with special focus on Vatican II documents, as well as the formational directives of the Light-Life Movement and Equipes Notre-Dame. DC pays special attention to **marital spirituality** or growing in holiness with your spouse. It seeks to assist sacramentally married couples in building a true marital unity. This marital unit is the soundest and best environment for faith-filled raising of children.*<sup>32</sup> The charism of the Light-Life Movement is enriched in this phase of formation of

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<sup>28</sup> Per *Gaudium et Spes*, 48

<sup>29</sup> *Apostolicum Auctositatem*, 11

<sup>30</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11; John Paul II, *Przeslanie – i wy badzcie radosni*, pg. 56

<sup>31</sup> Per *Apostolicum Auctositatem*, 26; *Ecclesia in Europa*, 90-94; *Redemptoris Missio*, 71-72

<sup>32</sup> *DC Rules and Bylaws*, Light-Life, Krakow 2004, nr. 9-10

the married couples with that special gift of the Holy Spirit, which enables them to together, in their marriage as well as family, surrender their life to God's light.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Letter to family communities*, Fr. Blachnicki wrote that, "*The Light-Life Movement, which is a movement of evangelization and formation, desires to serve and help Christian parents and Christian families in fulfilling all their duties of evangelization and family catechumenate.*"<sup>33</sup> It accomplishes this by enabling and implementing:

- ~ *God's Word into life, so that it becomes Word of Life,*
- ~ *everyday prayer, so that it becomes a constant opportunity for a personal relationship with Christ, our Savior,*
- ~ *Sacramental life, especially in the Eucharist,*
- ~ *witnessing to a personal encounter with Christ in marriage, in family, and to others we come in contact with,*
- ~ *an attitude of service in our Church community, each according to their unique gifts.*<sup>34</sup>

*The acceptance of the charism of Light-Life Movement within DC happens in particular in and through:*

- ~ *formation of members in the spirit of unity of "light-life",*
- ~ *leading them to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior (The Guideposts of The New Person),*
- ~ *striving towards a full and responsible participation in the life of a local Church (ideal of the New Community),*
- ~ *building and propagation of culture based on Catholic principles (ideal of the New Culture)*
- ~ *effort and service towards the goal of moral renewal of the nation, especially through*

*The building of unity (communio) in marriage and family is facilitated by the following formation elements – **commitments** adopted from END:*

- ~ *everyday personal prayer (Tent of Meeting),*
- ~ *regular reading of Scripture,*
- ~ *everyday spousal prayer,*
- ~ *everyday family prayer,*
- ~ *monthly spousal dialogue,*
- ~ *rule of life (systematic work focused on growing in virtue of self, marriage, and family)*
- ~ *participation, at least once a year, in formation retreats.*

*The integration of the above commitments into life leads to a closer individual relationship with God, as well as an overall increase in holiness and spiritual maturity of the married couple. These elements are not a goal in itself, but a means to an end. The adherence to the*

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<sup>33</sup> F. Blachnicki, *Evangelization and catechumenate in the family*, in *Domestic Church*, pg. 73

<sup>34</sup> *DC Rules and Bylaws*, nr. 11

*commitments happens through joint spousal effort, as well as with the support offered by other couples in the circle (the idea is that small communities are needed in pursuit of holiness).*

***The Circle** is formed by 4-7 married couples, optimally from the same parish, desiring to help each other in forming their family into domestic Churches. The couples gather in the name of Christ – for Him, from their love of Him – so that they can jointly find and remain in Him in everyday life. The Circle should be a realization of an ideal Catholic community and be a source of renewal in individual marriages. Thus, it is necessary that each couple attends monthly meetings.*

*Within DC, the family is the primary place of formation, and the circle is the primary element in DC organizational structure. It is an environment for formation and evangelization that serves the family and is a particular “laboratory” of marital spirituality.*

*One of the couples in the circle, called the animator couple, bears the responsibility for its formation, spiritual life, and the formational-prayer meetings. The doctrinal and spiritual help of a priest moderator – a spiritual counselor and guardian - is necessary for the proper function of a circle.*

*The circles work in yearly cycles. Monthly meetings occur from September to, and including, June. Formation retreats occur during the entirety of the year, but especially during summer months. There is a special place and function for the 15-day retreats.*

***Monthly circle meetings** consist of the following:*

- ~ **exchange/sharing of life** (sharing of events, joys, and worries during the meal);*
- ~ **prayers** sharing of the Gospel or other forms of encounter with the Word of God, - Rosary;*
- ~ **formation** sharing, conducted in a prayerful atmosphere, of the progress or issues with the daily, weekly, and monthly commitments, bearing in mind the goal of spiritual growth, - discussion of new formation topic.*

*The meetings are held once a month in the homes of different circle couples and should not exceed three hours in duration. The sharing of successes or struggles with the commitments is an important part of the evening and is always to be led by the animator couple. The extent to which the couples and the circle will develop spiritually is greatly dependent on the fulfilment and fidelity to these commitments.*

*The meeting can include Church hymns appropriate to the theme discussed or the liturgical season. Any organizational issues of the circle or the movement should be discussed at the end of the meeting.*

*For a new circle, the service of an animator couple is given by a piloting couple. This couple leads the circle through the evangelization stage, introduces aspects of marital spirituality, and explains the methodology behind the work of the circle and the movement. The duration of time the piloting couple is expected to serve after the initial period of*

*evangelization is around one year.* <sup>35</sup> During this time, the aid of the chaplain – mentor and guardian of the spiritual health of the circle, who with his presence assures the proper course/progression of this crucial formation step - is indispensable. At the same time, his presence allows the couples to cultivate in themselves an attitude of responsibility for the Church, not only in regard to their family or domestic Church, but also in regard to the local and universal Church.

## 2.2 The character of the collaboration of the chaplain and the animator couples in the Domestic Church

The guidelines of the collaborative work of priest-chaplains and animator couples were set out by the founder of the Light-Life Movement early. In the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Letter to family communities* we read, *“The chaplain should consider and give regard to the viewpoints of mature laity, especially in the area of their specific competence. The family community movement is a lay movement. There are responsibilities entrusted to lay people not only in the area of organization and stimulating growth, but also and above all, in the area of that “spiritual adventure” which all of them desire to experience. The chaplain, who serves as a spiritual counselor, has to recognize the responsibility the animator couple has for the spiritual life of the circle. Still, he should – without encroaching upon their jurisdiction – always serve the couple with advice, encouragement, focus them on things that matter, and correct when needed. His help in the pursuit of holiness and striving toward God has to be by all means brotherly, however, at times even exacting and demanding.”*<sup>36</sup>

Many of the Church documents contain an exegesis of Second Vatican Council’s thoughts on the lay participation in the common priesthood, with special attention given to the concept of *specific competence* of the laity in the area of responsibility for the Church. In the past decades the Church has expressed many and varied thoughts on the dignity of laity and its responsibilities in the Church, with attention given to the need to form appropriate relationships between the clergy and the laity. On one hand Vatican II stressed that, *“(t)he laity should, as all Christians, promptly accept in Christian obedience decisions of their spiritual shepherds, since they are representatives of Christ as well as teachers and rulers in the Church”*. On the other hand, it reminded, that the shepherds should, *“willingly employ their prudent advice. Let them confidently assign duties to them in the service of the Church, allowing them freedom and room for action.”*<sup>37</sup>

In his exhortation *Patores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II wrote, *“(t)he ministerial priesthood conferred by the sacrament of holy orders and the common or “royal” priesthood*

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<sup>35</sup> *DC Rules and Bylaws*, Light-Life, Krakow 2004, nr.12-17. The process of pilotage of new circles is described in a separate manual, entitled *Evangelization and pilotage of new Domestic Church circles. Meeting outlines* (formation materials), Kroszienko 2004

<sup>36</sup> F. Blachnicki, *Animator couples and priest-chaplains*, pg. 377

<sup>37</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 37

*of the faithful, which differ essentially and not only in degree, are ordered one to the other - for each in its own way derives from the one priesthood of Christ. Indeed, the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received.”<sup>38</sup> Through his work with the families in the Domestic Church, the priest-chaplain has a special opportunity to be, “a “brother among brothers,” a member of the People of God, joyfully sharing in the gifts of salvation (cf. Eph. 4:4-6) and in the common duty of walking “according to the Spirit” in the footsteps of the one master and Lord.”<sup>39</sup>*

The opportunity for a priest to work with the laity within the framework of the communities in the Domestic Church has to be on one hand considered as a great good for both the priest and the laity, and on the other hand, it has to be seen as a specific and actual means of fulfilling the main ministerial duty, “*of the new evangelization (which) calls for the involvement of the entire People of God, and requires a new fervor, new methods and a new expression for the announcing and witnessing of the Gospel. This task demands priests who are deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ and capable of embodying a new style of pastoral life, marked by a profound communion with the pope, the bishops and other priests, and a fruitful cooperation with the lay faithful, always respecting and fostering the different roles, charisms and ministries present within the ecclesial community.*”<sup>40</sup> The formation of married couples in the Domestic Church is an explicit answer to the call of the Holy Father for embarking on new evangelization, which has need of priests, spiritual guides for the spouses and the family, so that with their help, the parents can become reliable mentors for the children on their spiritual journey.

The witness of a priest who, in his life, fulfills the general vocation to holiness rooted in the sacrament of Baptism, is necessary in the ministry of salvation of the Church. In the context of cooperative work with the Domestic Church families, for who the small community of the circle becomes a kind of a school of marital and family holiness, this witness is particularly needed and not to be underestimated. It becomes a sign of the priest taking on a vital and necessary obligation for, “*the radicalism of the Gospel (which) represents a fundamental, undeniable demand flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with him brought about by the Spirit*”.<sup>41</sup> John Paul II points out that this radicalism of the Gospel is an obligation for all Christians, without exceptions, hence especially for the priest who becomes a spiritual director and guide for the community of families in the circle. Clear and strong witness in this area is expected from the priest, since only by pursuit of this path can he become an

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<sup>38</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 17

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 20

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 18

<sup>41</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 27

unequivocal and legible sign of Christ, the Head and the Shepherd, and fulfill the duties of a shepherd in the Domestic Church community.

### 3. The priest's role and function during various DC formation stages

The basic formation in the Domestic Church communities, which is also true of formation in the entire Light-Life movement, proceeds along the following stages: evangelization, catechumenate, and mystagogy. The goal of evangelization is “to lead to a religious awakening through a personal encounter with Christ and accepting Him through faith in the Holy Spirit as personal Lord and Savior”.<sup>42</sup> One of the fruits of evangelization is the desire to join a community of disciples of Christ. In the case of married couples, it leads to the decision to join a Domestic Church circle, where formation is offered that is appropriate to their stage of catechumenate. What follows is the recognition of marriage as the path toward holiness and, with maturity, the acceptance of their apostolic ministry in the Church. “Oasis III degree corresponds to the period of mystagogy in the program of the catechumenate. Its theme, *Ecclesia Mater – Mater Ecclesiae* begins the time of a deeper awakening into the mystery and life of the Church – community”.<sup>43</sup> During this time, the formation will help with a good discernment of one's place in the Church, the local and the universal, as it prepares for taking on a specific diakonia.

#### 3.1 The priest's role and function during the period of evangelization and pilotage

The Domestic Church formation of married couples begins with evangelization which can be experienced by partaking in a variety of evangelization retreats given by the Domestic Church in retreat centers either away or at the parish. The retreats based on the manual *Evangelization retreats for the family*<sup>44</sup> are worth mentioning and recommended. These are organized either in a retreat house setting or in a parish, but in a way that is reminiscent of the retreat house experience. The first option allows for a more contemplative space and can lead to a deeper experience for those attending, as well as the team presenting the retreat. The second option allows for a larger number of attendees from the parish and creates a good opportunity for giving witness to the charism of the Domestic Church in front of the whole parish community. If the retreat happens at the parish, it is led by a guest priest, invited specifically for that reason by the pastor, along with the evangelization team which is made of: a couple from a Domestic Church circle that has been prepared for the job of moderators, animator couples for leading work in groups, music diakonia, educational/childcare diakonia (if there are children), prayer and witness diakonia, and people who are in charge of food and meals. A good place for this sort of retreat experience could be the parish hall, school or another building which has the

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<sup>42</sup> F. Blachnicki. *The Charism of Light/Life. Primary texts*. Lublin 1996, pg. 43

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pg. 44

<sup>44</sup> *Evangelization retreat for the family*, Krakow, 1993

required amount of space and rooms for group work, along with a working kitchen or space adequate for meal preparation.

A similar opportunity to spread the Good News and to offer a personal witness of benefiting from the progress in the Domestic Church circles are the so called “evangelization Sundays”, which are organized by the Domestic Church diakonia and the priests from a given parish. The priest proclaims the Gospel message and the Domestic Church gives personal witness based on their lives. Advent and Lent days of recollection also present a good opportunity to evangelize, where the Domestic Church diakonia in contact and with the permission from the priest leading the days, prepares the liturgies and couples offer witness. Another form of evangelization in a parish are the so-called evangelization days of recollection according to the outline *Ad Christum Redemptorem*,<sup>45</sup> which were the first tool for evangelization in the Light-Life Movement. Finally, a very important way of evangelization is the person to person, individual evangelization, which is initiated by the Domestic Church couples or priests during Pastoral visits during the Christmas octave, as well as other Pastoral visits or meetings.

All the above-mentioned ways to evangelize can be fruitfully realized only when the evangelization effort and initiative of the Domestic Church couples is met with support and understanding of the local priests. May the words of John Paul II be an inspiration for the work of evangelization in the parish, when he said, *“The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever-increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason, the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. (...) Only if he “abides” in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free, overcoming every conditioning which is contrary or foreign to the Gospel (cf. Jn. 8:31-32). The priest ought to be the first “believer” in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not “his,” but those of the One who sent him. He is not the master of the word, but its servant. He is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest - like every other member of the Church - ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized.”*<sup>46</sup>

For the existing circles, undertaking parish evangelization is a chance to enhance their formation and find a way to interface with the community outside their circle. For the circles that are formed in the parish, evangelization is a path of finding a proper motivation for remaining in the Domestic Church community, ensuring that they, above all, undertake

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<sup>45</sup> The exact plan of these days of recollection is given in a manual prepared by Fr. F. Blachnicki, *Evangelization according to the form of Ad Christum Redemptorem*, Light-Life ,1988.

<sup>46</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 26

their formation for the sake of Jesus Christ, who invited them to the circle community of the Domestic Church.

### 3.2 The role and function of a priest during primary and permanent formation

*The primary work of formation is accomplished with the use of following manuals: “Domestic Church. 1<sup>st</sup> year efforts.” and “Domestic Church. 2<sup>nd</sup> year efforts.” The first manual is a gradual introduction to the commitments, the second manual brings in formation that deepens marital spirituality. The time of this initial formation and study of the primary materials can take anywhere between 2 to 4 years, depending on the spiritual maturity of the couples in the circle. After this initial period, the second, permanent, stage of formation begins.*

*The work of formation is supplemented by and with the participation in a variety of retreat experiences organized by DC: I, II, III degree 15-day family retreats (family oasis), few days long Animator Oasis retreats (ORAR I and II degree), evangelization retreats, and topic-focused retreats. These retreats should be open to families and their children, unless the presence of children is not feasible from the organizational perspective. A formation program for the children should be organized during the retreats (especially the 15-day retreat).*

*The nature and subject of I degree oasis is evangelization and catechesis; also discussed are some aspect of marital spirituality. The I degree oasis expounds on biblical underpinnings of the liturgy; also discussed is the family experience of the liturgical seasons. The II degree oasis highlights the reality of Church as a community.*

*The I degree ORAR deepens the understanding of the reality, goals, spirituality, and methods of DC as a marriage/family movement and current within Light-Life Movement. The II degree ORAR readies a couple for witting and mindful service as an animator couple; the retreat highlights the gravitas and responsibility of this particular service to the community.*

***Primary formation** is accomplished by grasping and assimilating the formation contained in manuals of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year efforts, attending I, II, and III degree oasis retreats, and I and II degree ORAR retreats. The DC members who have gone through primary formation, begin **permanent formation** through:*

- ~ deepening of concepts contained in primary formation,
- ~ examining and studying (during monthly circle meetings) formation documents suggested by DC Central Diakonia or ones chosen as suitable and best for the circle,
- ~ attendance at DC retreats or evenings of reflection on a particular topic,
- ~ Paschal Triduum experienced as a family retreat at a local parish or an away location,
- ~ participation in ORD,

~ participation in retreats organized by the Light-Life Movement or other retreats.<sup>47</sup>

Embarking on the work of formation in the Domestic Church circles, which builds on rich program of retreats, results in not only the strengthening of marital and family unity but also brings opportunity for the couple to begin to live out the principle of life mentioned in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Catholic Church, *Gaudium et Spes*, given to us by the II Vatican Council, that man “cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”<sup>48</sup> Only through the implementation of this principle, one that became a veritable rule of life for Fr. Blachnicki, can we expect from both, the laity and the priests, the attitude of service that has nothing to do with finding of self, but is an expression of a desire to minister which emulates Christ, who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). It is because of this principle that the married couples find time for formation in circles as well as the time to serve others as apostolic laity, and the priests manage to sacrifice their free time to accompany the couples on their road to spiritual maturity through participating in circle meetings in addition to leading different formation retreats during the year or summertime.

This mutual effort of priests and laity, commenced and motivated by the love of God and neighbor, results in communities of the Domestic Church fulfilling their mission to the families in the circles, as well as the other Christian families in the parish. John Paul II spoke about this mission in his exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* in these words, “It will be their task to foster among the faithful a lively sense of solidarity, to favor a manner of living inspired by the Gospel and by the faith of the Church, to form consciences according to Christian values and not according to the standards of public opinion; to stimulate people to perform works of charity for one another and for others with a spirit of openness which will make Christian families into a true source of light and a wholesome leaven for other families.”<sup>49</sup>

Systematic formation of married couples in Domestic Church circles, undertaken with the help of a chaplain both in the circle and during various retreats, readies the couple for the task which John Paul II brought our attention to in the encyclical *Ecclesia in Europa*, “If serving the Gospel of hope calls for giving adequate attention and priority to the family, it is equally the case that families themselves have an irreplaceable responsibility for the Gospel of hope. With confidence and affection, then, I renew my invitation to all Christian families living on this continent of Europe: “Families, become what you are!” You are a living sign of God's love: indeed, you have a “mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his Bride”.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, nr. 18-19

<sup>48</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 24

<sup>49</sup> *Familiaris Consortio*, 72

<sup>50</sup> *Ecclesia in Europa*, 94

Thanks to the appropriate attitude of both the clergy and the laity, formed in the spirit of the guidance of the Church's Magisterium, during the circle meetings the spouses have the opportunity to train for apostolic work under the watchful and caring attention of spiritual mentors. During their formation, they receive the correct preparation to become the subjects of evangelization, on the other hand, remaining in the community allows them the opportunity for different ministry in the Domestic Church and in the local Church. It is this kind of ministry that the Holy Father Paul VI spoke about in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, "*Among the fruits that ripen if the law of God be resolutely obeyed, the most precious is certainly this, that married couples themselves will often desire to communicate their own experience to others. Thus, it comes about that in the fullness of the lay vocation will be included a novel and outstanding form of the apostolate by which, **like ministering to like**, married couples themselves by the leadership they offer will become apostles to other married couples. And surely among all the forms of the Christian apostolate it is **hard to think of one more opportune** for the present time.*"<sup>51</sup>

#### 4. Chaplain's objectives in various levels of engagement and responsibility

Among different formation-specific tasks which the chaplains and the animator couples of the Domestic Church are set to accomplish during the year, one task is especially notable, the task of caring for the spirituality of communion in individual marriages that make up the circle and in communities that make up the structure of the Domestic Church. The spirituality of communion should be, in fact, a kind of bedrock, a foundation of any process or effort of formation, as well as the guiding principle for those in positions of authority and responsibility in the Domestic Church. John Paul II spoke about this spirituality in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, issued for the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2,000: "*A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion also implies the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which*

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<sup>51</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 26

*constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.”<sup>52</sup> The Holy Father speaks clearly, “ unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, “masks” of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.”<sup>53</sup>*

John Paul II’s words justify, with sufficient strength, the need to care about the proper motivation and disposition in actions and decisions undertaken in planning formation on behalf of the Domestic Church.

*The responsibility for DC lies with the Diakonia of Domestic Church (DDK), which assumes the service on behalf of particular structural section (circle, region, diocese, branch, country) in order to keep and preserve the charism and unity of DC, and to safeguard proper formation. The married couples are responsible for appropriate organizational efforts and for their spiritual development. The support of committed clergy as spiritual advisors is necessary for the work done by couples who serve. DC priest chaplains guarantee fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church and a connection and relationship with the Church hierarchy.<sup>54</sup>*

The method/manner of priests’ engagement in circles, as well as their assumption of responsibility on the many structural levels of the Domestic Church, is something of a “novum” in the post-Synodal Church. Its practical mode is outlined in the Synod documents and more recent encyclicals. The Second Vatican Council declared in the Church there exists many apostolic projects or undertakings, “*which are established by the free choice of the laity and regulated by their prudent judgment. The mission of the Church can be better accomplished in certain circumstances by undertakings of this kind, and therefore they are frequently praised or recommended by the hierarchy. No project, however, may claim the name “Catholic” unless it has obtained the consent of the lawful Church authority. (...)*

*Special care should be taken to select priests who are capable of promoting particular forms of the apostolate of the laity and are properly trained. (5) Those who are engaged in this ministry represent the hierarchy in their pastoral activity by virtue of the mission they receive from the hierarchy. Always adhering faithfully to the spirit and teaching of the Church, they should promote proper relations between laity and hierarchy. They should devote themselves to nourishing the spiritual life and an apostolic attitude in the Catholic societies entrusted to them; they should contribute their wise counsel to the apostolic activity of these associations and promote their undertakings”.<sup>55</sup>*

In his exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, John Paul II wrote that the mutual effort of the priest with the laity presupposes “*a knowledge and appreciation of the different gifts and charisms, of the diverse vocations and responsibilities which the Spirit offers and entrusts to the members of Christ’s body. It demands a living and precise consciousness of one’s own*

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<sup>52</sup> *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 43

<sup>54</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, 23

<sup>55</sup> *Apostolicum Auctositatem*, 24-25

*identity in the Church and of the identity of others. It demands mutual trust, patience, gentleness and the capacity for understanding and expectation. It finds its roots above all in a love for the Church that is deeper than love for self and the group or groups one may belong to. It is particularly important to prepare future priests for cooperation with the laity. The Council says: "They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. In this way they will be able to recognize with them the signs of the times."<sup>56</sup>*

#### 4.1 The tasks of the chaplain in circle formation work during the year

*The circle is the basic and primary structure of DC. Diakonia in the circle is assumed by the animator couple, who is supported doctrinally and spiritually by the chaplain. The circle that loses its attachment to spiritual formation and DC commitments, loses its right to call itself a DC circle.<sup>57</sup>*

The priest-chaplains of the Domestic Church, through their ministry as spiritual advisors and shepherds, fulfill a very important and, at the same time, diplomatic and discerning role. They don't lead the formation/circle meetings directly, this is the job of the animator couples, however, through offering advice, encouragement, clarification, correction, illumination, they strive to help the animator couple in successfully discharging their task. They keep an eye on the circle, so that it fulfills its commitments, pursues the formation goals, and integrates the Domestic Church Central Circle's advice into their lives. The presence of a priest at a Domestic Church circle meeting has a tri-fold significance:

- ~ most of all it is a presence that signifies Christ, who through the priest desires to bless the members of the circle and come to them with all the strength which flows from the Sacrament of Holy Orders,
- ~ at the meeting, the priest represents the Hierarchy of the Church (the shepherds), who were charged with the care of/for the truth in teaching and discerning the will of God as it pertains to the spiritual benefit of the community,
- ~ the priest at the meeting is not a bystander, but participates in it like all the married couples, sharing his life, his care of God's mission, and giving witness to his faith and the love he has for God and neighbor.

This irreplaceable presence of a chaplain in the circle means that the meeting becomes a communion of two sacraments, thus the efforts of lay animators result in a fuller, more fruitful spiritual benefit in the hearts of the members of the circle.

In a particular way, the priest-chaplain of a circle:

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<sup>56</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 59

<sup>57</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, 24

- ~ prepares each monthly meeting through prayer and discussion with the animator couple,
- ~ he serves the members of the circle with his doctrinal knowledge and pastoral experience, reinvigorates prayer, explains, gives advice, is attentive and observant to the progress of the meeting,
- ~ is present for the whole meeting – by virtue of his Sacrament of Holy Orders, he makes present Jesus Christ and the Church. If the chaplain cannot attend the whole meeting, he is comes for at least a part of it, bestowing his priestly blessing on those present; if, for some important reasons, the chaplain cannot be at the meeting in person, anything that is unclear or a concern that requires clarification from a spiritual advisor, should be postponed until the next meeting,
- ~ can be a spiritual director for any individuals or couples who participate in the circle, whence his influence over the circle is much greater,
- ~ encourages the members of the circle to make a 15-day retreat, any other formation and themed/focused Domestic Church retreats and days of recollection, prayer retreats and community days and other meetings within or offered by the Light-Life Movement,
- ~ encourages the members of the circle to active apostolic work (according to their gifts and abilities) in the Crusade for Human Freedom, in evangelizing, in pastoral work with families, in social and charitable work. He facilitates their involvement in works on behalf of the parish,
- ~ guides the yearly selection of the animator couple.

#### 4.2 The task of a chaplain on different Domestic Church structural levels

The fruitful formation in Domestic Church circles is aided by the appropriate structure of the Movement on the diocesan level as well as the national level.

*DC within a diocese can be separated into regions. A region encompasses up to 25 circles in the same or neighboring parish(es). The work in the region is the responsibility of a regional couple, who asks for and relies on the support of one of the chaplains from the circles in the region. Regional couple, their chaplain, animator couples from circles, and connector couples (asked to serve if needed) create a regional circle. Connector couple(s) are called to service by the regional couple and extend care over 3-5 basic circles.* <sup>58</sup>

The regional priest chaplain of the Domestic Church:

- ~ works closely with the Domestic Church regional couple,
- ~ participates in regional circle meetings,
- ~ works with the Domestic Church diocesan priest-chaplain,

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<sup>58</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, 25

- ~ works on organizing regional community days together with the regional couple, the animator couples from the region, and those responsible for retreats in the area.

The regional priest-chaplain has a vital role in the building of unity within the diocesan Domestic Church community and the Light-Life Movement, especially through good relationship with the Domestic Church diocesan chaplain and diocesan Light-Life chaplain.

*Diocesan couples, with their diocesan chaplain, are responsible for DC in a diocese. Together with regional couples, they form a diocesan circle. This circle could extend to and include couples from any specialized diakonia. (...) The DC diocesan chaplain is assigned and missioned by the diocesan Bishop. The request for a chaplain is made by the diocesan couple on behalf of the diocesan circle, after it has consulted with the diocesan chaplain of Light-Life Movement.* <sup>59</sup>

The diocesan priest-chaplain of the Domestic Church:

- ~ works closely with the Domestic Church diocesan couple,
- ~ participates in diocesan circle meetings,
- ~ coordinates the work of regional chaplains and preserves the unity of the Domestic Church in the diocese,
- ~ supports the diocesan couple in initiating and organizing Domestic Church retreats within the diocese and outside the region; maintains communications with the local/retreat area pastor,
- ~ maintains communications with the branch couple,
- ~ works with the Domestic Church national chaplain and participates in the national meetings organized by the Domestic Church Central Circle,
- ~ works with Light-Life diocesan chaplain and participates in the works of the Diocesan Diakonia of Unity,
- ~ participates in the Diocesan Diakonias Days of Unity,
- ~ remains in contact with the diocesan bishop,
- ~ supports the Domestic Church diocesan couple in connecting and communicating with other family movements in the diocese and with family apostolates.

*National couple, with their national priest chaplain, is responsible for DC work in a particular country. National couple, national chaplain, branch couples, couples serving efforts assigned to them by the national couple, along with people assigned by the Institute of the Immaculate Mother of the Church (INMK) form the central circle of DC. The DC central circle forms and is called the Domestic Church Central Diakonia. People missioned by INMK support DC in the following ways:*

- ~ joint work with DC national couple and national chaplain,

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<sup>59</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, 26, 33c

- ~ assist with organizing and running the DC retreats and DC central meetings,
- ~ run the DC Secretariat and DC Archives,
- ~ manage the DC Central Retreat House in Kroscienko.

*The term of service asked of diocesan and national chaplains basically mirrors the terms of diocesan and national couples.<sup>60</sup>*

The Domestic Church national chaplain:

- ~ works closely with the Domestic Church national couple and the branch couples,
- ~ supports the national couple in coordinating and organizing the central circle meetings,
- ~ participates in the works of the central circle,
- ~ tends to the communication with the Domestic Church diocesan chaplains and Domestic Church diocesan couples,
- ~ works with chaplain-general of the Light-Life Movement and participates in the works of the Central Diakonia of Unity,
- ~ is in constant contact with the bishop delegate missioned to the Polish Bishops Conference on behalf of the Light-Life Movement,
- ~ represents, together with the national couple, the Domestic Church movement to and before the Church hierarchy and secular authorities,
- ~ maintains contact with priests and couples responsible for Domestic Church outside of Poland,
- ~ supports the national couple in their effort to build relationships with other lay family movements in and outside of the country, and with family apostolates.

#### 4.3 Chaplain's tasks during formation retreats

The priest-chaplain is responsible for the sum and structure of the 15-day Oasis formation retreat and other Domestic Church formation retreats and leads them with the moderator couple and entire diakonia; his position is that of a leader, different than during the circle meetings. The chaplain, along with the retreat diakonia, prepares the schedule and content, both instructional and spiritual. The retreat diakonia is made up of: priest-chaplain, moderator couple, animator couples, educational/childcare diakonia, liturgical-music diakonia, and sustenance-comfort diakonia. The Oasis retreats begin with a day of prayer, a sort of "seminary" of prayer life, in which the retreat diakonia participates, thus preparing and building the spiritual framework and grounding for the retreat. This is also an opportunity and a proper time for building accord and relationships within the community responsible for the retreat.

The family Oasis retreat chaplain is responsible for:

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<sup>60</sup> DC Rules and Bylaws, 28, 33e

- ~ leads morning prayer – matins,
- ~ presents some of the content of the teachings on the way of life and the liturgical-family tenets,
- ~ is in charge of ensuring a competent delivery and solid content of the conference on responsible parenthood and any other conference offered on a specialized topic by qualified people with appropriate knowledge base and background,
- ~ leads the “seminary” on prayer (the conferences and prayers that follow),
- ~ is the daily Eucharist celebrant and celebrates any other services that are within the program of the retreat,
- ~ strives to make a spiritual connection with all the married couples, so that he can discern and meet their spiritual needs,
- ~ supports the moderator couple in their care for the totality of the retreat, especially in their concerns for the adequate execution of all tasks assigned to the animator couples and other diakonias,
- ~ prepares the animator couples for leading circle meetings the following day on the retreat,
- ~ during the daily meetings (combined with prayer) with the retreat diakonia, he acquaints himself with the concerns and difficulties the diakonia is encountering during their ministry; he advises accordingly and benefits from the observations made by the diakonia,
- ~ informs the retreat participants about any decisions, tasks, changes, etc. previously discussed with the animator couples and the diakonia,
- ~ with the moderator couple, he tends to the communication with other “minor Oasis”, which compose the “major Oasis”,<sup>61</sup>
- ~ keeps contact with the parish in the area where the retreat is given and utilizes the opportunity to give witness to the parish community, especially through joining in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration.

The cooperative relationship between the moderator couple and their chaplain, as well as the entire retreat diakonia, should be marked by mutual respect and thoughtfulness, which is a prerequisite for a well conducted and fruitfully lived retreat. The chaplain is the main leader of the Oasis because of its retreat nature and, most of all, by virtue of his priestly sacrament. The moderator couple and the animator couples are his co-workers and helpers.

Together with the retreat diakonia, the chaplain strives to connect with another Oasis which form the “major Oasis”. He encourages the retreat participants to pray daily for the other “minor Oasis”. In this way, he builds in participants an attitude of a community, open to others within the Light-Life Movement and within the entire Church community.

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<sup>61</sup> “Major oasis” is made of individual “minor oasis” conducted in the same town or close vicinity.

The priest-chaplain of the “major Oasis” organizes and leads the meetings of individual diakonias of the “minor Oasis” which pertain to community service/worship preparations within the “major Oasis”, such as the “light and water” service, the mass of reconciliation, or the community days. Together with the diakonia of the “major Oasis”, he makes efforts to keep unity in all “minor Oasis” communities, as well as the local and universal Church community. He is responsible for leading the day of unity and delegating tasks to individual Oasis.

The cooperative relationship between a priest-chaplain and the moderator couple during other formation retreats in the Domestic Church, such as ORAR, or other kinds of retreats and days of recollection, follow a similar framework as the 15-day Oasis retreat.

## 5. The chaplain’s care and attention to personal formation

*“The Holy Spirit, who infuses pastoral charity, introduces and accompanies the priest to an ever deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ, which is unfathomable in its richness (cf. Eph. 3;14ff.) and, in turn, to a knowledge of the mystery of Christian priesthood. Pastoral charity itself impels the priest to an ever deeper knowledge of the hopes, the needs, the problems, the sensibilities of the people to whom he ministers, taken in their specific situations, as individuals, in their families, in society and in history. All this constitutes the object of ongoing formation, understood as a conscious and free decision to live out the dynamism of pastoral charity and of the Holy Spirit who is its first source and constant nourishment. In this sense ongoing formation is an intrinsic requirement of the gift and sacramental ministry received; and it proves necessary in every age. It is particularly urgent today, not only because of rapid changes in the social and cultural conditions of individuals and peoples among whom priestly ministry is exercised, but also because of that “new evangelization” which constitutes the essential and pressing task of the Church at the end of the second millennium.”<sup>62</sup>*

With the words above John Paul II reminds all priests of the necessity of ongoing spiritual formation because of their responsibility for forming others. For the priests who accompany married couples in their spiritual formation in circles, the witness to the necessity of continual priestly formation is that much more crucial. If the priest is not convinced of the need for his own priestly formation, he will not encourage formation in others, especially lay people. If he does not live a radical evangelism, it will be difficult for him to expect it from the married couples gathered in the Domestic Church circles. If the priest has not experienced the 15-day Oasis retreat, it will be difficult for him to understand its value for spouses. If it is challenging for the priest to offer his time for work with married couples in circles or serve as chaplain at a summer retreat, the he will also

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<sup>62</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 70.

find it challenging to find an argument that encourages families to spend their vacations on a 15-day Oasis or other Oasis or themed retreats.

In the same document, the Holy Father notes, *“the entire People of God, in each and every one of its members, can and should offer precious assistance to the ongoing formation of its priests. In this sense the people should see that priests are allowed time for study and prayer. They should ask of them that for which Christ has sent them and not require anything else. They should offer to help in the various aspects of the pastoral mission, especially in those related to human development and works of charity. They should establish cordial and brotherly relations with them, helping priests to remember that they are not “to lord it over” the faithful, but rather “work with them for their joy.”*<sup>63</sup>

The joint labor of priests and laity within the framework of Domestic Church circle formation gives ample opportunity to fulfill the teachings of John Paul II quoted above. This is evidenced by the many testimonies of priests who speak of the abundant blessings in their own spiritual lives resulting from ministering to circles. Some of these testimonies are included in the appendix of this document.

It is also worthwhile to mention the great and irreplaceable value of formation meetings for priest-chaplains organized in the diocese by the Domestic Church diocesan chaplain and the diocesan chaplain of the Light-Life Movement. During these meetings one can hear all the updates on the movement in different dioceses, regions, and the whole country, and most of all, in a prayerful environment, hear the witness of other priests and be strengthened to persevere on the path of ministering to the Domestic Church circles. You can gain much understanding, especially in the area of motivation of other priests and their Domestic Church ministry.

A particular mention should be given to priests’ meetings within the framework of country-wide Light-Life Movement conferences, such as:

- ~ Oplatki/ “Christmas wafer” gathering for those in ministry within Domestic Church and the Domestic Church yearly summary gathering,
- ~ Light-Life Movement Executive Conference,
- ~ Fundamental Prayer Oasis at the Light-Life Center in Kroscienko,
- ~ the summary of summer Oasis retreats in Kroscienko,
- ~ clergy retreats organized by the Society of Christ the Servant Priests,
- ~ topic retreats, such as ORDR I and II, and sessions about circle pilotage, organized by the Domestic Church Headquarters in Kroscienko.

It is desirable that the Domestic Church chaplains care about and pursue the development of a priestly community together with the Light-Life chaplains, especially when ministering to a larger region or a diocese. Worth recommending here is the Society of Christ the Servant Priests, whose statutes were ratified by the Bishop of Tarnow on Aug. 15, 2000. The Society tends to the formation of priest-chaplains in the movement, coordinates yearly

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<sup>63</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 78

retreats for priests, and prepares formation materials for monthly clergy meetings. John Paul II spoke about the value of such communities for the spiritual formation of priests in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, noting that, “all the forms of “priestly fraternity” approved by the Church are useful not only for the spiritual life but also for the apostolic and pastoral life.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 81

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. The priestly ministry within the Domestic Church community has to be marked with fidelity and adherence to the implementation of spiritual formation and direction given by the Executive (Central) Diakonia of the Domestic Church for the 15-day Oasis retreats, as well as other formation retreats, and the work of formation in circles during the year. A circle led through another or adjusted/changed program ceases to be a Domestic Church circle and will often disintegrate after the chaplain leaves for another parish, in part because a new priest who steps in has no reference point and cannot find a way connect with it. The particular tasks of the Domestic Church Diakonia, its structure and the way it's appointed is described in *Domestic Church Rules and Bylaws*, which – like this volume – should be one of the primary documents referred to by the priests ministering to the Domestic Church community.
2. The priest who desires to preserve the fidelity to the Domestic Church charism, should become familiar with the particulars of this charism, preferably by experiencing the 15-day Oasis retreat for himself. By daily embracing the essence of the Light-Life theme, that is, by cultivating the surrender of his life to God's Light, he will give witness which will serve as the best encouragement for the married couples to take up the joint work and effort to pursue in their lives the light of God's word. The witness of the priest, supported by the witness of the animator couple, becomes a transmission belt of sorts, one that transmits the Good News during circle meetings, the recognition of which leads spouses to surrender all aspects of their lives to God's will and guidance in their married and family life, as well as their community life and apostolic service in their local and universal Church.
3. Many years ago, John Paul II spoke to the youth in Czestochowa, that they should learn how to expect utmost of themselves, even when others demand nothing of them.<sup>65</sup> The same call could be addressed to the clergy and the laity who intend to work together within the formation framework of the Domestic Church. Even if the priest, as a spiritual director of the spouses, doesn't set any demands or requirements, let it not excuse the animator couple from setting high expectations for themselves first, and then, for those entrusted to their care within the ministry of the Domestic Church. We should remember the words of Jesus Christ, who said, "*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me*" (Mt 16:24). Just as you cannot walk in two directions at once, you cannot expect good fruit of the work of formation in the circle without setting expectations in regard to following *Domestic Church Rules and Bylaws* in its entirety.

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<sup>65</sup> Per John Paul II, *Peace be with you, Poland! My motherland!* Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1983, pg. 78

4. You must defend yourself effectively against the danger of portraying the work of a priest with laity in the Domestic Church in a distorted, false light; as though sacrificing three hours, once a month, for a meeting with a few married couples was a simple case of obvious waste of time which can be used for other, more important, matters. Pope Paul VI warned spiritual advisers against such a temptation during the END Congress in 1976, in Rome: *“Do not hesitate to devote your theological knowledge, your energy, your pastoral zeal for this privileged field of apostolic work. Do not surrender to the temptation of judging that your work is limited to a small group of Christians. Your efforts will be multiplied by how the couples you serve pour forth and radiate. You yourself, to the degree that you help them in deepening their participation in Christian life, will deepen your spiritual life.”*<sup>66</sup> The words of Paul VI have not lost their appeal, just the opposite, the priests today need them more than ever.
5. In the Letter to Families, *Gratissimam Sane*, John Paul II wrote that a great need exists today, *“for a special solidarity among families. This can be expressed in various practical ways, as for example by associations of families for families. The institution of the family is strengthened by such expressions of solidarity, which bring together not only individuals but also communities, with a commitment to pray together and to seek together the answers to life's essential questions. Is this not an invaluable expression of the apostolate of families to one another? It is important that families attempt to build bonds of solidarity among themselves. This allows them to assist each other in the educational enterprise: parents are educated by other parents, and children by other children. Thus, a particular tradition of education is created, which draws strength from the character of the “domestic church” proper to the family.”*<sup>67</sup> Without a strong support of the clergy, the attainment of this invaluable family apostolate and family ministry is likely to be difficult, perhaps even impossible.
6. In conclusion, it is worthwhile to once again quote the words of John Paul II in his exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, *“God promises the Church not just any sort of shepherds, but shepherds “after his own heart.” And God's “heart” has revealed itself to us fully in the heart of Christ the good shepherd. Christ's heart continues today to have compassion for the multitudes and to give them the bread of truth, the bread of love, the bread of life (cf. Mk. 6:30ff.), and it pleads to be allowed to beat in other hearts - priests' hearts: “You give them something to eat” (Mk. 6:37). People need to come out of their anonymity and fear. They need to be known and called by name, to walk in safety, along the paths of life, to be found again if they have become lost, to be loved, to receive salvation as the supreme gift of God's love. All this is done by Jesus, the good*

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted from J. Skudro, *Priests in Domestic Church*, pg. 51

<sup>67</sup> *Gratissimam Sane*, 16

*shepherd - by himself and by his priests with him.*"<sup>68</sup> May these words of the Polish Pope become a constant encouragement for the priests, so they strive with their lives and engagements to image Christ – the Good Shephard, as well as the laity, so they continually petition God with steadfast prayers for priests according to the Heart of God.

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<sup>68</sup> *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 82

## APPENDIX

### - testimonies of priests

*I thank God for the Domestic Church. I am grateful that for over sixteen years I've been able to witness the miraculous healings and triumphs of our Risen Lord. They take place in marriages and families who by taking up formation of the Domestic Church strive for purity and holiness in their lives. Christ's triumph over human weakness gives fruits of joy, peace, and ripening of love in individual marriages and families. (Fr. Piotr, Bydgoszcz)*

*The witness of married couples in, and also outside of, circles has a tremendous value for me as a priest. This family witness is often humbling, but always motivates me in my work of formation. I see in it the authentic disposition of surrender to God's service, and this attitude has a great effect on my path of constant conversion. (Fr. Jan, Szczawnica)*

*I am grateful to our Lord for this time of meetings, conversations, sharing of God's word, prayer within the Domestic Church circles, and for the expectation and the joy of a community for having a chaplain that serves, blesses, and sanctifies. It is a grace of God that I felt needed, expected, that I could share the gift of my priesthood with those called to marriage. After all, we walk towards God together, to a fullness of unity with Him, to holiness. (Fr. Zdzislaw, Lublin)*

*The participation in Domestic Church circles (14 years) allows me to tangibly experience the mystery of the Church as a community whose members serve each other with their particular gifts. When I serve married couples with my gift of the priesthood, I am simultaneously rewarded and enriched by them with a gift of prayer, trust, and friendship. The work in the circle teaches me about fruitful cooperation with the laity. My pastoral work benefits from the intense experience of spiritual accompaniment to the families on their journey toward God. The charism of the Light-Life Movement has become for me a valued aid in personal growth, and the witness of Christian family life in the Domestic Church is a source of pastoral joy and hope (Fr. Adam, Czestochowa).*

*Encountering the couples from the Domestic Church was very significant for my priestly ministry. When I ministered to the circles as a spiritual director and a chaplain, I matured in my spiritual fatherhood. The example of spouses' concern for their family and simultaneous work of evangelization, helped me to more consistently and reliably meet my daily priestly work. I was often humbled by married couples' generosity and availability which encouraged me to a like disposition. The sharing of commitments by the spouses motivates me to an examination of conscience and embracing my priestly duties. The circles help me to have a genuine look at the problems facing marriages and family. When I witness families take*

*advantage of summer retreats during their vacations, I often offer my vacation time to serve at those retreats. As I give a final blessing at the end of a circle meeting, I always realize how much priests need holy families, and how much families need holy priests (Fr. Bogdan, Tarnow).*