

Foundations of Familism
Volume I

THE FAMILIST WAY:

An Introduction

Marvin Gawryn

(Note: The following is a preliminary draft of the first chapter of what is planned as a full book-length manuscript. Many other sections are planned which will amplify on the themes introduced in this first chapter.)

C H A P T E R 1

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE FAMILIST WAY

"During the psychologically unsettled times of the twentieth century, amid the economic upheavals, the moral crosscurrents, and the sociologic rip tides of the cyclonic transitions of a scientific era, thousands upon thousands of men and women have become humanly dislocated; they are anxious, restless, fearful, uncertain, and unsettled; as never before in the world's history they need the consolation and stabilization of sound religion."(1)

There is a hunger in the land.
The people cry out in the pain of their emptiness.

Yet their table is laden with a great feast,
And the food and the drink which they crave
Lies spread before them.

So many of us live and die without ever finding the spiritual nourishment we crave. Who are we? Where do we belong? Where are we bound? Without the answers to such questions, how can we expect to fill the spiritual hunger within us, to find that peace which passes all understanding?

In order to answer such questions we must discover our fundamental relationship with God. Without Him, we cannot experience life's deepest joys. Without the guidance and companionship which flows from His Presence within us, we are lost -- adrift in a starless night.

And yet that is precisely how so many of us feel; lost-- orphaned by our ignorance of the remarkable relationships we can have with God, and with our sisters and brothers in His family.

1. The URANTIA Book, URANTIA Foundation, Chicago, 1955,
p. 1090:2

The Essentials of the Familist Way

At the heart of Familism lies the fundamental truth that family is the master pattern of all personal relationships in Creation. Family is that profound window of understanding through which each of us can grow to see who we really are, and discern how best to relate to our Creator and to each other. God is first and foremost an all-wise, loving Parent. We are His beloved children, sisters and brothers in an infinite universe family.

Familists aspire to an actual way of living which centers around seven essential truths or qualities of family relationship: the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Indwelling Spirit, the Will of God, Love, Eternal Life, and Faith. Familists attempt to live out these truths within the context of five family circles, each of which is a broad arena of service and fellowship: the inner family, the home family, the fellowship family, the family of all believers, and the world-wide family of all God's children. These truths and circles are introduced briefly below in Chapter I. Their fuller unfolding in the Familist Way is presented in the subsequent chapters of Volume I.

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD(1) The unique bond which exists between parent and child is the seed out of which all family relationships unfold. To the Universal Father, each human being is His special child. We gain our most profound insights into God's nature by experiencing His parental qualities. We find our deepest satisfactions in childlike worship of the heavenly Father.

This worshipful experience of discovering that each of us is a unique son or daughter of the God of all creation has the power utterly to transform how we feel about ourselves. It may take time, but like the young child who has been well-loved, each of us can eventually come to feel deeply valued just for who we are. Because our special place in creation is assured, we can begin to feel fundamentally secure.

This changes the way we live. As we allow ourselves to relax into the profound trust felt by a well-loved child, we are able to open more to our Father's guidance. We grow more teachable. Slowly, but steadily, the life of the child can begin to reflect the ways of the Parent. The unfolding experience of living thus, as a child of the Universal Father, lies at the very heart of the Familist Way.

1. Unfortunately, the English language does not have a word which powerfully conveys personal parental qualities without reference to gender. Some readers may more naturally relate to God as Mother than as Father. For any believer, at any particular point in his or her spiritual development, the right concept for God is the one which most effectively facilitates an intimate parent/child relationship with Deity. For a fuller consideration of God's maternal and paternal qualities, please see Section .

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN(1) In addition to being parental, spiritual family life is also fraternal. The most fulfilling kinds of human relationship develop when we begin to love each other as sisters and brothers in God's family. The rich, balanced friendships born of such spiritual fraternity are one of life's greatest joys.

Next to worship of our Father, we can experience nothing more satisfying in life than the privilege of ministering to a sister or brother in need. Each such act of loving service is a significant forward step along the spiritual path.

As would any devoted parent, God rejoices in the love which His children feel for each other. Increasing sisterly/brotherly affection is the very essence of Familist fellowship.

THE INDWELLING SPIRIT In addition to being parental and fraternal, family life is also intimate. The Father has given each of His children a miraculous gift. He has sent an actual fragment of Himself to dwell deep within each human personality. Every one of us enjoys the dedicated ministry of a perfect Indwelling Spirit, solely devoted to our spiritual welfare. Each of these Father fragments is an undiluted part of the divine whole. These Indwelling Spirits constitute our Father's ever available Presence, loving and guiding us moment by moment along our Godward journey.

God is not far away and unreachable. He is closer to us than the beating of our hearts. His is the still-small voice within our minds; He is the mentor and friend of our souls. The Familist Way is, thus, a life of intimate companionship with God, an affectionate inner sharing between the Universal Father and His spiritual child.

THE WILL OF GOD Life in God's family is also directional. It is forward-moving, progressive. The Father encourages the spiritual growth of His children.

A wise parent challenges his or her child to reach for ever higher levels of living, all the while providing sensitive guidance toward such life-mastery. Similarly, the Universal Father encourages each of us to reach for ever higher levels of spiritual living, all the while providing perfect guidance through the ministry of His Indwelling Spirit. Even in the midst of the distractions of modern life, we can learn how to sense His often subtle leading and live in keeping with it. This practice of progressively seeking to understand and do God's will is an essential part of the Familist Way.

LOVE While relationships in the Father's family are often challenging, they are progressively affectionate. Over time we discover that the love which originates in God flows in many directions. We are each nourished by the devoted affection of the Father's Indwelling Spirit. We can adore our Creator in the

1. Again, poverty of language is unfortunately limiting. There seems to be, as yet, no androgynous wording which effectively captures the spiritual ideal historically expressed in the phrase "The Brotherhood of Man."

outpouring of our worship. And we can bestow the overflow of our love in caring for our sisters and brothers. Love energizes the soul. In every relationship, love purifies and clarifies; it shows the way ahead.

ETERNAL LIFE Death cannot deprive us of our relationships in God's family. It is precisely because these gifts are never-ending that we can feel spiritually so secure. The Familist Way is an exhilarating path, one which beckons the believer to ~~enter~~ ~~an~~ an eternal adventure of growth in the Father's universe family.

Death is a passageway, the entrance to a never-ending future of spiritual advancement. As we ascend through the stars, innumerable new experiences and unimaginable opportunities for service await us. As we move from one destination to the next in our Father's universe home, the goal for which we shall strive is perfection itself. And though it may take us age upon age to attain it, eventually we shall come before the Universal Father at the center of all things and experience the fullness of His paradise Presence.

FAITH Genuine family relationships are always trusting. The children of wise and affectionate parents have learned to be reasonably confident that everything needed for their well-being will be provided. They have implicit faith in those who love them.

It is just such simple childlike faith which opens the way to eternal relationship with God. The Father resides within, gently calling to us. He knocks quietly at the inner door, waiting for us to invite Him into our lives. When we extend the faith invitation, we literally open the inner door through which He can enter with all of His spiritual gifts.

Gifts, however, cannot be given through a closed door, and God will not open the inner door of the heart against our will. Though the Father loves us more than we can ever know, He will not force us to accept His love. First we must come to that place where, like a young child, we are able to trust Him. Then we will naturally open inwardly to receive His love.

For those of us who were hurt early in life, mustering the courage to trust and receive God's love in this simple way, like a little child, can be very difficult. We may actually feel quite distrustful, paralyzed by profound fears of rejection, feelings of unworthiness, or other emotional blocks. However, if we persist in our attempts to trust God and discover how He feels about us, such inner blocks will begin to melt away under the very real and radiant sun of His affection. We can thus begin to learn just how trustworthy, consistent, and dependable the Father's love for us really is (See section for more on the process of such inner healing.)

No matter how hesitant at first, such courageous expressions of childlike faith are the key which opens the door to a deeply satisfying relationship with God.

Familism can never be reduced to a ~~doctrine~~ doctrine or creed. Any spiritual path remains simply an empty shell unless it is made real in the relationships and activities of daily life.

There are five family circles within which the Familist lives out his or her ideals. Each of these circles is an actual family of loving relationships, as well as a broad arena of service activities. These five family circles are introduced below, and more fully presented in later sections of Volume I.

First Circle: The Inner Family We experience inner family love and devotion primarily in the context of our relationship with God's Indwelling Spirit.(1) First circle activities center on the regular practice of inner communion -- prayer, worship, and other personal devotions.

Additional benefits often result when we come together in groups to share our inner spiritual experiences. Sometimes fellow believers can offer suggestions which add depth and consistency to our individual practices. Small first circle sharing groups (7-15 people) which meet regularly can provide a nourishing context for spiritual study, the sharing of insights, and small group worship and prayer. Such first circle groups provide a vital service by helping us to develop the inner family life.

The Familist Way flows from the wellspring of the inner life. If the inner pool is allowed to run dry, the outer life will wither and die. The quality of all outer family relations depends upon the constancy of our inner family sharing.

Second Circle: The Home Family The home is where we form our earliest and most lasting impressions of family relationship, our own self-worth, and the nature of reality. Good family life and spirituality are mutually beneficial. Family life is strengthened by home-based spiritual practices. And a good early home environment can make it much easier for a person to mature spiritually as an adult. For these reasons, parents should be

1. The cultivation of relationships with our other spiritual helpers (especially Jesus and our angelic ministers) can also play a significant part in the dynamics of the inner family (see Volume I, Sections and Volume II, Sections .) A full description of the spiritual influences active in our inner lives can be found in the many relevant passages of The URANTIA Book (see also Sections in Volume II on the Familist Fellowship.)

especially concerned with improving the stability and spiritual life of the home.

Spiritual home culture, however, is just as important an activity for those not engaged in child-rearing. Familists in all kinds of living situations (married couples, committed friends who share a home, even those who live individually) should develop home based practices which encourage spiritual growth.

For all of these reasons, one of Familism's greatest priorities is the cultivation of spiritual home culture. Second circle activities involve believers in the development of materials and programs which spiritually uplift home life. The overall goal is to include God as fully as possible in the daily life of the home. Participants in second circle groups support each other's attempts to incorporate spiritual practices into the everyday events of their families' lives.

Third Circle: The Fellowship Family Individual Familists usually gather together in local Fellowships to share their spiritual ideals and work toward the realization of common service goals. Such local groups are chartered by the Familist Fellowship, an organization devoted to the development and perpetuation of a world-wide association of religious believers who aspire to embody the Familist Way.

Local Fellowships are the third vital circle of family relationships. Here again, our challenge is to live out the central truths of Familism, this time within a community of like-minded believers who worship, share, grow, and serve together over time.

Third circle functions are many and varied. All of the activities of the other circles (for instance, the first and second circle groups mentioned above) are coordinated through the structure of the third circle Fellowship. A partial list of the functions undertaken by a local Fellowship would include regular worship services, celebration of special events in the lives of participants, religious education of children, orientation of new members, and evangelistic sharing of the Familist Way. For a fuller elaboration of such third circle functions, see Volume II on the Familist Fellowship.

In addition to serving as a vehicle for the coordination of such activities, however, an effective local Fellowship eventually grows to be a genuine family. Here, over the years, we can come to love each other as spiritual sisters and brothers, sharing the joys and pains, the successes and struggles of our lives. Participation in a Fellowship family can be a deeply rewarding experience, especially in the midst of the superficialities of much of modern life. The viability of the Familist Way depends upon such dedicated third circle participation.

Fourth Circle: The Family of All Believers All people who have discovered a living relationship with God, whether or not they are members of organized religious groups, are participants in the fourth circle family. If they feel a genuine desire to

know God (regardless of their God concept) and aspire to live in a higher spiritual way, then they are sisters and brothers in the family of believers. It is important that all such believers strive for relations based on mutual respect and affection, such relations as befit our common status as God's beloved children.

Familists engage in many activities aimed at furthering good relations between believers of different faiths. The study of various religions, visiting the services of other traditions, and the promotion of inter-religious dialogue are but a few of the fourth circle activities which are important to a full realization of the Familist Way (see Sections in Volume II.)

Fifth Circle: The Family of God All people everywhere are sons and daughters of God. The Father cares equally for each and every one of us. Even if we are not yet aware of being His children, even if we question or reject the very existence of God, we are still His children, beloved and precious to Him. The fifth circle family of God includes all human beings, whether or not they have discovered a living relationship with Him.

The main service activity in this fifth circle family is helping those who have not yet discovered that they are God's children, to make that life-transforming discovery. Evangelistic sharing of the Familist Way, on levels ranging from personal ministry through community outreach to worldwide mission, is the primary goal of fifth circle service. (See sections in Volume II.)

Additional types of fifth circle service include varied community ministries to aid those who are ill and suffering, and in need of spiritual support and rehabilitation.

In summary, Familism is an actual way of living in vital family relationships with God and other people. While recognizing that no set of human understandings can provide a complete and final grasp of truth, the Familist Way rests on the foundation of seven primary qualities or truths of spiritual family life. It is parental (Fatherhood of God), fraternal (Brotherhood of Man), intimate (Indwelling Spirit), directional (Will of God), affectionate (Love), secure (Eternal Life), and trusting (Faith).

In order to be potent, however, these truths must come alive in our daily experience. They cannot simply be truths we understand and believe; they must be truths we increasingly live out and become. The potential of the Familist Way lies in the tremendous power it has to unify human experience, if it becomes an actual way of living. There is great life coherence for the believer in the integration of family relationships on all conceivable levels; from the inner family to the home family, from the fellowship family to the family of all believers, from the global family of all human beings to the universal family of all beings in the Father's vast creation.

Foundations of Familism
Volume II

THE FAMILIST FELLOWSHIP:

Its Nature, Purpose and Function

Marvin Gawryn

(Note: The following is a preliminary draft of a small sampling of what is planned as a full book-length manuscript. The large majority of the manuscript has yet to be drafted, including many other sections which would precede, follow, and be interspersed with these sections. However, this very limited sampling does begin to provide a sense of the purpose and tone of the projected completed work.)

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Variations in Local Fellowship "Culture"

Each local Fellowship, as it evolves, will naturally develop its own distinct ways of accomplishing the purposes common to all local Fellowships. Just as a family develops its own unique culture, so, with the passage of time, each local Fellowship family will evolve ways of sharing, worshipping, and working together which reflect the collective preferences of its participants.

Some Fellowships will function conservatively, some progressively, and some moderately. Fellowship culture will vary with the socioeconomic, ethnic, national, and other characteristics of the participants in each group. A local Fellowship in a Christian European country will likely pursue Familist purposes very differently than one situated in Moslem Turkey, Hindu India, or Buddhist Japan. Even Fellowships in close proximity may develop different styles of function.

It is most important to promote tolerance and even keen appreciation for the wide variations in local group culture which the Familist Fellowship may eventually encompass. It must be remembered that Familism is first and foremost a way of living, loving, and serving in a series of spiritual family relationships. Variations on the theme of such a life are infinite. While local Fellowships should be guided in their function by broad Familist purposes and principles, the evolution of a variety of local cultural approaches to such function is inevitable and even desirable.

Organizational Overview of the Familist Fellowship and Institute

If groups of believers are to enjoy regular fellowship and serve together toward common ends, they must organize themselves effectively in order to accomplish their purposes. There are five levels of organization in the Familist Fellowship: local Fellowships, Area Associations, Regional Associations, National Associations, and the Central Association.

The Familist Institute is a missionary organization dedicated to the proclamation and spread of the Familist Way. Although it is an independent institution, the Institute works in close coordination with the Fellowship. Each of these structures is described below in a brief overview. For a more detailed description of the organization of the Fellowship and Institute, the reader is referred to Volume IV of the Foundations of Familism series, Leadership and Structure of the Familist Fellowship.

Local Fellowships The local Fellowship is, by far, the most important locus of activities in the entire Familist structure. It is here that all of the vital functions of the Familist Way unfold. It is in local Fellowships that believers come together

regularly to engage in worship, study, service, mutual support, and social sharing. In the local Fellowship the spiritual life of the individual is deepened and connected with the spiritual life of the community. Children are spiritually educated, and Familist ideals of home life are uplifted. The local Fellowship facilitates fraternal interaction with religionists from other traditions, coordinates community ministries, and carries out local efforts to share the central truths of the Familist Way.

Because local Fellowships undertake so many vital activities, sound organizational structures are critical to their effective function. Administrative and pastoral leadership roles should be well-articulated, and the best people selected by the membership to fill them.

The members of each Fellowship, meeting annually as a local Fellowship Assembly, elect a coordinating Executive Board. This group includes officers and committee heads to address various ministry and administrative tasks, as well as the most spiritually mature and well-trained person(s) the Fellowship can find to provide pastoral leadership. A Fellowship's Pastor facilitates its ministries, usually working with a staff of volunteer assistants, the size of which varies in accordance with the local Fellowship's resources and stage of development (see sections .)(1)

The most seasoned members of the local Fellowship should be chosen to serve on its Council of Elders. These Elders, appointed for life by the Executive Board and confirmed by the local Assembly, act as an advisory and judicial body, focusing on the long-term growth and stability of the Fellowship.

Detailed help in developing local Fellowship organization and leadership is available from the Familist Institute and the Fellowship's Central Association.

Local Fellowships should be limited in size. When first forming, a local group of believers, known as a Familist Meeting, may be quite small; perhaps just a few members meeting informally in a local home. While some Meetings remain small and informal, others add members and eventually grow into formal Fellowships (see section .) It is important, however, that a local Fellowship stay small enough to allow all of its participants to enjoy extended family-like relationships.

When a group of believers grows beyond 200 adult members, it should consider either dividing into two smaller Fellowships or sponsoring the formation of a new local Fellowship to receive additional members. Often two such related Fellowships will work out arrangements for dividing leadership resources and sharing the same facility.

1. Details of organizational roles and structures may be quite different for local Fellowships in different nations. While uniformity of roles and structures is not necessary, it is important that local Fellowships formally establish clear guidelines for their organizational functions.

It is also important that the geographic area served by a local Fellowship be small enough to allow members to travel easily to the Fellowship home. Local Fellowships should be small enough and geographically concentrated enough to function as real friendship families on at least a weekly and even a daily basis. Familists living too far away from an established Fellowship to allow for regular participation should be encouraged to form a Familist Meeting in their local community. Often, in time, such "satellite" Meetings develop into new local Fellowships.

Area Associations Often the members of several local Fellowships in an area will want to gather together periodically. They may wish to undertake common service activities, or may face common difficulties which require the mobilization of resources greater than those of any one Fellowship. In such circumstances, it is natural for them to organize on a second level by forming an Area Association of Familist Fellowships.

Usually an Area Association is established by the Fellowships within a metropolitan or county area. The members of the Fellowships in an Area Association should be able to travel easily to a central location for a one day gathering. Typically such Area gatherings occur every 2-3 months and incorporate a variety of worship and fellowship activities.

Each Area Association should have its own offices, and an Area Pastor and staff. An Executive Board is elected by lay representatives and Pastors from the local Fellowships who meet annually as an Area Assembly. Each Area Association should also have its own Council of Elders, appointed and serving in a manner similar to the Councils of Elders at the local Fellowship level.

An Area Association often coordinates service projects involving all of the local Fellowships in the area. For instance, it may sponsor area-wide educational seminars on spiritual home culture for parents. Or Area staff may plan and implement an area-wide effort to publicize the central truths of the Familist Way. Often such Area Association projects are carried out with the help of personnel from the Institute and Central Association.

Regional Associations A third level of Familist organizational structure, most often found in the larger nations, is the Regional Association of Familist Fellowships. Usually, all of the Fellowships in a broad region share a common set of needs and concerns: how best to select and provide training for administrative and pastoral leaders, how to develop educational and ministry materials which fit the cultural needs of the people within a particular region, how to allocate resources for the development of new local Fellowships, etc..

In those larger nations which have a number of regional subcultures, it is the Regional Associations which address such concerns. In the smaller, single-culture nations, Regional Associations do not normally develop, and such responsibilities are usually handled by a National Association.

Each Regional Association has its own offices, Regional Pastor, and staff. A coordinating Executive Board is elected by lay and Pastoral representatives of the local Fellowships and Area Associations who meet as a Regional Assembly. The Executive Board organizes the yearly gathering of the Regional Assembly, which combines worship and fellowship with a series of meetings for administrative and planning purposes.

As at the Local and Area levels, the Executive Board appoints and the Assembly confirms a Regional Council of Elders, which functions in advisory and judicial capacities on matters of regional concern.

National Associations The local Fellowships in a particular country usually organize themselves on a fourth level, as a National Association of Familist Fellowships. Its structure and functions are similar to those of a Regional Association, except that it deals with issues and projects affecting all of the Fellowships in a particular nation-state. For instance, some countries have rigorous legal requirements to which religious organizations must conform. National Associations would help local Fellowships adapt to such conditions. The translation of Familist publications into local languages would be another area under the jurisdiction of a National Association.

National Associations sponsor a nationwide convocation every three years (every year in small countries, without Regional Associations) for worship, fellowship, and administrative purposes. Each National Association has its own Pastor, staff, and administrative offices. Its Executive Board is elected by a National Assembly made up of lay and Pastoral representatives from the lower Associations. The National Council of Elders is appointed and serves much as do its counterparts at the lower Association levels.

The Central Association The Central Association is the highest and most broadly representative governing body in the Familist Fellowship's organizational structure. It provides guidelines for the activities of local Fellowships and lower Associations all around the world and coordinates all planning and projects which affect the welfare of the Fellowship as a whole. It has its own Executive Board, offices, and staff headed by the Central Association Pastor.

In order to provide direction and stability during the Fellowship's early formative stages, the Central Executive Board is initially self-appointing. Ultimately, however, after the formal association of the first one hundred local Fellowships (see Section), members of this Board are to be elected by lay and Pastoral representatives from the local Fellowships and/or the Regional and National Associations meeting as the Familist Fellowship's Central Assembly. Until this shift in electoral process occurs, however, the Central Assembly serves as an advisory body to the Executive Board.

The Central Executive Board organizes an international Familist convocation once every three years. These are times of satisfying worship and fellowship for Familists from all parts of the world. Immediately before this Convocation, the Central Assembly is convened to advise and/or elect the Fellowship's Executive Board and present the collective concerns of the local Fellowships and lower Associations.

The Central Council of Elders, appointed by the Board and confirmed by the Assembly, is made up of the wisest, most experienced individuals in the worldwide Fellowship. It advises the Board and Assembly, and presides over those judicial proceedings which concern the entire Fellowship.

It is important to note that provisions have been made for independent legislative, executive, and judicial functions at all levels of the Fellowship organization. The Assemblies -- Local, Area, Regional, National, and Central -- are the primary locus of legislative enactment. These bodies adopt major principles and programs of function at their respective levels.

The Executive Boards -- ranging from the local Fellowships to the Central Association -- are the executive bodies at each level. They suggest various programs and then oversee the execution of those which have been endorsed by their particular Assemblies. The Pastor and staff at each level actually carry out the Fellowship's programs under their particular Board's executive direction.

The Councils of Elders act at each level as independent judicial bodies, arbitrating and adjudicating differences of viewpoint when they arise.

In carrying out its responsibilities, the Fellowship's Central Association works very closely with the Familist Institute. The Institute is an independent training and missionary organization which works alongside the Familist

Fellowship. The Institute's purpose is to promote the spread of the Familist Way and serve the needs of the Fellowship at all levels.

The Institute prepares and sends out missionaries who broadly share Familist principles and help initiate the formation of local Fellowships. It helps train leaders to fill pastoral and administrative roles within the local Fellowships. Institute personnel are always available to aid local Fellowships and Associations as they move through various stages in their development (see section).

The Institute serves additionally as a resource center for people dedicated to the development of the Familist mission. Its personnel work on an ongoing basis to develop and distribute materials and programs for worship, education, administration, and outreach.

The Institute's work is coordinated by an Executive Director who has primary responsibility for the overall development and implementation of the organization's purposes. This Director is guided by an Advisory Board which he or she appoints. In the event of death, resignation, incapacity or malfeasance, the Advisory Board is empowered to elect a new Executive Director (by a three quarters vote), who must then be confirmed by the Fellowship's Executive Board (by a three quarters vote) before assuming his or her responsibilities.

The Fellowship and Institute are separate but interdependent organizations, each with its unique structure and purposes. The Fellowship is a broadly representative, democratically governed religious institution. It coordinates the evolving activities of all Familists and local Fellowships, and its Central Association is responsible for the welfare, direction, and growth of the Fellowship as a whole.

The Institute, in contrast, is a much smaller, centrally governed missionary organization with a single clearly defined purpose: to spread the Familist Way and help catalyze the development of the Familist Fellowship.

The functional relationship between the Fellowship and the Institute is cooperative and highly synergistic. The Institute's Advisory Board and the Fellowship's Executive Board work closely together. Their membership may overlap to some extent, and the meetings of one Board are always open to members of the other Board.

The Fellowship and Institute are, in the fullest sense, mutually interdependent organizations. Each needs the other to function in a balanced fashion. The strengths of one compensate for the vulnerabilities of the other. Each organization can best serve only when it is yoked with the other.(1)

1. It is important to recognize that, at the time of this writing, the above descriptions of the Familist Fellowship and Institute are a projection of mature religious organizations which do not yet exist in the form described. Such mature

The Role of The URANTIA Book in the Familist Fellowship

The role played by The URANTIA Book in the Familist Fellowship is subtle and complex, and deserves careful consideration. Initially, it is important to understand some of the limitations on the URANTIA Book's role in the Fellowship.

Familiarity with The URANTIA Book is not necessary for membership in the Fellowship. One can live as a dedicated Familist without reading any of The URANTIA Book. The key elements of the Familist Way, once clearly understood, do not require the reading of a book to be practiced. Books and other spiritual aids may help, but they are not essential. Living in spiritual family relationship with God and one's sisters and brothers is essential.

Much of what is contained in The URANTIA Book has little or no relationship to living the Familist Way or to the purposes and functions of the Familist Fellowship. The URANTIA Book makes observations in a broad variety of fields, including history, geology, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, psychology, political science, social issues, and philosophy. The Familist Fellowship, however, is simply a religious organization, the purposes of which are limited to proclaiming spiritual truth and encouraging spiritual living. Indeed, the Fellowship is enjoined against taking positions on any issue or engaging in any activity that is not directly related to its limited religious purposes (see section .)

Despite these limitations, The URANTIA Book does play an important role in Fellowship functions. The URANTIA Book is the primary scripture used in all Familist activities; passages from

organizations only evolve over substantial periods of time. However, having a clear initial vision of desired end results is important for the effective early development of any organization.

Of the organizational forms described above, it is anticipated that two rudimentary structures will become functional during Familism's early stages. The Familist Institute will coordinate the initial spread of the Familist message. And the Central Executive Board will coordinate the Familist Fellowship's early development, including the chartering of the first local Fellowships.

It is anticipated that Area, Regional, and National Associations will form naturally as the number of local Fellowships increases and the need for greater coordination becomes apparent.

it comprise the central inspirational stimulus in worship services, sermons, and other presentations.

The URANTIA Book is also a major source of material for studying and teaching the more advanced nuances of the Familist Way. It is especially helpful both in fully unfolding the nature of the afterlife experience, and in providing a replete account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Neither of these subjects is so fully presented in any other source. For this reason, most local Fellowships provide optional study groups which focus on The URANTIA Book as a regular part of their weekly activities.

Acceptance of The URANTIA Book is also an essential criterion for those who feel called to serve as leaders in the Fellowship. While participants and even dedicated members need not read The URANTIA Book, Familists who aspire to any level of group leadership in the Fellowship must have read it and must accept it as providing normative guidance for their leadership efforts. This is critically important for the following reason.

A substantial effort has been made to ensure that the initial conception of the Familist Way, as well as the major organizational principles of the Fellowship, are consistent with the guiding perspectives contained in The URANTIA Book. The Fellowship, however, is an evolving social organization, growing and changing over time. Its leadership should be involved in a constant process of steering a course in wise adjustment to new circumstances. In this highly creative process, the "Foundations of Familism" series is meant to offer substantial guidance. However, as these leaders inevitably encounter unforeseen challenges, the perspectives of The URANTIA Book should remain the primary written guide used in their efforts to chart the Fellowship's unfolding course.

For this reason it is critical that all levels of leadership, from the most local and informal to the most central and formal, be thoroughly familiar with The URANTIA Book and accept it as a normative source of guidance in leadership deliberations.

This is not to urge that fixed codes of interpretation based on passages from The URANTIA Book should be established and uncritically accepted. While leadership groups should assume the normative revelatory value of URANTIA Book passages, they should always be engaged in ongoing efforts more wisely to interpret and apply their import.

In summary, the Familist Way is the living of a life, not simply the reading of a book. Thus, it is not expected that Familists will necessarily read The URANTIA Book. Any Familist functioning in a leadership capacity, however, must have read it and accepted the authority of its guidance for his or her service in the Fellowship. The Familist Institute, in conjunction with the Fellowship's Central Association, is responsible for developing training guidelines for all levels of leadership. Both of these organizations can provide help to local Fellowships in the important task of properly integrating The URANTIA Book into their activities.

The Role of Jesus in the Familist Fellowship

As with The URANTIA Book, Jesus' role in the Familist Fellowship is subtle and important to understand clearly. Perhaps it would be helpful to explain preliminarily that some elements are essential to the Familist Way, and some elements, while they are very important in the Fellowship's function, are not essential to living as a Familist.

For instance, aspiring to live in family relationship with God and other people is a key element in Familism. Without it, Familism loses its essential meaning. Acceptance of Jesus' special role, however, is not indispensable to Familism in the same basic sense.

It is true that Jesus' life and teachings, as portrayed in The URANTIA Book, offer the greatest available illustration of the Familist Way of living. Any Familist who wishes to understand more of that Way will find incomparable inspiration and insight from a study of the Master's life and teachings. And yet, such a study is not essential to Familist practice. The simple desire to know and do the Father's will and live as His child in loving inner friendship is all that is needed to ensure progress along the Familist path.

As with The URANTIA Book, acceptance of the validity of any claims regarding Jesus should never be coerced, even in the most subtle or indirect way. If a believer really wishes to know more about Jesus, that is exciting. If for any reason, however, a believer is not so motivated, that is perfectly acceptable. He or she can experience all the essentials of Familism without having to accept Jesus' special role.

The URANTIA Book presents Jesus as a very special person. He was and is divine, the sovereign Creator of our local universe, both before and after he took human form. He was born two thousand years ago as a child of the realm, grew up to manhood, lived a full human life in the most perfect way, died and resurrected, and ministers to us even now through his Spirit presence. From The URANTIA Book's perspective, in the fullness of eternity every progressing believer will eventually come to know Jesus. But for many people, including some Familists, such an experience may not happen in this first life.

The process of a believer's evaluation and possible acceptance of such assertions about Jesus is an intensely personal experience. No one should accept them simply because another person or a book claims they are true. Firm conclusions on such profound faith questions usually come as a result of searching prayer and illuminating worship, and often only emerge over an extended period of time.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that both Jesus and The URANTIA Book have such prominent roles in Fellowship functions, and yet a loyal Familist need not accept either one of them. How is it that, as previously mentioned, The URANTIA Book is the

Fellowship's primary scripture, and Jesus' life and teachings are presented as the living embodiment of the Familist Way, and yet neither one of them is deemed essential to Familist practice?

Perhaps some light can be shed on this seeming paradox by looking at the differences between the religion of Jesus and the religion about Jesus, and the religion of The URANTIA Book and the religion about The URANTIA Book.

In the religion about Jesus, acceptance of Jesus' special status is the major article of faith. The faith revolves centrally around his person and the special role he plays in the cosmic scheme of things. Salvation is available only to those who accept Jesus' divinity. In contrast, the religion of Jesus is simply the essence of his spiritual life. It is the amazing way in which he led a life of constant companionship with God and loving service to his spiritual sisters and brothers.

The religion about The URANTIA Book, were it to evolve, would focus unduly on the phenomenon of the Book, on the details of how it came to be, and on acceptance of its special revelatory nature as a criterion for group participation. Reading and studying it would be the believer's primary religious activity.

In contrast, the religion of The URANTIA Book is the striking way of spiritual living described within its pages. It is an experience of intimate companionship between spiritual child and heavenly Parent, a sincere faith search for the will of the Father, and an eternal adventure of loving service to our brothers and sisters in His universe family. The Familist Way is simply a restatement of the religion of Jesus and of The URANTIA Book in symbols and forms which speak to the needs of people entering the twenty-first century.

If Familism required acceptance of Jesus' special status, it would be a religion about Jesus. If Familism required acceptance of the revelatory status of The URANTIA Book, it would be a religion about The URANTIA Book. A Familist is not required to accept the special spiritual status of any particular human being or scripture. He or she is only expected to try progressively to live the Familist Way.

Many paths lead Godward, some less directly, some more directly. Sometimes a magnificent feature of the environment, a majestic mountain or a sparkling lake, arrests our attention as we tread a particular path. Sometimes we mistake the path itself for our destination. It is essential, however, if we are to reach our destination, that we not remain indefinitely at any one spot in our journey, that we continue walking the Godward path. If we persist thus, nothing can keep us from Him. For we are His precious children, and He is our affectionate universal Father, gently but surely guiding us home.

The Familist Communion: A Symbolic Enactment

Familists, as individuals and in groups, may develop any number of ritual practices which symbolically celebrate their

spiritual ideals. However, the one form of symbolic enactment in which most Familists engage is the Familist Communion. This devotional act has multiple levels of meaning, value, and experience attached to it.

On the simple material level of the Communion practice, the believer partakes of two symbolic elements, the bread and the wine (usually non-alcoholic wine or juice.) Throughout history, the world's religions have accorded many varied meanings to these venerable symbols. Put simply, in the Familist Communion the bread symbolizes the substance of the Familist Way, the substance of the life and teachings of Jesus. The wine symbolizes the actual spirit Presence of the Father and of Jesus, and the possibility of immediate inner sharing with them in the moments of the Communion experience.

Out of the inner kernel of these simple symbols, however, unfolds an unlimited array of spiritual values and relationships. For instance, what do we mean when we say that the bread symbolizes the substance of Jesus' life and teachings? In his life we see the perfect living embodiment of family relationships with God and other people. And in his teachings are contained the entirety of the Familist Way. Thus, as we eat the bread and symbolically "take in" the substance of Jesus' life and teachings, we can savor and be nourished by our family relationships on all levels.

But how is it that these relationships actually come alive in the moments of the Communion experience? It is through the inner working of God's Spirit, symbolized by the wine, that all of what is contained in the substance of Jesus' life and teachings is quickened, comes alive in the present moment. As Jesus promised, it is all happening now, and he and the Father are celebrating with us. Somehow, the act of savoring the bread and the wine, symbolic of nourishing substance and the quickening spirit, can trigger an inner experience of our myriad family connections.

Thus, in the midst of the Communion experience we can reestablish ties with the members of our inner family -- our Father, Jesus, the angels, and our other spiritual helpers. Our love for and commitments to those in our home families -- spouses, children, parents, and others -- can be renewed and celebrated. Our deep connections with brothers and sisters in the local Fellowship family can also be reaffirmed in the group's sharing of the Communion experience. We can feel the common spiritual loyalties which join us to our fellows in other religious traditions. And we can experience the spiritual thrill of contemplating our place in the Father's far-flung global and even universal family.

In the midst of the Communion experience we can delight in the myriad qualities which characterize our family relationships with God and our fellows: that we are His trusting children and brothers and sisters to each other; that He shares Himself with us so intimately within; that He guides us forward with affection in our eternal ascent through His universe home; that through the

opening door of our faith He fills our days with all of these qualities of spiritual family life. All of this and infinitely more is enfolded in the symbolic seed of the Familist Communion, waiting to sprout and flower in a thousand enactments of devotional sharing.

Families are the social bedrock of every culture, and one of the universal practices of family life is the gathering together of family members to partake of a common meal. Thus, even at its simplest, the Familist Communion embodies a universal symbol of family solidarity; sisters and brothers eating and drinking together in affectionate company with their Creator Parent.

The Communion is an experience of profound spiritual nourishment, mirrored in an act of elemental physical nourishment. Since times immemorial, the grain of the harvest and the fruit of the vine have served as traditional symbols of the sustenance God has provided for humankind. In the Familist Communion they represent the deeper nourishment which humankind has sought all through the ages, the joyous and sustaining experience of fellowship in the Father's family.

As a devotional practice, the Familist Communion is quite adaptable. It can be experienced in a great variety of settings.

It can serve as a form of private devotion. The solitary Familist can partake of the bread and wine as a powerful personal revitalization of his or her faith. The Communion ritual can be surrounded by prayer and worship, and thus incorporated into the Familist's daily devotional practice. In this way, it can function as a symbolic catalyst, immersing the believer regularly in the experience of spiritual family relationships.

The Familist Communion can also become a regular family practice in the home. It can be shared in ways appropriate to the budding spirituality of children. The form of the ritual can evolve as they grow, introducing them, over time, to the heart of the Familist way of living.

The Communion practice can also be shared informally in a variety of small group settings. With a group of friends or at the beginning of a group service effort it can spiritually deepen and anchor the purpose of the gathering. For instance, a second circle group of parents might be gathering regularly to share insights on how to better spiritually educate their children. Starting their meetings with a Communion sharing would likely bring their love for their families and for each other to the fore, and add depth and purpose to their service efforts.

Perhaps most importantly, the Familist Communion should be a regular part of the worship services of the local Fellowship. It is by repeated symbolic acts such as the Communion, in liaison with group worship, prayer, and service, that the local Fellowship grows increasingly from a mere collection of individuals into an actual family of brothers and sisters, loving and serving God, each other, and their fellows in the larger family circles.

The Communion ritual can also play a vital part in the celebration of special occasions in the lives of local Fellowship participants. A variation of the Communion practice usually marks the acceptance of new members into the Fellowship (see section .) Other variations may be shared at the birth, marriage, and death of believers. In the deep bonding of the Communion experience, these events become an enduring part of the local Fellowship's family history.

The form of the Familist Communion should be simple and flexible. Individuals and groups should feel free to experiment with the forms that best suit them (see Section .) The following thoughts are simply offered for consideration.

In groups, the facilitator might establish the setting by sharing a few brief inspirational thoughts on the nature and purpose of the Communion experience and any special values attaching to its specific celebration at that time (for example, entry of new members, marriage, service effort, etc.) Then, during an extended time of quiet contemplation, the bread and wine (usually non-alcoholic wine or juice) can be distributed. The participants can partake of them when they feel themselves filled with the experience of family union on multiple levels, in combination with the values of the occasion. When sufficient time has been allowed for all to partake and commune inwardly, it is often desirable to end with gentle worshipful music.

As a final consideration, one of the beauties of the Familist Communion as a ritual practice is that it is, in itself, a variation of inner communion. It is somehow appropriate that this central symbolic practice fit within the most important spiritual practice in the Familist way of life, the constant sharing we can each enjoy with our Indwelling Spirit.

In the prayer and worship of inner communion, Familists strive progressively to deepen their communication and union with God. Eventually the symbolic practice of the Familist Communion can become simply a highlighted act in the flow of ongoing inner communion. It is important to remember that, at any one moment, it is through this web of inner sharing that the Universal Father maintains loving contact with all of the faith-conscious children of His far-flung spiritual family.

Different Degrees of Familist Participation

It is natural for modern people to have varied reactions to the idea of participating in organized religious functions. There are many religionists who desire to live in relationship with God but, for various reasons, do not wish to participate in religious organizations. Some of these "unchurched" believers may benefit from indirect exposure to Familist ideas, but will not wish to participate in worship services or other group

functions. This is perfectly acceptable. While, in general, a combination of personal spiritual experience and social religious sharing is desirable, it is the first that is vitally necessary; the second, while it can be important, is optional. Believers should participate in group religion only when they genuinely feel its value; such involvements should not be coerced in any way.

There will be many people who participate occasionally in the activities of a local Fellowship. They espouse the Familist way of living, but do not feel sufficient need for group involvement to participate regularly. As time passes, some of these folks may grow more involved; others may not. While greater participation should be welcomed and appreciated, it should be clearly communicated to the irregular participant that any level of involvement is acceptable and worthwhile.

Some believers will conclude soon after their initial exposures to Familism that they wish to formally affiliate as members of a local Fellowship. Others will come to the same conclusion, but gradually, as a result of increasing participation. Membership signals the participant's desire to establish a deeper and more enduring bond with the local Fellowship family. It involves a commitment to regular participation and upstepped service in the activities of the Fellowship. The process of orientation and initiation to membership in the local Fellowship is an important experience, both for the individual and for the group. (See sections).

Finally, members of the Fellowship may wish to serve in various leadership capacities. Opportunities exist for many different kinds and degrees of service in the work of deepening and extending the Father's family. Leaders may serve on a part-time basis or in full-time ministry, in local areas or more broadly, and in the context of all five family circles (see sections .) The Familist Institute works closely with the Fellowship's Central Association to clarify leadership needs and to develop selection criteria and training programs to meet such needs. (See sections in Volume IV, Leadership and Structure of the Familist Fellowship, for more on leadership roles).

Becoming a Member of the Familist Fellowship

It is important to place formal membership in the Familist Fellowship in proper perspective. A careful consideration of relationships between the third, fourth, and fifth circle families provides some helpful clarification of the issues involved.

First and foremost, every human being is a child in the Father's worldwide family (the fifth circle.) Sadly, many of our brothers and sisters have not yet realized their membership in this largest of spiritual groups. They have not yet entered the

fourth circle family of conscious religionists. The central goal of fifth circle evangelism is effectively to introduce these wandering children to the possibility of living relationship with God. This ministry of bringing the Father's lost children home to Him is far more important than persuading them to become members of any particular religious group, including the Familist Fellowship.

If a person is already participating as a satisfied member of an established religious group, it should be the goal of fourth circle ministries to affirm his or her existing religious loyalties, and to seek mutually enriching fraternal dialogue. The goal of loving relationship between believers in the Father's many religious families is more important than enlarging the membership of any one religious group, including the Familist Fellowship.

If, however, people become familiar with the purposes and service activities of the Familist Way and wish to get involved, third circle participation in a local Fellowship can be a deeply satisfying spiritual experience.

Local Fellowships should develop a comprehensive series of stages through which interested people can move if they wish to participate in and then become members of the Fellowship. Usually local Fellowships establish a membership committee to coordinate this important function.

Prospective members should be provided a thorough orientation to both the central elements of the Familist Way and the purposes and functions of the Fellowship. This is a special time of learning, adaptation, and spiritual growth, and it should not be rushed. It is important that the choice for membership be a wholehearted one. The orientation should allow the prospective member sufficient time to fully form and strengthen his or her commitment to living the Familist Way and assuming the responsibilities of membership. After completing such an orientation, the participant is ready for the formal act of becoming a member of the local Fellowship family.

The ceremony of entry to the Fellowship is the crossing of an important threshold, a significant experience on many levels for both the individual and the group. In form, it is a variation of the ritual of the Familist Communion (see Section) and is, therefore, symbolic of the renewed bonding of brothers and sisters together with the Father in family love. But on this occasion it is additionally significant in that it signifies the enfolding of newly entering sisters and brothers in the love of the local Fellowship family.

The new members may already be participants in families on multiple levels. But in the ceremonial entry of Familist Communion, they bond with and become part of yet another and important family circle, the local Fellowship. They are, in a sense, born into a new family. From that point on, there is a special relationship of commitment to love and service between them and the sisters and brothers of their local Fellowship. In the symbolic act of the Communion, these new and deeper bonds of

spiritual connection are established. The story of the individual and the story of the Fellowship formally intertwine. From this point on, each time the Communion ritual is experienced, these special ties of love can be renewed and strengthened.

In summary, there are three stages in the process of becoming a member in the Familist Fellowship. The first is a thorough orientation. The second is formal entry to the local Fellowship family. The third stage, which completes the process, is the gradual integration of new members into the activities of the Fellowship. The membership committee should help new members become familiar with the array of service and fellowship opportunities within the five family circles, and facilitate their ongoing participation within them.

This section has outlined some initial considerations related to becoming a member of the Familist Fellowship (see also Sections). The development of a mature process for entry of new members should be a continuing priority for local Fellowships. Personnel from both the Familist Institute and the Central Association are available to help local Fellowships develop their processes of orientation, entry, and integration of new members.

Starting Local Familist Activities

Local activities begin when one or more believers take the initiative to organize them. When a Familist in a particular area feels moved to organize local activities, often the first step is either to introduce interested friends to elements of the Familist Way, or locate other nearby Familists and fellowship informally with them. The various Association offices can help put interested individual believers in touch with each other. As a nucleus of committed participants gathers, the formative steps can be taken to initiate a Familist Meeting and eventually a local Fellowship (see Section .) Personnel from the Institute are often available to help with such early efforts.

Initially, it is important for a new group of believers to find a suitable place to meet. If the size of the group is not too large, a participant's home can offer a warm first environment. As gatherings grow larger and more frequent, various kinds of more public settings can be rented. Eventually, as the new Fellowship forms and gains stability of membership, attention should be directed to the procurement of a more or less stable home for its activities.

It is also important, early on, to establish a regular worship service. Even if such services are small and simple at first, they are an important part of third circle family life. Perhaps, early on, they will be held only monthly, but it is

desirable that believers worship together weekly as soon as practically possible. Even with small numbers of believers, the bonds that form in regular group worship, prayer, and Communion are vital to local Fellowship evolution.

As Familist Meetings form and mature into local Fellowships, they can begin addressing the full range of service activities embraced in the five family circles. Such a full service array takes time to develop, but with patient, persistent efforts a local Fellowship will eventually reap a rich harvest of family expansion and fellowship deepening.

Forming a Local Fellowship

There are two main evolutionary stages that a group of believers moves through in forming a local Fellowship. When first gathering together, they tend to function informally as a Familist Meeting. At some point, however, they may decide to undertake the organizing efforts which lead to formation of a local Familist Fellowship. After such initial organizational efforts, followed by a brief transitional period to develop stability of function, the group can apply to be formally chartered as an associated local Fellowship.

In both the Meeting and Fellowship developmental stages, newly organizing groups often receive help from several sources, including nearby established local Fellowships, Area, Regional, and National Associations, and the Central Association. Usually one of the first steps taken by a new group of believers is to request guidance and support from the Familist Institute. Visiting personnel from the Institute can be especially helpful, providing valuable counsel in the earlier stages of Meeting and Fellowship formation.

Provision for effective leadership is an important matter, even in the earliest informal activities of a Familist Meeting. There are two types of leadership tasks to be accomplished: those related to administration and those related to spiritual ministry.

It must be decided when and where the group will meet, who will chair its deliberations, the activities it will undertake, how conclusions are to be reached, etc.. The group of believers should early choose the person or persons whom they feel can best lead them in accomplishing such initial administrative tasks.

Likewise, from its inception, a Familist Meeting will want to engage in spiritual activities, especially in support of functions in the first, second, and third circle families. Early priorities for a newly gathered Meeting include the establishment of a first circle group or groups for the sharing of spiritual insights, the support of spiritual life in the home, as well as the organizing of group worship. Often working with the help of personnel assigned to the area by the Institute, the Meeting selects those from among its participants who can best be trained

to serve in coordinating and facilitating such ministry functions. Service activities in the fourth and fifth circles often wait until the formal establishment of a local Fellowship.

After a new group of believers has been functioning informally as a Familist Meeting for some period of time, the participants may feel committed enough to want to enter the second developmental stage, wherein an enduring organizational structure is established. If so, they must generate a set of formal founding documents which incorporate the group's basic operating procedures. Such formal structures provide continuity over time by establishing clear leadership roles and clarifying the processes by which the emerging local Fellowship will proceed toward the accomplishment of its enduring purposes.

It can take quite a while for a group of believers to develop formal structures with which they are comfortable. But the Meeting should be encouraged to take whatever time is required, for it is in this stage that the group of believers must form a stable organizational foundation for its future function. Eventually, though, all of the details are worked through, and the new local Fellowship can be chartered by representatives of the Fellowship's Central Association (or a Regional Association if one exists nearby.)

At this point a newly formed local Fellowship tends to go through an adjustment period during which its participants fine-tune the administrative procedures they have created and adapt to new ways of functioning. This is also often a time when the first, second, and third circle activities of the Fellowship broaden and stabilize, and participants branch out into fourth and fifth circle service.

In a sense, the development of a local Fellowship parallels that of a growing human being. First a person moves through the early formative stages of childhood (informal Meeting stage.) Then the person enters adolescence and matures to the threshold of adulthood (formal organizing stage; this is the time when the group unfolds its organizational wings and learns to fly.) At this point the young adult is ready to begin acting as a responsible member of society (formal chartering as an associated local Fellowship.) In a sense, attaining chartered status indicates that a local Fellowship is fully functional; through the persistent efforts of its participants, it has come of age.

The Fellowship's Central Association, with the aid of the Familist Institute, is responsible for developing criteria for the chartering of local Fellowships. After chartering, the local family of believers can send representatives to all of the Central Association's deliberative functions. Associated status also entitles a local Fellowship to participate fully in the functions of its Area, Regional, and National Associations (see Sections .)

Frequently, the first year or two after formal chartering is the beginning of a time of growth for a local Fellowship. Having accomplished a fair degree of organizational stability, the new Fellowship often feels ready to gather and mobilize its

resources in a first community outreach effort (see Sections .)

It is important to understand that there are no hard and fast time-frames for the process of a group of believers moving through these developmental stages. Some groups may wish to formally establish themselves and be chartered soon after first gathering together as a Familist Meeting. Others may take a long time to get used to the idea of a formal organization, and will continue informally for many years. Still other small groups may elect to function as an informal Meeting indefinitely. It is not necessary for Familist Meetings to move toward the goal of formal association, even though it is generally desirable for purposes of stable function and broader fellowship. It is much more important that groups of believers, regardless of the organizational status they choose, effectively pursue the spiritual purposes of the Familist Way.

Local Fellowship Outreach Activities

Depending on the extent of evangelistic motivation and available time and energy, the participants in a local Fellowship can initiate a broad range of outreach activities. All such efforts deserve careful, prayerful planning before they are begun. Usually a Fellowship will seek the help of personnel from the Familist Institute when organizing and implementing such local expansion activities.

As an example of one type of outreach effort, a simple flyer introducing the Familist Way and the purposes of the Fellowship could be given out during door-to-door sharing in local neighborhoods. Such a flyer might include information on local worship services, along with the phone number of a contact person. It could also refer people to informal evening or weekend gatherings designed to further introduce them to the Fellowship's purposes and activities. At such gatherings one speaker could give a brief ~~presentation~~ ^{presentation} on the Familist Way, followed by others who might share publications and answer questions. The gathering could end with snacks and a time for informal fellowship.

Depending on the degree of local interest, such introductory gatherings could be held frequently, sometimes weekly or even nightly. Use of public media could also be integrated with the above-described methods. The basics of the Familist Way could be tastefully but vividly shared in brief local newspaper, radio, or television announcements, with a mention of how those interested might make contact with the local Fellowship.

Much can be learned from a selective study of the outreach methods of other religionists past and present, both by negative and positive example. Indeed, there are a great many ways to

share the essence of Familism; those who are motivated to so serve are limited only by the boundaries of their own ingenuity.

In all outreach efforts, however, it is critically important that the best preparations be made to personally fellowship with and teach those who are newly attracted by such efforts. In fact, actual outreach activities should not be initiated until after an effective structure has been developed to receive those who will be attracted by such activities.

The Ministry of Evangelism in the Five Family Circles

Evangelism is the sharing of spiritual truth. It occurs whenever a person is in spiritual need, and receives the love and/or insight from another which ministers to that need.

A common misperception is that any one person or group of people can have a monopoly on the truth and that all others can only hear it from them. In reality, each of us, at least occasionally, feels confused or distracted. At such times we need to be inspired and uplifted by the ministry of a sister or brother who is enjoying a spiritual surplus. Likewise, when our brothers or sisters are spiritually depleted, each of us can open in prayer to the leading of our Indwelling Spirit and minister to them with the nourishment of love and the light of truth. Each of us can both benefit from evangelistic ministry and experience the joy of so ministering to others. In fact, the ministry of evangelism has an important role to play in all five family circles.

In the sharing of the inner family, the Father's Spirit constantly imparts new truth to the questing soul. Within the dialogue of prayer and the embrace of worship we experience the deepest kind of inner evangelism. Also, first circle sharing groups (see Section) can provide the context for an intimate form of evangelistic ministry. As Familists share their experiences in such small groups, opportunities arise for believers to help each other overcome blocks to relationship with the Father, thus improving their inner communion.

Evangelism can also play an important role in the second circle family. Evangelism in the home requires a great deal of tact and discrimination. Yet, because of the intimacy of home relations, often family members can more clearly sense each others' spiritual needs and more sensitively minister to them than can people in any other context. Because they often come to know each other so well, husbands and wives can especially help each other with well-timed and sensitive spiritual support.

The spiritual culture of the home can also be a powerful medium for conveying truth to children. Family rituals, spiritual discussions, spiritual story telling, family prayer and worship can all help to introduce younger family members to varied experiences of relationship with God. In fact, the more

formal spiritual teaching provided to children by the local Fellowship can really be only a supplement or extension of the exposure to the Familist Way which they should encounter at home.

Third circle evangelism should be a prominent activity among participants in the local Fellowship. Every Familist needs to hear new truth, and every Familist can offer such evangelistic stimulation.

Such ministry can take many forms in the third circle family. A sister can minister to a brother in casual personal conversation. More structured pastoral counseling can be offered to those struggling with weightier problems. Believers can share helpful insights in group study and discussion. Children can learn the essentials of the Familist Way in well-designed play and study activities. Spiritual values can be highlighted in small group prayer sessions. Pastoral leaders can inspire the Fellowship in the more formal context of the regular worship service. A near-endless variety of opportunities for third circle evangelistic ministry exists for believers who truly love their fellows. Sincere prayer for others will bring them to mind.

It is important to realize that the central purpose of third circle service is spiritually to nourish and stimulate each participant in the local Fellowship. It is primarily the local Fellowship participants themselves who have the privilege of providing such evangelistic service for each other.

Fourth circle evangelism requires subtle and discerning insight. The fourth circle evangelist must have his or her goals very clearly in mind. As one fellowships with religionists from different traditions, the goal is three-fold: to learn new truth from them and to more fully appreciate their traditions; to support and help strengthen them in their faith; to share new truth with them, but only insofar as they are receptive to such sharing. If they express a desire to know more of the Familist Way, it can be presented to them. But it should never be the goal of fourth circle ministry to convert established religionists to Familism. Such an approach is inconsistent with true respect for their faith.

Fifth circle evangelistic ministry comes closest in form to the more commonly accepted view of missionary service. It is a widespread sharing of the essential elements of the Familist Way, with the main purpose of encouraging people to take the faith-step of entry to a living relationship with God.

It is tremendously important not to lose track of the primary goal of fifth circle evangelism: introducing people to living relationship with God. If we can help our sisters and brothers enter into that relationship, eventually they will discover all further truth in the fullness of eternity. Whether they accept all the facets of the Familist Way or participate in the Fellowship is of secondary importance. The primary goal is to help those in the fifth circle, who have not yet found God, to

cross the threshold into the fourth circle, the family of faith sons and daughters who enjoy a living relationship with Him.

This limitation is especially important in relation to The URANTIA Book. The goal of fifth circle outreach is not the introduction of people to The URANTIA Book. Familists who wish to consider it for use in fifth circle outreach are encouraged only to do so in situations of personal one-to-one ministry, and then only if it seems likely to be particularly helpful with the individual spiritual seeker with whom one is sharing.

The development of evangelistic ministries is carried out on all levels of the Fellowship's structure. The Central Association, the lower Associations, the local Fellowships, and the Institute all work closely together to plan and coordinate evangelistic efforts. The Institute develops ministry materials and techniques of many kinds, and trains aspiring evangelists. The Central Association and the Institute help the lower Associations and local Fellowships to plan and implement programs of evangelistic ministry in their respective geographic locales.

In summary, the ministry of evangelism should be thought of in the broadest possible terms; it occurs whenever spiritual truth is shared. Thus, evangelism should be a pervasive part of relationships and service activities in all of the five arenas of Familist life.

Methods in Fifth Circle Evangelism

The goal in fifth circle evangelism is to save souls by helping those who have not yet encountered God to approach the threshold of a living relationship with Him. In a sense, the goal is to help people cross from the fifth into the fourth circle, the family of all believers. The range of methods which can be used in such efforts is very broad, from the most personal one-to-one ministry to the far-reaching proclamations made possible by modern mass media.

Regardless of whether the medium is personal or public, evangelistic outreach must always be guided by love and respect for those who are approached. The highest standards of quality and taste should characterize all evangelistic efforts. Whether in personal sharing, public speaking, pamphlets or other publications, radio or television messages, newspaper or magazine appeals, or any other form of outreach, proclamations of spiritual truth should always be consistent in method and tone with the highest values of the Familist Way.

It is helpful to recognize that different media accomplish different purposes. For instance, a simple but evocative television spot highlighting one of the Familist truths might initially catch the interest of a spiritually hungry viewer. If an address or phone number were included, an introductory booklet or videotape could be sent to introduce such a seeker to the basics of the Familist Way. An invitation to an introductory

orientation or even a worship service could serve a similar follow-up function.

Different people respond to different approaches. Personal ministry is almost always an effective approach. It offers the nourishment of actual fellowship, and can provide answers to the individual seeker's more specific questions. Sometimes, for the searcher who wants a more comprehensive introduction to the Familist Way, it is appropriate to recommend basic books, such as Volumes I or II of the Foundations of Familism series.

In general, the more public types of outreach can be used initially to address a broad spectrum of spiritual seekers. Then more personal methods can be used with those who make contact and express interest in further exploring the Familist Way.

Experimenting with evangelistic outreach methods is beneficial as long as such experimentation is consistent with guidelines contained in the basic Familist documents (see Sections .) Often the only way to determine whether a new approach will be effective is to try it. If a particular method brings the Father's children to the entrance of living relationship with Him, and if it is consistent with the values of Familism, it should be perfected and used.

An expanding collection of evangelistic materials and approaches should be developed for use in different situations. Familists should engage in ongoing efforts to improve and add to this pool of outreach methodology. The personal experiences of effective evangelists should be recorded and shared with those who aspire to serve toward the expansion of the Father's faith family.

For those who are interested in evangelistic service, the Familist Institute acts as a clearinghouse for materials and activities, and functions as a training center for all types of fifth circle outreach.

Loyalty, Commitment, and Service

How is it that a spiritual ideal changes the way a person lives, changes people and events around that person, and empowers people to change the world? The response to this question must begin with a consideration of loyalty.

When we are truly loyal to an ideal, we shape our lives toward its realization. Our lives more and more express the ideal. As we wrestle with decisions, we make them in confluence with the ideal. In our daily acts of relationship we strive to live out the ideal. The values of the ideal increasingly fill our inner lives, overflowing to our outer lives in action. We build and elaborate the themes of the ideal in prayer, worship, and service.

Often the ideal to which we give our ultimate loyalties is

embodied in a symbol. While the symbol can never really enclose the living essence of the ideal, it is deeply connected to that essence. We can allow the symbol to function as a vehicle for bringing the ideal powerfully into play in our lives.

The family is the central symbol of Familism. It vividly portrays a higher way of living in relationship with God and other people. All of the elements of the Familist Way spring from this symbolic ideal.

When, as Familists, we have consecrated our deepest loyalties to this ideal of living, increasingly we will begin to change in conformity with it. Increasingly, the events and relationships in our lives will begin to reflect the ideal. Thus, as we build loyalty to the Familist Way, the ideal of living as a beloved child and a sister or brother in the Father's family becomes the recurrent pivotal theme in our lives.

True loyalty invariably leads to commitment. Commitment is loyalty culminating in decision and action. Decisions and consequent actions always flow from the commitment born of true loyalty. True loyalty thus bears spiritual fruit in peoples' lives.

The Familist's commitment flowers within the five family circles. It is expressed in two ways; fellowship and service. Initially, the Familist is committed to progressive fellowship, to an ongoing transformation of his or her relationships, uplifting them toward the ideal of family love. It is the Familist's joy to engage in such progressive fellowship in all five family circles; inwardly with the Father's Presence and other spirit helpers, in the home family, in the Fellowship family, with brothers and sisters of different faith families, and with every one of the Father's children that he or she encounters.

In addition to the progressive transformation of relationships, which are spiritual ends unto themselves, the Familist's commitment also flowers in service within the five arenas of family life (see Sections .) It is important for believers to be engaged in specific service activities which, to some degree, change the world. Such service activities are of great value for two reasons.

First, the need to be productive and see the results of one's labors is built into human nature. Idleness deteriorates self-respect. Service work is spiritually invigorating. And we enjoy a deep sense of satisfaction when the projects on which we are working contribute to the realization of our highest ideals.

The second critically important reason for engaging in service activity emerges from a consideration of the question, "What will it require for the world to really change?" What will it require for the Father's lost children to find Him, for vibrant local Fellowships to spring up and mature, for home life to be uplifted by spiritual culture? What will it require for

believers in the various faith traditions to transcend their differences and celebrate their kinship in God's family? What will it require for God's global family to slowly but surely emerge as a living reality?

If all of these magnificent spiritual ideals are to be realized -- in other words, if the world is really to change-- it will require the loyalty, commitment, and service of many, many thousands of devoted religionists. There is a tremendous amount of good work waiting to be done.

In summary, a real loyalty to the ideals of the Familist Way leads us to the kind of commitment which is life-changing. In the life of a committed Familist, relationships flower and service work multiplies.

The Challenges of Persecution

Spiritual truth is liberating. The realization that one is a beloved child of the Universal Father makes a person feel secure in the universe. Such security makes one less dependent on human authorities for direction in life. This relative independence can be threatening to people (and institutions) who feel that their power, and thus their own security, is eroded when people are less dependent on them. When people in power feel thus threatened, they often lash out with persecution.

Familists should always strive for harmony with their fellows and full integration with society. But sometimes living consistently with God's will leads unavoidably to conflict with those who live by more materialistic values. Again, persecution may result.

Persecution is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it forces one to take stock of one's values, to evaluate whether they are worth suffering for. Often spiritual commitment and group loyalty are greatly strengthened in response to persecution.

On the other hand, when faced with persecution, religious groups often react defensively, hardening truth into dogma and requiring excessive doctrinal and behavioral conformity. And later on, even when persecution has ceased and doctrinal walls are no longer needed, a legacy of rigidity often remains.

Familists should strive to love all people, including their enemies, with an affection that destroys hate. If faced with persecution, they should do all within their power to win over their persecutors with love. If persecution persists, however, Familists can benefit by strengthening their faith in response to it.

It is natural in such circumstances for groups of believers to draw more closely together in mutual support. In such times of stress, it is especially important that leaders strive to exercise wisdom by seeking God's guidance. By augmenting their

own reserves of faith and love, they can keep from reacting with fear or anger, and can thus better help groups of believers avoid extreme reactions when faced with persecution.

The Possibilities, Power, and Perils of Liturgy

Put simply, liturgy is the set of combined elements which go to make up a group worship service. The visual and acoustic environment, the placement of participants and facilitators, the music, prayers, worship, preaching, group discussion, symbolic rituals, and many other elements together comprise the liturgy of a religious community.

Group worship can be quite simple and informal or highly detailed and stylized. For instance, at one end of the spectrum in the Christian tradition lies Quaker worship, which is conducted with a very spare liturgy. Participants enter a simply furnished meeting house in silence and sit quietly, worshipfully receptive to the inner voice, for approximately one hour. The only interruption is the occasional brief sharing of an insight by one of the participants. At the end of the hour the participants greet each other, signalling the end of the service.

At the other end of the Christian liturgical spectrum is the traditional Roman Catholic mass, with its set recitations, glorious music, precise celebration of the Eucharist, and other intricate ritual elements set in the grandeur of an art-laden cathedral.

Some liturgies allow the individual participant great flexibility. Zen Buddhist group worship centers on the self-guided, spontaneous meditation of the individual. Other liturgies are pre-established in great detail. The traditional Jewish Sabbath service is precisely ordered, with selected scriptural passages read in sequence by the worship leader and congregation.

Many possible liturgical elements can be included in group worship. Music often plays an important part, both as inspiring performance and in emotionally satisfying group singing. Sermons, either didactic or interactive, are usually included. Time is often allowed for group prayer, sometimes silent and sometimes spoken by the worship facilitator or people in the congregation. Liturgies can also include group ritual, such as the symbolic enactment of the Familist Communion (see Section .)

Any time religionists meet regularly to worship together, they inevitably develop preferred ways of conducting their worship. Even if they decide to do it differently each time, that in itself is a liturgical choice. The liturgies of local Familist Fellowships, especially within a regional or national area, are likely to develop along similar lines. However, each local group of believers should be allowed to establish the ways of group worship which most stimulate them, and most comfortably express their deepest spiritual emotions.

Local Fellowships are most welcome to consult with the

Familist Institute as they engage in the ongoing process of evolving their liturgies. The Institute serves as a clearinghouse for gathering and sharing an array of liturgical materials, including a collection of liturgies specifically related to Familist worship practices.

A well thought-out, dynamic liturgy can make a powerful contribution to the spiritual life of a local Fellowship. It can serve as an effective framework for intertwining truth, beauty, and goodness in ways that deeply renew the believer and reinforce the ideals of the Familist Way. It provides continuity and builds spiritual values from week to week. The bonds of fellowship are strengthened each time a group of believers shares a powerful experience of common spiritual realization.

The power of liturgy, however, can cut both ways. It is true that liturgical practices can stimulate and galvanize Fellowship participants. But such practices can also petrify over time, devolving into empty and irrelevant forms, barriers to the vital force of living truth.

Familists should engage in a constant process of evaluating their liturgical practices. Do they evoke living spiritual experience? Do they effectively express the essential elements of the Familist Way? Are they structured so as to engage the participation of individual believers? If not, they should be reshaped or replaced.

In this process of liturgical evolution, however, care should be taken to move wisely, selectively, and not too rapidly. A liturgical tradition is the living form of a community's collective worship. It must grow organically; it cannot be cut and rebuilt mechanically. Reforms should be undertaken with great sensitivity. As new forms are developed, they should be tried out and perfected over time, and old forms should be relinquished only when the community is ready to release them.

Familists should remember the axiomatic relationship between truth and forms: truths persist and forms adapt. As Familism moves from one area to another, from one culture to another, and from one time to the next, it is the central truths and purposes of the Familist Way which should remain constant. The liturgical forms and practices of local Fellowships will most likely adapt to the times and cultures in which they exist. This is not only acceptable; it is highly desirable.

In summary, a liturgy is like a garden of varied plants, springing naturally from the soil of group religious practice. When neglected, the liturgical garden can begin to fill with weeds which eventually crowd the spiritual life out of group devotions. A well-tended liturgy, however, is like a vibrant garden filled with flowering forms, contributing much to the beauty of spiritual community in a local Fellowship.

Maintaining Unity Within the Fellowship

Human beings do not function together without differences of opinion arising. Eventually, people with a wide variety of temperaments and experiential backgrounds will participate in the Familist Fellowship. As they serve together, these differences will invariably result in their wanting to pursue common purposes in different ways. Such diversity should not be discouraged; it contributes much to creativity in group function. But attention must be given to ways of harmonizing divergent viewpoints, so that the unity of the Fellowship is not jeopardized.

When differences of opinion develop which prove difficult to resolve in normal group process, personnel from the Institute or Central Association who are skilled in arbitration can be called upon to work with the differing parties. The express purpose of such efforts is not to evaluate or adjudicate, but to build consensus, to develop a way forward with which all parties can agree. If consensus cannot be reached, the differing parties can ask for a judgement on the matter by the Council of Elders at the relevant level.

In attempts to resolve differences within the Fellowship, at least five sources of guidance should be consulted. The first is the organization's set of formal procedural documents (Constitution and By-laws.) The second is the body of written materials which provide seminal perspectives on the Familist Way and the Familist Fellowship, including the Foundations of Familism series and, most importantly, relevant passages from The URANTIA Book.

The third source of clarifying guidance is the collective set of precedents established in the history of the Fellowship's function. The fourth source is the assortment of insights generated in the actual process of group deliberation on the issues at hand.

The fifth and most important source of guidance is the body of insights gleaned in the participants' prayerful search for God's will. No group deliberation can be maximally successful without such Spirit input. It must always be remembered that the Fellowship is, in reality, a family, and that it is the will of its all-wise Parent which can best guide this family in its group process. This is especially true when the members of the family temporarily hold different points of view.

In the Fellowship's deliberative process, plentiful time for both solitary and group communion should be interlaced with the varied modes of guidance outlined above. The insights born of clarifying prayer and refreshing worship can often untangle knotty problems. Even more important, the renewal of fraternal love which flows from such inner communion adds a spiritual sweetness to the group process which prevents the build-up of animosities, and greatly aids in the harmonious resolution of differences.

Sources of Authoritative Spiritual Guidance

As we proceed through life we are faced with a never-ending series of choices. Some are large, affecting the overall course we shall take. Some are more immediate; what to do in the next hour, what to say to a struggling friend. Life is full of situations where values conflict, where what is right is not entirely clear. And if we are to survive, much less progress, we must evaluate the endless stream of such situations, make often difficult choices, and act upon them. Where can we go for dependable guidance as we encounter these myriad choices along life's way?

Historically, religious institutions have pointed the individual believer to a variety of sources for authoritative spiritual guidance. Some have pointed to a creed, a set of doctrinal statements, saying, "This is our ultimate guide. Follow these precepts and you will choose right." Other religions have pointed primarily to their own leadership, saying, "Follow the commands of the clergy; they have been ordained by God to show you what is right." Still others have enshrined their scriptures as the primary guide, saying, "Consult and follow the Holy Book as your ultimate authority." And others have canonized the accumulated body of their historic traditions as the "law" which their followers must obey.

The Familist Way points to the fundamental primacy of the relationship between the Universal Father and each of his spiritual children. In our search for truth, each of us has the capacity for direct relationship with God. No mediating element is required. The Father's intimate Presence indwells each of us and ever guides us toward that which is true, beautiful, and good. Each of us can progressively develop the ability to sense God's will in the passing situations of life. Each of us can strengthen our resolve to carry out His will. This progressive discovery and doing of the Father's will is central to the Familist Way.

However, the primacy of such direct inner guidance having been clearly articulated, it is important to recognize that traditional sources of spiritual guidance also play an important part in the life of the Familist Fellowship. There is a central body of truths and teachings which provides continuity of values. There is strong pastoral leadership which provides counsel and support, and lifts up spiritual ideals. There is a magnificent scripture, The URANTIA Book, which provides inspiration of incomparable beauty and depth. The life and teachings of Jesus are a powerful living illustration of spiritual truth. And there is a slowly accumulating body of tradition, the stories of the lives and service of Familist women and men, which historically exemplifies the Familist Way.

All of these are valid sources of inspiration which can guide us as we face life's choices. All of them augment our efforts to clearly discern God's inner leading, our primary source of spiritual guidance.