



Newsletter – July 2021

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Our Calling as a Family Movement

Prologue:

One of the important qualities of a Christian is to be able to read the sign of times, for we are told “we are in this world but not of this world”. The second thing is we should be aware we are in a constant spiritual battle with evil: as a presenter at one of our formation session had pointed out some years ago, “Satan do not need us to fall into sin completely, all he needs is just for a 1% (compromise). When he has achieved that, he will work on getting another 1%”. Often the change in the world is so subtle and gradual that we do not even realise it. What makes it more insidious, is that we become part of the change. Like a fish in the water, we do not know what is it outside – what is the ideal. So whilst we know we are “in this world”, how do we know we are not to be “of this world” unless we can recognize the difference?

In this regard, the family which is the foundation of society and the “original cell of social life” is slowly changing and weakening. Pope Francis’s prayer intention for the month of June 2021¹ is for marriage and the family and acknowledges that the family is facing serious challenges. What are they? They say a picture speaks a thousand words and therefore much of the reflections in this newsletter will be in graphs. We shall use graphical representations to illustrate and discuss the situation in Singapore.

SEE - State of marriage and family in Singapore

The first statement in the mission of the CFSM is “to build good Christian families because we believe the family is the basic building block of a good society, a good nation.” However, the news about marriage and family has not been good in recent years². Just last month, it was reported that “A bigger percentage of married couples are going their separate ways in recent years, especially among those who tied the knot more recently...”³. Whilst doing God’s work is

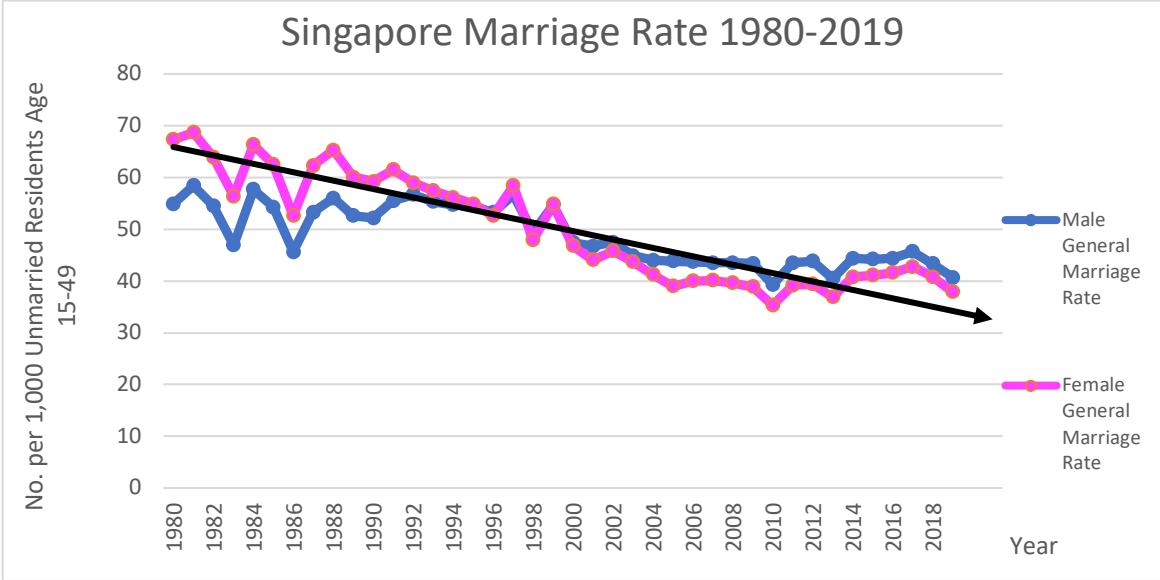
¹ Pope’s June prayer intention: ‘The beauty of Marriage’,
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-06/pope-francis-june-2021-prayer-intention-beauty-marriage.html>

² Number of marriages registered continues to decline, more couples divorced in 2019
<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/number-of-marriages-registered-continues-to-decline-more-couples-divorced-in-2019>

³ <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/more-spore-couples-especially-those-recently-married-getting-divorced-msf-report>

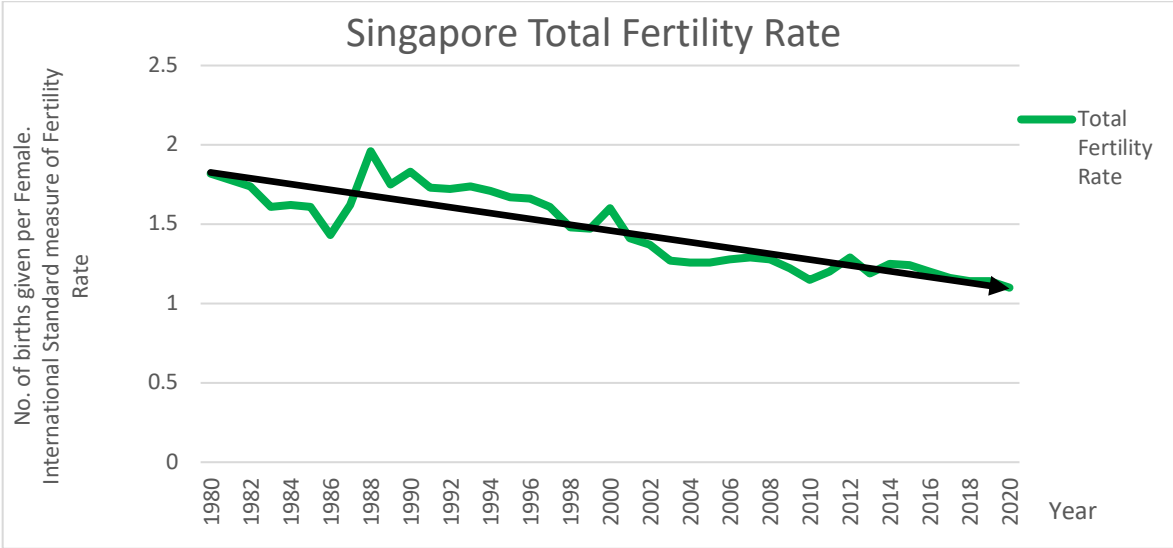
not about numbers, it is useful for us to see the overall trend so as to understand the environment our vocation is in.

1. The marriage rate has been on a decline for the last 40 years.



Source: Department of Statistics Singapore, <https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=14168>

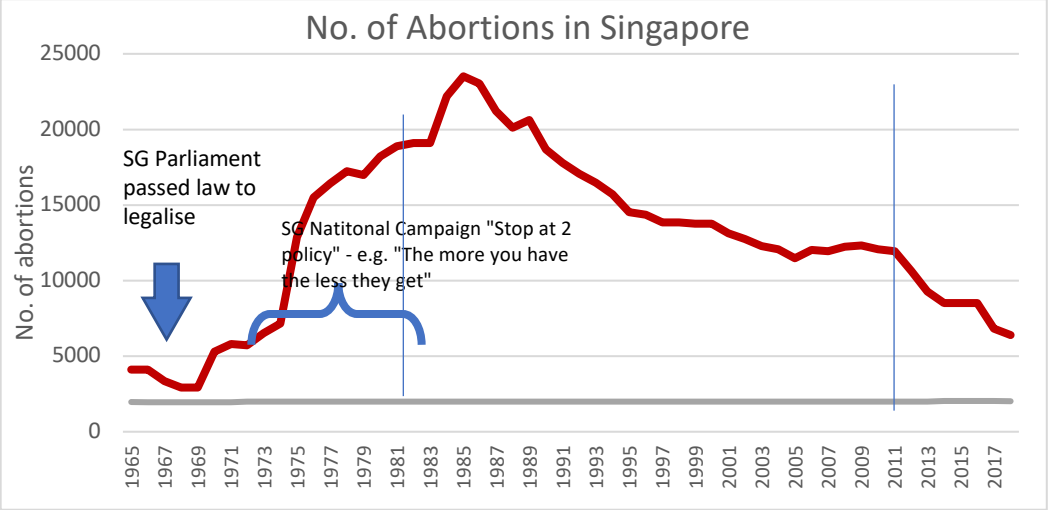
2. The number of children, indicator of starting a family, declined. Singapore fertility rate is 1.1 whilst sociologists say that it needs to be at about 2.1 for a society to replace itself.



Source: Department of Statistics Singapore, <https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=13273>

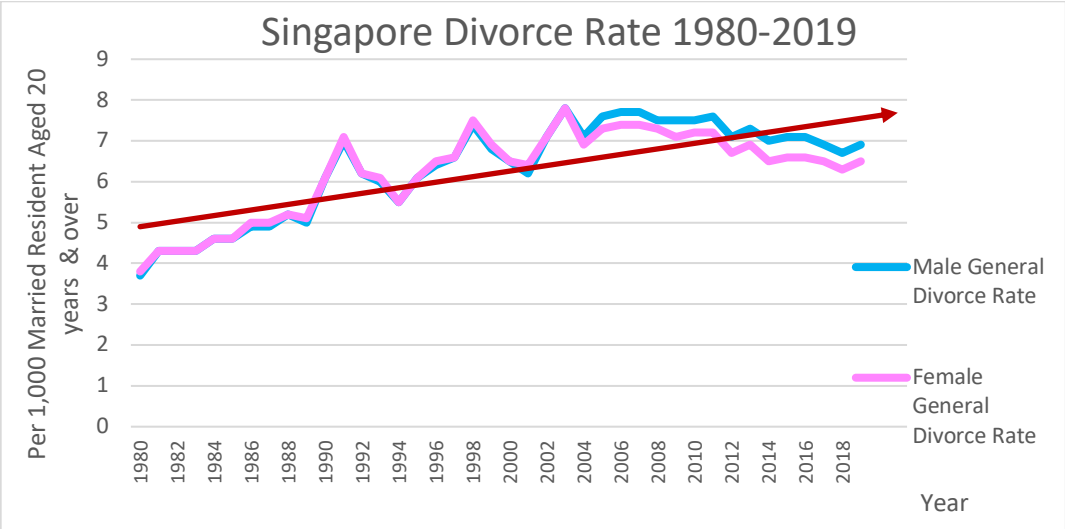
3. From the onset in the 1970s, Singapore achieved stellar economic growth, powered by the only resource our country has: humans. The country has to encourage our woman-folk to work: our female labour force participation has been one of the highest in this region.

- 4. With the “Stop at 2 (children)” campaign, the abortion rate shot up. At its peak some 30 years ago in the 1980s, an average of 20,000 babies were aborted annually.



<https://www.straitstimes.com/3singapore/number-of-abortions-down-by-about-half-in-nearly-a-decade>
<http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/ab-singapore.html>

- 5. Whilst abortion has declined in the recent years. The use of contraceptives has increased⁴.
- 6. The effect of the declined/declining birthrate is clearly shown when we see the closure or merger of schools (due to falling enrolments).⁵
- 7. Conversely divorce rate has been on an incline for the last 40 years. Just as a rough indicator: in 2019 there were about 25,400 marriages and about 7,600 divorce cases; which means, about 1 in 4 recent marriages eventually break up (conservatively estimate).

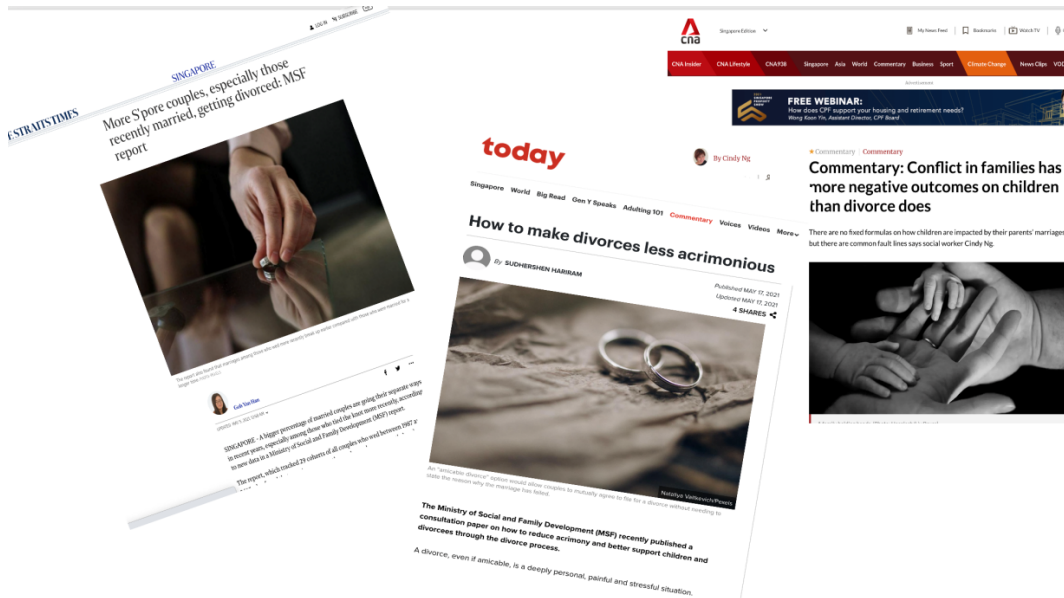


Source: Department of Statistics Singapore, <https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=14172>

⁴Demand for birth control pills jumps to four-year high <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/demand-for-birth-control-pills-jumps-to-four-year-high>

⁵18 primary and secondary schools to undergo mergers due to declining birth rates, changing demographics <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/moe-schools-merging-new-town-tanglin-telok-kurau-14573328>

- Children from divorced couples were likely to fare worse compared to children from intact family; which a report published by the Ministry of Social and Family (MSF) termed as the “divorce penalty”. The children “were less likely to get married” when they become adult. Those who do marry were “more likely to undergo divorce.”⁶



- As people are more highly educated, they become more “progressive” and are liberal-minded. Many countries have legalized gay-marriages. In Singapore, there is a growing movement to legalise the gay sexual relationship in the repeal of Section 377A⁷.
- With a trend of shrinking local population, the pragmatic solution is opening the country to immigrants. From 2009-2018, Singapore granted about 29,000 Permanent Residency approvals. With it come the challenges of social capital/identity and integration i.e. building a sense of community and nationhood.

JUDGE - What is at stake?

- Against all odds, Singapore has not only survived but thrived in a quality of life far exceeding many neighbouring countries. What is the cost? Unlike other immediate social or health issues, such as employment, wages etc, the forces undermining the family is gradual and insidious. It takes a generation for effect to be seen. Sometimes, a policy that is valid for ten

⁶Inter-generational Effects of Divorce on Children in Singapore, https://www.msf.gov.sg/research-and-data/Research-and-Data-Series/Documents/Research_Series/MSF_Research_Series_Intergenerational_Effects_of_Divorce_on_Children_in_Singapore.pdf

⁷Challenge against Section 377A: Chief Justice says Govt's 'compromise' on enforcement should be considered <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/challenge-against-section-377a-chief-justice-says-govts-compromise-on>

years would have repercussions for future generations and may be irreversible. In Singapore Inc. we can see the effect of a community with a weakened family culture.⁸

2. What is nation? A nation is the collection of communities that are formed by families; it's a population of individuals formed by families, sharing a common identity. It is in this context that the Christian family has its vocation. So CFSM is right in its mission statement.

3. Indeed, Christian apologist C.S. Lewis pointed out:

"I think I can understand that feeling about a housewife's work being like that of Sisyphus (who was the stone rolling gentleman). But it is surely, in reality, the most important work in the world. What do ships, railways, mines, cars, government etc exist for except that people may be fed, warmed, and safe in their own homes? As Dr Johnson said, 'To be happy at home is the end of all human endeavour'. (1st to be happy, to prepare for being happy in our own real Home hereafter: 2nd, in the meantime, to be happy in our houses.) We wage war in order to have peace, we work in order to have leisure, we produce food in order to eat it. So your job is the one for which all others exist."

The following should be points to we can reflect:

- a) Sisyphus is a character in the Greek mythology who was punished by the gods to spend his eternal life pushing a rock up a slope only to have it rolled down whenever he rest. So it seems for housewife's work – it seems valueless and meaningless with no economic value. It seems endless and thankless.
- b) The housewife's work can represents the family; the effort/resource put in for and within the family. It is the ultimate work which all other endeavours are meant to support.
- c) We believe in a Trinitarian God (God of a family – ie God cannot exist alone but in a family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit), then the family is a living sacrament (a sign pointing to the Trinitarian reality, instituted by God).

As Christians we see beyond the tangible to the Spiritual: this is where we need to link the mundane of this world, as indicated by the statistical trends to the Spiritual.

4. The family is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. the family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society. If the family falls apart, society falls and the crown of God's creation will fall apart.

5. There are specific precepts given by God and taught by the Church to preserve the family. Against this reason, The Prince of this World uses the worldly forces to undermine the family. The late Cardinal Carlo Caffarra⁹, founding president of the Pontifical John Paul II

⁸J.Koktin, 2013, *What is a City For?*, Working Paper Series No. 1 Lee Kuan Yew Centre for Innovative Cities. https://lkycic.sutd.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2014/01/LKYCIC_Working-Paper-No-1_Joel-Kotkin_Dec-10-2013.pdf

⁹https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/documentation/cardinali_biografie/cardinali_bio_caffarra_c.html

Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family asked the late Sister Lúcia de Jesus Rosa dos Santos, O.C.D. the last surviving seer at Our Lady at Fatima to pray for the Institute and he received the following response:

“Father, a time will come when the decisive battle between the kingdom of Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family. And those who will work for the good of the family will experience persecution and tribulation. But do not be afraid, because Our Lady has already crushed his head.”

ACT - For the family

For thousands of years, the family survived the rise and fall of empires because people needed the family, even though it may be for pragmatic reasons e.g. safety in numbers, taking over the farm etc. Today, most of the influential humans live in a city empowered by the connectivity of the Internet Age, and these humans do not need a next generation. Humans have higher education and need not be held back by archaic precepts that impede the quest for “happiness”. Against such a tsunami what can we do?

1. Even though many CFSM members are in the matured stage of marriage/family – i.e. our children are themselves grown up, we should not see this as an issue affecting just ourselves but it is a family/social issues we, as Christians, need to help redress.
2. Arm yourself with knowledge and faith formation to understand the teaching better. It is not about “us vs them”, but we love them and will what is good for them.
3. Pray for humility and guidance even as you equip yourself for this is a Spiritual challenge in which the very cause in the calling may bring you pride and wrath against those who disagree. The Prince of this World may well use your belief and knowledge to cause your downfall.
4. Be an active family movement, evangelise¹⁰. Join a ministry where you can share this calling. Do not be distracted by other social issues. Actively help promote a ministry like the CFSM when opportunity calls.
5. Pray for wisdom, grace and strength. Pray for your family and for all families. Just like Job, trials may come your way when even family relationship may breakdown for other reasons and you would doubt the goodness of the family.

Epilogue:

The charts may be difficult to interpret, there may be many other factors affecting the family. The purpose of this article and this approach is to facilitate the group discussion – linking faith, spiritual awareness and the reality. The family is in the world but not of the world. We are called to evangelise through love, both in words and action. It is counter-productive to take an “activism” approach as can be seen in some groups with the other agenda.

¹⁰<https://voiceofthefamily.com/cardinal-caffarra-we-are-no-longer-witnesses-but-deserters-if-we-do-not-speak-openly-and-publicly/>

[Editor's Note: For the avoidance of all doubts, this article is meant for **Christians** only)

FURTHER REFLECTION

1. How is your own family faring?
2. In what way could you have done better (could be doing better)?
3. Are your children all grown? What are the changes with different stages?
4. What is the family situation with the extended family/community?
5. Do you feel that each family should handle problems themselves (differing situations)?
6. What can we do to help family see their calling more clearly?
7. In what way could you help while still respecting the "other family's autonomy/space"?

Appendix

Catechism of the Catholic Church

I. THE FAMILY IN GOD'S PLAN

The nature of the family

2201 The conjugal community is established upon the consent of the spouses. Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children. The love of the spouses and the begetting of children create among members of the same family personal relationships and primordial responsibilities.

2202 A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. It should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated.

2203 In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties.

The Christian family

2204 "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*."⁹ It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament.¹⁰

2205 The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task.

2206 The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a *privileged community* called to achieve a "sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children's upbringing."¹¹

2207 The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

