

The Family

Short Historical Background

The Family, formerly known as the Children of God, is an international fellowship of Christian missionary communities. It was founded in 1968 by David Brandt Berg (1919-1994), from Jewish heritage and formerly a pastor of the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination. He began a Christian outreach ministry to the counter-culture youth in Huntington Beach, California. By the end of 1969, the group of converted youth had grown to about 100 members, and began to receive national attention in the USA. They were first called "The Children of God" by a newspaper reporter. By 1972, there were 130 Children of God "colonies" in dozens of countries on every continent.

Professor Susan Palmer, who got a Ph.D. from Concordia University in Montreal (Quebec), studied the "Children of God" and other new religious movements extensively. In "Heaven's Children: The Children of God's Second Generation" (published in *Sex, Slander and Salvation*, pp 9-10, 1994, Center for Academic Publication, Box 5097, Stanford, California 94309), she wrote:

"Between 1978 and 1987 women were encouraged to extend sexual freedom beyond the boundaries of the commune by offering sexual favours to lonely businessmen in order to prove Jesus' love for them in a new soul-saving strategy called "flirty-fishing" or "Ffing". (...) Ffing was discontinued in 1987.

(...) In January to February 1978 Father David sent out the RNR letters, instituting a number of dramatic changes in the movement. Claiming there were reports of local abuses of power, he fired over 300 leaders (...). Many of the top leaders defected, including the prophet's daughter Deborah, her current husband Bill Davis and former spouse Jethro, Wachman who became one of the main career apostates currently lionized by the Cult Awareness Network, and Rachel, the prophet's top consort after Maria. The official membership figures demonstrate a high rate of defection from 8068 members in 1977 to 5742 by the end of 1978. There was a wave of persecution and media attacks on the Family of Love in 1978 in the wake of Jonstown, and members were jailed in Mexico. Members packed their 'flee bags' and 'went underground'. Dad, Maria and their entourage fled from Spain to Portugal and on to Switzerland, Malta and France "

From 1978 to 1981, the Homes shrunk to the size of 4-8 members, mainly nuclear families living with one or two friends. In 1981 the Homes began to group together and consolidate into large communes (40-45 members) in the "Fellowship Revolution". at the beginning of the 1980s, the number of children inside the movement started to increase sharply. By 1982 the Family of Love claimed to number 5,800 kids and 21,000 adults. The ratio in 1993 was even higher in favour of youth: it was 2:1 in favour of children out of around 9,000 or 10,000 disciples.

Now that the second generation have reached the same age as the original "Children of God", they are being groomed to take over the administration and executive posts of the movement and to assume the main "burden" of witnessing.

In April 1995, The Family adopted a Governing Charter which defines the basic beliefs, goals, responsibilities, rights and standards of conduct of Family members. Each community functions independently and determines, by electoral process of its members, its nature, goals and activities.

The Family's core theology differs little from evangelical Christians: they affirm the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. They confess God to be revealed in the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; believe that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; and that through Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, redemption was brought to humankind. However, their radical doctrines regarding sexuality and communicating with Heavenly Spirits set them apart from traditional mainstream churches

The Family has well developed eschatological beliefs. They are persuaded by Scripture that this generation will witness Christ's visible return to Earth; that prior to His return a powerful One World Government (New World Order) will arise, led by a megalomaniac dictator known as the Antichrist, which will violently persecute people of all faiths; and that at His Second Coming, Jesus Christ will defeat the Antichrist and establish His millennial reign on Earth.

There are over 1,000 Family communities in 80 countries on six continents. Membership is comprised of 80 nationalities. Current full-time membership: 4,000 adults and 6,000 children. Associate members: 20,000.

Profile

1. Hierarchical structure of the movement

As an emerging religious movement, The Family has undergone a large variety of hierarchical structures over its 30 year history. In mid-February 1995, The Family adopted a "**Governing Charter**". The Charter is basically comprised of two main components, the "Charter of Responsibilities and Rights" and the "**Fundamental Family Rules**". It outlines the most important and basic principles, goals and beliefs of the movement and codifies its method of government. The Charter grants each Family community (Home) a large amount of autonomy. Each community decides by democratic vote its objects and nature, the disbursing of finances, the group of officers to oversee the community, known as the "**Teamwork**" and any matters affecting the community or its members. Each member has the right to bring up any matter to the "**Home Council**" (the body of voting members, which includes every member from 16 years of age and up) and the matter must be voted upon within the next 14 days. Every three months, the "**Home**" votes to either confirm their "**Teamwork**", or vote in a new one. Such vote is decided by a simple majority. The "**Charter**" also grants individual members and nuclear families a great deal of personal autonomy. If a member or family does not wish to dwell with the community, they may give their thirty day notice and either join another community in the country of their choice (if the members of that community vote to receive them) or open a new community of their own. A Home consists of no less than four voting members (though provision is made for exceptional circumstances) and no more than 35 members (including children and other members who don't hold a vote).

Every Family Home operates independently. It is self-governing and financially autonomous. It pursues its own local goals and carries out its own self-chosen activities. Most Homes are not legal entities but conduct their missionary and social welfare projects on a private basis. Some Homes choose to register their particular project as a charity or some other sort of association, depending on the legal requirements and possibilities in the country in which they reside.

The Family does not organise any leadership or office on a national level. There is no official representation in each country, although The Family has organised some Information Offices for continental areas. (The European Family Information Department answers enquiries regarding the Family in Europe, CIS and Africa.
E-mail: info@thefamilyeurope.org
Mailing Address: Family Information Department, Maxet House, Liverpool Road, Luton LU1 1RS, England)

On an international basis, World Services (WS) is the executive body of The Family, whose main function is to provide spiritual direction and international administration. This is achieved primarily through the production of publications, as well as through international administrative services, and the appointment of continental offices to provide pastoral and administrative services within their assigned area.

World Services consists of:

a. **WS Leadership:** Maria (the wife of the late founder, David Berg) and Peter, and their personal teamwork (co-workers). Family members believe that Maria is God's chosen successor to David, and as such she is the spiritual leader of the movement. Peter Amsterdam was David and Maria's personal assistant for many years. Following David Berg's passing in 1994, Peter took up a place next to Maria in the leadership. Maria and Peter's role is mostly that of pastors, giving spiritual guidance and direction to the movement; as well as overseeing the overall administration of The Family, but not becoming involved in details of local administration.

b. **WS Homes:** Those responsible for the creation and production of WS publications and outreach tools, and related administrative matters.

c. **Continental Officers:** Officers are appointed on a continental basis, whose job is to co-ordinate the missions in their area, mediate in situations that arise between members of Homes, and ensure that the Charter is being implemented in the Homes, as well as investigating and punishing offences warranting excommunication as per the Charter. Continental Officers are appointed by World Services.

Continental Officers have no authority to interfere in the internal decisions and running of individual Family Homes, except when they believe that a Home is not fulfilling the responsibilities of the Charter and/or the rights of an individual are being infringed upon.

Visiting Servants (referred to as VSs) are appointed by the Continental Office for each area, and confirmed twice a year by majority vote of all voting members in that area, conducted by secret ballot. A Visiting Servant who is not confirmed will be removed from his or her position.

Visiting Servants (VSs) are expected to visit the Homes in their area to check that they are fulfilling the requirements of the Charter, to offer pastoral care upon request, and to attempt to settle, by prayer and counsel, any matters between their area's Homes that the Homes are not able to resolve on their own. VSs have no authority to interfere in the internal affairs and running of a Home, except when they judge that the behaviour of a Home or of an individual in a Home is contravening the requirements of the Charter. In that case, they may offer advice. Depending on the type of infraction, the VS may recommend to the Continental Office the suspension of an individual's membership in The Family, or that of the entire Home.

Family membership is divided into three general categories: " Charter Members " who are " full-time ", " Fellow Members ", and " Other Members ".

Charter Members: A Family member, who has received Jesus as his/her Saviour, lives in a Family Home ;

- regularly " witnesses " (shares his/her faith) ;
- tithes 10% of their income ;
- abides by the Charter and the "Fundamental Family Rules" ;
- fulfils the Responsibilities of the Individual [of the Charter].
- Fellow Members: One who has received Jesus as his/her Saviour,
- tithes 10% of his/her income;
- fulfils the basic requirements and guidelines of Fellow Members, as outlined in the Statement on Fellow Members.

There is no requirement for Fellow Members to live communally or perform any certain activity. The majority of Fellow Members were at one time Charter Members, but for various reasons (such as wanting a more independent lifestyle) decided that the lesser commitment of Fellow Membership was now more appropriate for themselves.

" Other Members " : There are a variety of other members, who may adhere to certain Family beliefs, but not necessarily all of them ; who may receive some of The Family's literature ; who may work with them on certain projects ; who may or may not regularly visit a Family community, or may simply receive their literature through the mail.

2. New member recruitment

The Family does not seek a large membership. In the past fifteen years or so, new full-time members have joined less rarely than in the earlier days of the movement. There is little active recruitment. If during the course of their evangelistic or other activities the Family meets an individual who is interested in joining or working actively with them, the person is invited to start participating in the Home's activities, such as personal evangelism, social welfare projects, as well as Bible studies. They will be given a selection of Family literature to read in order to learn about the Family's lifestyle and beliefs. Most prospective full-time members will associate with the Family as part-time members for a considerable amount of time before their application for full-time membership is considered.

3. Entrance in the movement

If an individual, after becoming familiar with the teachings and lifestyle of the movement, wishes to join as a Charter member, the Home they have been associating with will vote on whether they wish to receive them into membership. Acceptance is determined by a two-thirds majority vote, providing all the requirements below have been met. In some cases the Home may decide that it is wise to wait for a substantial period of time before accepting a new member into their Home, whereas in rare cases they may allow them to join almost immediately. Following are the basic requirements for them to join:

- they must have received Jesus as their personal Saviour and been filled with the Holy Spirit ;
- they are of legal age, or if not, have notarised parental permission ;
- they have a basic understanding of The Family, its goals, way of life, and believe that David was God's Endtime Prophet and that Maria is God's chosen and anointed successor, who has inherited David's mantle, as God's Prophetess ;
- they show a sincere interest in reading God's Word and desire to engage in evangelism ;
- they have a sincere desire to dedicate their life to serving Jesus with The Family ;
- they have lived in a Family Home for a minimum of 20 days ;
- they must be free from substance abuse and/or the use of illegal or illicit drugs ;
- they must be free from contagious disease ;
- they must refrain from any sexual activity during their first six months in The Family ;
- they must have a negative AIDS test before moving into the Home, and again after a six-month period ;
- they may not have any debts or legal or military obligations which would prevent them from being a full-time member of a Family Home.

Although those of legal age do not have an obligation to receive the consent of their parents and/or other relatives, potential members are expected to explain their decision to their parents and those they are close to. Members of the local Home may initiate communication with the parents or close relatives in order to introduce themselves and help answer any questions that the parents may have. If the parents voice any major concerns, depending on the circumstances, the Home may encourage the potential member to refrain from joining full-time presently.

When a person fulfils the above qualifications, and if the Home has voted to accept him or her, then he may move into the Home. Upon moving in, the new member must list his or her assets (cash and personal possessions) using the [Asset Declaration for New Charter Members](#). The assets listed on this declaration will remain his or her property to take with them should he or she decide to leave before completing six months in the Family, unless they voluntarily decide to leave some of these assets with the Family.

After living in a Charter Home for six consecutive months, he or she may become a full voting Charter Member. At this time they complete and sign [a Statement of](#)

[Commitment for New Disciples Form](#) . This includes a declaration of assets and an agreement between the Home and the new member as to which of his or her possessions the new member would be permitted to take should they decide to leave the Home. The remainder of their possessions will become the property of the Home. It is recommended that this form be legally witnessed and notarised.

4. Adherence to the movement and to another religion

Full time membership in The Family precludes adherence to another religion, unless on a nominal, cultural basis. However, participation in the worship services and ceremonies of other Christian churches is acceptable providing nothing in the ceremony contradicts the Fundamental Beliefs of Family members. Thus, it would be acceptable for a Charter member to attend the Sunday Service at a traditional Christian Church, or those who have been raised as Roman Catholics may choose to be married in a Catholic Church, those baptised as infants as Orthodox may marry in the Orthodox tradition, etc., as these ceremonies do not contradict the Family's Fundamental Beliefs in Christianity. On the other hand, it would not be acceptable to take part in a service where a Hindu deity is worshipped, for instance.

Members who do not consider themselves as Charter Members or Fellow Members can do so while adhering to another religion.

5. Financial responsibilities of members

Each Family Home is financially independent. Every full voting member (those 18 years of age and over) is financially responsible for the community in which they reside. All financial decisions are voted upon and receive a consensus of a two-thirds majority before being implemented. All members are responsible for any debts or liabilities incurred by the community and before leaving a community, individual members are required to pay their portion of any outstanding debts or liabilities.

Each Family Home is required to tithe 10 per cent of its income, although exceptions are made for those operating on poorer third world mission fields. This ten per cent is reinvested in the production of publications for the general public, publications for Family members and their children, musical productions, and the assistance of missionaries on poorer mission fields.

Each Home has voluntarily decided to also contribute an additional 1% of its income for the "Family Aid Fund", which is a Fund administered by World Services to provide emergency aid to Family members, such as those facing medical emergencies, etc.

6. Voluntary leave of the movement

Any member wishing to leave a Family Home may do so at any time. This is effected very easily at will, as is evidenced by the high level of turnover in The Family (around 40,000 people have passed through the ranks of the Family in their 30 year history). In the case of a spouse wishing to leave, with the other wishing to remain in the community, such matters are personal decisions and are to be handled by the individuals involved.

7. Procedure of exclusion of a member, a Home, or the supreme leaders

The procedures for the expulsion of a Family member are the same, regardless of their rank in the movement. Charter members can only be excommunicated by the Continental Office, and only if the member violates one of the Offences Warranting Excommunication listed in the "Fundamental Family Rules" of the Family's Charter. The rules and procedures apply equally no matter the member's rank: From an individual Home member to the top leadership of the Family, all are expected to obey the rules or face the consequences.

Recommendations for full or partial excommunication can only be initiated by the Home Officers, or the Area or Continental Office. To recommend excommunication, the following procedures must be adhered to:

1. The Home Officers must inform the Area and Continental Offices of the member's excommunicable offense, giving full details of the matter.
2. Regardless of who initiates the excommunication, the Area Office must fully investigate the matter, speaking personally with the Home Officers, the member in question, and anyone else involved. A Home member who has acknowledged that he committed an excommunicable offense has the option, if he or she so desires, of waiving the right to have an Area Officer visit and investigate the offense, thereby fully accepting the sentence of the Continental Office.
3. The Area Office must inform the Continental Office of its findings, and its assessment of whether the member has committed the excommunicable offense, and if so, recommend to the Continental Office full or partial excommunication.
4. Upon receipt of the Area Office report and recommendation, the Continental Office will decide whether full or partial excommunication is warranted. If full excommunication is warranted, the Continental Office will inform the member and his Home, in writing, that the member's Family membership is withdrawn.

Offenses warranting full excommunication include: Engaging in substance abuse and/or the use of illegal or illicit drugs, committing violent, intentionally endangering or life-threatening acts, except in defense of self, others or Family property, continual breaking of, or persistent disregard for the Charter of Responsibilities and Rights, engaging in sexual activity with non-Family members, engaging in any male with male sexual activities, engaging in sexual activity with new members who have been in The Family for less than six months, engaging in sexual contact with those under the age of 21.

A Home may be placed on "Probationary Notice" if it violates, contravenes or fails to fulfil the Responsibilities of the Charter Home as listed in the Charter. Procedures follow the same pattern as that for excommunication. For instance, if a Home does not send in its tithe, or if the Visiting Servant found that the physical standard of the Home was so low that it endangered the health of its members, or if the Home was persistently in debt, after investigation, the Home would be sent a warning notice by the Continental Office. If after 30 days the problem has not been rectified, a second stage Probationary Notice would be sent. Then after a further 30 days, if the problem has still not been rectified, the Continental Office would reclassify the Home to "Fellow Member" status.

8. Social and domestic relations

Family communities consist typically of one or two married couples and their children, along with several other unmarried persons. Marriage of a man and woman is considered the ideal relationship, particularly when children are involved. However The Family does accept single parents into its Charter membership, and encourages other members of the Home to give extra assistance to those who are raising a child or children without the support of a spouse.

Responsibility is emphasised for both parties when pregnancy results from sexual relations, regardless of marital status.

Decisions about marriage (whom to marry, whether to marry or not, etc.) are taken by the individuals concerned. Although they may wish to discuss their plans with others in the community, it is entirely up to their own personal choices. Those wishing to marry must announce their "engagement". After a minimum engagement period of 90 days, the couple may marry.

Marriage is considered a permanent relationship. Divorce is only permitted with mutual consent. Since the decision to marry was taken mutually, any decision to break up the marriage must also be taken mutually.

The importance of the marital unit is emphasised in Family literature, and couples are encouraged to work through any problems and succeed at their marriage, for their own sake and for their children. Although unnatural methods of birth control are not encouraged for theological reasons, birth control is permitted. Decisions on birth control are made by the individuals.

The Family respects the sanctity of life, including that of the unborn, and is opposed to abortion.

The Charter contains sections detailing the rights and responsibilities of parents towards their children, as well as the rights of the children, and the responsibilities of the Home towards the children. Parents have responsibility for the care of their children and make the relevant decisions concerning their education, medical care, discipline, and other matters. Decisions that affect others in the Home are discussed openly, and standards of discipline when more than one nuclear family are living in the Home are reached by mutual agreement.

Considering that the average size of a Charter Family Home is 13 members – that is typically 5 adults and 8 children -- in most cases the parents are directly involved with their children for most of the day. The Charter does specify that parents are expected to put aside one full day a week devoted entirely to their children, along with a few hours nightly. At these times, parents are expected to invest quality attention in their children. Since most parents home-school their children as well, the children often are under their parents' tutelage during the day as well.

Although nuclear family ties are strongly encouraged, the unity between members of the community is also important, so the familial relationship should not exclude others in the community or create a lack of harmony in the Home.

Family members are to strive to live harmoniously with all those in their Home, with all ensuring that the needs of the children are fulfilled.

Family members are encouraged to maintain open communications with outside relatives, including visits home for holidays and family reunions. The amount of contact with relatives is a personal matter, decided upon by the individual. Relatives may visit the Family Home if mutually agreed upon.

Allowing non-members to visit a Charter Home is up to the choice of the Home itself. According to the Charter, non-members may not reside permanently in the Home but may visit for up to 30 days. The Home's members will vote and decide about visitors. The Continental Office may grant exceptions to a Home that requests permission for a non-member to stay longer than 30 days.

A notable exception to this rule is regarding teenage children who have decided to leave The Family but whose parent(s) are still members. With approval of a majority of the Home's voting members and permission from their Continental Office, they may continue to temporarily reside in a Charter Home on guest status. This gives the teenagers a chance to continue living with their parents in order to help them be prepared for life outside the Family, to make the transition as smooth as possible, and help them get properly situated elsewhere. If the teenagers are not of legal age, they might have to remain in the Home for a considerable amount of time until they are old enough to move out on their own.

9. The movement and medicine

The Family maintains the Biblical belief that divine healing is a privilege available to all that believe in Jesus. However, the decision regarding medical matters involving themselves or their children is entirely in the hands of the individuals involved. Members are welcome to seek medical diagnosis should they become ill, and are then free to decide whether to take medical assistance.

The decision whether to trust God completely for healing or to accept conventional medical help is up to the individual. Members of the Home where they reside are expected to support the individual in whatever choice he or she makes.

In the case of potentially life-threatening illness or emergencies, members are expected to seek proper medical advice and consider seriously the options they are presented.

The receipt of blood transfusions are not encouraged for theological and medical reasons; however they are not forbidden.

Pregnant women are encouraged to receive prenatal examinations.

Parents with children in the Family, are responsible to make all medical decisions regarding their under-age children and they must be made in the child's best interests and in accordance with the laws of the land in which they reside.

All members, children and adults, are encouraged to receive regular medical check-ups as the need arises, including dental and eye-care.

10. Information from members on the financial management of the movement

The Family finances are managed in accordance with the Biblical precedent set in Acts 2:44 and 45: "All that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men according to their need." As such, finances are generally managed communally by the voting members of each Home.

David Berg's writings have placed great emphasis on "owing no man anything save to love one another" (Romans 13:8), as such, The Family is encouraged to live within their income and not incur debts. Members may only raise financial support through legal means. The Family's financial base is varied, depending on the individual Home, country and ministry the Home or individuals are involved in. Most Homes receive funding or donations in kind from donors, as well as from donations received for literature, audio and video cassettes produced by the Family. Some members take secular jobs on a part-time or full-time basis.

Each Family community is autonomous and manages its own finances. Financial decisions must be made by the Home, and a two-thirds majority of votes is required before enacting any proposal. All members are to be cognisant of the financial status of the Home at all times.

Should a Home fall in debt, they are required to pay off their debts within a 30-day period if they wish to retain their Charter Member status. All debts and liabilities are the responsibility of every Home member aged 18 and up. Should a member wish to depart from a community that has incurred debts or liabilities, it is the individual member's responsibility to pay his portion of these, unless the Home votes to waive this responsibility.

The opening of bank accounts, renting of housing, and so on, is arranged entirely by the voting members of the Home without any oversight or involvement by Family members outside that Home.

11. Worshipping and religious activities

As a high commitment religious community, much of the Family's daily activities have a religious thematic. Religious worship is a daily event, with Homes undertaking daily devotional sessions at least once a day. Family members also evangelise regularly, as well as participating in disaster relief projects, humanitarian aid, assistance to the needy in homeless centres, juvenile centres and prisons. Formal ceremonies in the Family are few: they include communion (which is practiced very simply) and marriage ceremonies.

12. Life in community

The Family is a communal society, structured around its religious devotion, evangelisation and work with the needy. Two-thirds of its population consists of minors and as such much of its focus and development is oriented to the minors, their schooling and education. Most Family members home-school their children, though members are also able to enrol them in public school, should a simple majority of the Home members be in agreement. Members are also free to open their own Homes with other members who wish to enrol their children in public schools.

Daily tasks are scheduled to include all members of the Home and each is expected to participate and cooperate to do their part. Each Home votes and decides what particular ministries it would like to undertake and its goals and basic nature. Each person is expected to uphold decisions made by the Home members via democratic vote. Dissenters should either cooperate or seek out a more suitable situation for themselves.

13. List of allegations concerning the dangerous character of the movement

During its 30-year history, the Family has been on the receiving end of a litany of allegations :

A.Rape	and	sexual	abuse
B.Child			abuse
C.Prostitution.			
D.Brainwashing			
E.Children's			indoctrination
F.Disturbing		public	order

14. Official position of the church to these allegations

A. B. & C : Rape And Sexual Abuse, Child Abuse, Prostitution.

The Family believes that its vindication in courts of law in diverse countries such as Australia, Spain, France, Italy and Argentina speaks for itself: The Family communities have been found innocent of all charges. The Family communities and their children have been highly scrutinised by court authorities, investigators, psychologists, child welfare officials and doctors. Such arduous examinations have only confirmed The Family's innocence of charges of brainwashing and abuse.

The Family's theology regarding sexuality is controversial and radical in comparison to that of the vast majority of churches. As a movement that evolved out of hippyism of the 60s, The Family went through a period of ample liberality regarding sexuality. The founder, David Berg, has recognized his responsibility in not instituting protective boundaries during that period to avoid innocent people being hurt in some way by the liberties being incurred by some. The Family's leadership has apologized

to any who could have been hurt during that period of Family history, and strict safeguards were installed to ensure that such abuses could not occur. Any infringement of these safeguards results in immediate expulsion from the community.

Rape and sexual abuse, child abuse, prostitution are explicitly prohibited in the Charter of The Family : See Procedure of exclusion of a member (Point 7). Homosexuality is condemned by the group and is an excommunicable offence. Any teenage-adult sex has been banned as well.

Sexual relations between consenting adults, regardless of marital status, are permitted, providing they are governed by the doctrine The Family calls the "Law of Love". The basic tenet of the Law of Love is that what is done is agreed upon by all parties involved, and precautions are taken so others are not hurt by their activities. As such, in the case of extra-marital relations, the spouse must first give their agreement. Sexual relations may only take place between those of legal age and with mutual consent. No sexual activity or open demonstration of sexual affection should take place in public areas of the Home. New members in the Charter Family less than six months must refrain from all sexual activities. In Norway, officials from the Department of Social Welfare declared after visits to a Family residence in Ameberg on 18 July 1991 : " During our time spent with the families we have not found or observed anything which might serve to sustain a possible suspicions of sexual abuse or lack of care where the children are concerned. "

About prostitution : courts in various countries have concluded that Flirty Fishing was not prostitution. The Family no longer practices Flirty Fishing. The Flirty Fishing ministry was officially discontinued in 1987. Present policies explicitly forbid any sexual contact with non-members.

D. Brainwashing :

The Family asserts that there is no scientific basis for accusations of " brainwashing ". Members of the Family think for themselves and make personal choices about all matters of importance, including whether to stay in the group or not. Around 40,000 people have been full-time members of the Family at some time. Considering that there are only around 4,000 adult full-time members at present, this is ample evidence that those who wished to do so were able to leave.

E. Indoctrination of children :

Parents in The Family strive to ensure that their children receive a well-rounded education. Children receive a religious as well as an academic education. Similar to devout parents world-wide, Family parents wish to inculcate their children with the religious values they themselves hold. These values include a knowledge, understanding and tolerance of those of other faiths, including those without any religion, as well as of the world in general, its history, cultures and ways.

Children in The Family are not isolated from society. They watch television and movies, although most parents do not permit indiscriminate viewing. They hear contemporary music. Most are computer literate and familiar with the Internet. They

play computer games. They visit libraries and read secular books. They read newspapers and learn about current events. Depending on the facilities available locally, they may be members of local organisations such as scouts, or enrol in outside classes, or take part in local gymnastic and sports activities, and so on.

Thus the education children receive while growing up in the Family is analogous to those who attend private religious schools, as well as Orthodox Jewish children, Muslim children, conservative Christians, etc: Although part of education is oriented to their religion, the children are also educated academically and learn about the world around them. While their parents do teach them the foundation beliefs of their own faith, the children are also shown alternatives in the religious and secular world. When reaching their teenage years, they are able to question and choose for themselves whether they wish to adhere to their parents' religion or not.

A fair proportion of those born and raised in the Family, on reaching their teenage years or later, decide to leave the Family. This could be for religious or other reasons. In such cases, the parents are encouraged to assist their departing son or daughter, giving them whatever help they can so they can integrate into mainstream society. Many of these young people have gone on to university education or good professions and have done very well.

F. About public order :

The Family believes that, according to the Scripture, the government is ordained of God to keep the law and order in the country. Therefore, Family members are expected to respect the laws that serve this purpose and maintain an orderly way of life.

The Family has always advocated respect for and compliance with officers of the law engaged in the performance of their duties. They have never approved of obstructing such officers and adhere to the Scriptural admonition which states that they are "the ministers of God, who bear not the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4).

Family members have shown themselves to be co-operative with the authorities. Over the years, due to some authorities being grossly misinformed by detractors, several Family Homes in different countries have been the target of police raids. Even though the members knew that such intrusions were misguided, and that their communities were innocent of any wrongdoing, they always peacefully yielded to and complied with the law-enforcement officials. (Each of these communities were subsequently exonerated of any criminal wrong-doing.) The Family feels that such conduct clearly proves their commitment to respect and obey the law-enforcement agencies.

Independent verification

A number of independent studies and investigations into the Family have been published. One of the books devoted to the subject:

"Sex, Slander and Salvation. Investigating The Family/Children of God" edited by James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, Centre for Academic Publication, Stanford, California. ISBN: 0-9639501-2-6.

15. Lawsuits against the movement in Europe on the basis of one of the allegations from point 13. Sentences.

In France, The Family was engaged in a lengthy legal process, due to some of the allegations mentioned in point 13. In 1993, homes of The Family were the target of raids by the French police in Lyon and Marseilles on the alleged grounds that the children were routinely prostituted and deprived of adequate medical and physical care. " Over 200 officers brandishing axes and automatic weapons entered the homes at dawn on June 9, 1993. 50 adults and 90 children were taken into custody. Over the next two days, The Family members were subjected to intense interrogation. In this case, the authorities were responding to charges levelled by the primary French anti-cult organisation, the Association for the Defense of the Family and Individual (ADFI).

For several years, ADFI had accused The Family of child abuse, prostitution, and various other unlawful activities. The authorities worked with ADFI, a government-supported agency, and the court appointed an ADFI-connected psychiatrist to interview the children. In spite of being isolated from their parents and the pressure placed upon them, the children denied that they were the victims of any abuse. In January 1999, six years after the raids, the Justice Court of Aix-en-Provence vindicated The Family. All defendants were found not guilty and acquitted.

In Spain, The Family has also undergone brutal, paramilitary-style pre-dawn raids. In July 1990, regional authorities in Barcelona forcibly apprehended 21 of The Family members' children after raids on a Family community. In May 1992, the Barcelona Provincial Court found that there was no evidence of wrongdoing or that abuse had occurred. The judges ordered that the children be immediately restored to their parents. On 3 October 1994, the Constitutional Court upheld this verdict. On 1 July 1993, the Barcelona Provincial Court acquitted The Family members of all criminal charges. On 1 December 1994, the Supreme Court of Spain upheld this verdict.

In Italy, magistrates at the Criminal Court of Rome (Division 2) acquitted David Berg and other members of the Children of God, of charges of " aiding and abetting prostitution, fraud and the production, commerce and distribution of obscene publications " (November 15, 1991), finding that there was " absolutely no evidence. ".

In England, the mother of a Family member attempted to sue for custody of her grandchild. This led to the lengthiest child custody case in the history of the English courts. After scrutinising the Family, its past and allegations against it by former members, the Judge awarded the care and control of the child to its mother, who continues to raise the child in the Family.

In November 1994, the State Educational Authority of Leicestershire declared about the education of Family members' children : " The standard of work and achievement seen during the course of the visits is in line with national expectations for the ages and abilities of the children. Standards in the key skills of literacy and numeracy meet those expected nationally with some children achieving beyond. "

In Sweden, a case was initiated regarding home-schooling. The authorities closed the case in favour of the Family, ruling that the children's educational needs were being amply met and there was no need for official intervention.

In Valbo, the Social Services Department of Valbo began a three-month investigation of The Family. This case was closed in The Family's favour on 9 May 1994. Valbo Social Services Department Secretaries stated " There has been no evidence throughout the investigation that would indicate any abuse of the children by any adults, be it sexual or physical ".

16. Lawsuits against the movement or against members of the clergy in other countries of the world on the basis of one of the allegations from point 13. Sentences.

The Family has undergone brutal, paramilitary-style pre-dawn raids not only in France, but also in Argentina and Australia. In each case, the children were removed from the parents' custody and placed in institutions.

In all these cases, the children were submitted to rigorous psychological, medical, educational scrutiny to ascertain whether they had been abused, whether physically, sexually, psychologically, emotionally or educationally. Of the over 500 children examined by the courts, not a single case of abuse was found, nor were the children found to be lacking educationally or socially. As such, all children were restored to the custody of the parents.

In Argentina, in 1989, a large number of heavily armed police officers, motivated by accusations of drugs, staged a raid on two communal homes of The Family in Buenos Aires. Adults in the commune were taken into custody and children were placed as wards of the state. Investigation by social workers and physicians revealed no evidence of neglect or abuse of any kind. The children passed educational tests with high scores. As a result, all criminal and civil charges were eventually dropped against the group and its members. (this case was not focused on the children, the children were taken as wards of state because the parents were all imprisoned. Although this was also investigated, it was not the main focus of the case or the accusations but was added after the fact by the ex-husband of a new member, who wanted the custody of the children and so said they were abused. He was denied the custody and later kidnapped the child and left the country).

However, on 1 September 1993, police in Buenos Aires again raided several residences of The Family, taking over 200 children into custody and arresting 21 adults. The outcome was similar to that of the earlier episode. On 13 December, the Argentine Court of Appeals of San Martin ordered the dropping of all charges, the release of all imprisoned members of The Family, and the return of the children to their parents forthwith.

In Venezuela, the Fifth Superior Court of the State of Zulia ruled on 27 May 1992 that regarding charges trafficking and abuse of minors made against fifteen adults of a Family community: " There was no evidence of any crime ".

In Peru, the Lima Ad Hoc Prosecutor to the General Attorney's Office said in his 14 December 1993 ruling : " After extensive, thorough and drawn-out investigations (...) we have not been able to find the slightest shred of evidence to substantiate any of the allegations of supposed criminal offenses, illegal activities or immoral behavior."

In Brazil, a case was initiated regarding home-schooling. The authorities closed the case in favour of the Family, ruling that the children's educational needs were being amply met and there was no need for official intervention.

In Australia, in May 1992, simultaneous predawn raids were made against several communal homes of The Family in Melbourne and in Sydney. A total of 153 children were taken into custody. In Sydney, the case was resolved relatively quickly, after a lengthy hearing in which one representative of the Department of Community Services (DOCS) spent 31 days in the witness box trying to explain and defend why the DOCS had taken the action it did, but with relatively little success. The DOCS eventually withdrew their charges of sexual abuse. In Melbourne, the case took much longer to resolve. A friendly settlement between The Family and the Child Services Victoria (CSV) was not possible. In the meantime, the 93 children involved in Melbourne were still technically wards of the state and could not be moved without permission from the court. Eventually, the Victorian State Government forced the CSV to settle the case on terms quite similar to those developed in the Sydney case.

17. Complaints from members of the movement concerning intolerance, discrimination on the basis of their convictions and hindrances to the exercise of their liberties before the publication of parliamentary reports on sects in Europe.

From time to time, The Family in some countries in Western Europe has been the object of slanderous publicity in different countries, which have rarely given The Family members there the opportunity to present their side of the story.

They contend that the anti-cult movements, which have received ample recognition and acceptance in several of the Western European countries, have never performed any kind of serious research on The Family or visited their communities or spoken with current members. In France, they say the local anti-cult movement ADFI publicised its responsibility for inciting the authorities to raid Family communities. Their accusations were seriously considered to the point of inflicting trauma on countless innocent children, The Family says, despite the fact that ADFI had never met the local Family members or visited their communities nor had any firsthand knowledge of them whatsoever.

18. Complaints from members of the movement concerning intolerance, discrimination on the basis of their convictions and hindrances to the exercise of their liberties after the publication of parliamentary reports on sects in Europe.

The publishing of the various parliamentary reports has signaled a rise in intolerance which have made life more difficult for our members.

a) Unfounded allegations and misinformation about The Family appeared in the 1996 report of the French Commission and have since been repeated, which they believe is causing other governmental and civil authorities to pre-judge their members:

The 1996 report of the French Commission did not take into account the decisions of the courts in Lyon and Aix-en-Provence where judges had affirmed that the children in Family communities had not been abused or subject to sexual practices. For reasons that The Family cannot fathom, the Commission's authors silenced or

ignored (?) the discoveries of their own national judges' and decided instead to allege that The Family was guilty of prostituting children and of indoctrinating them.. (See Case No. 91/20, Tribunal de Grande Instance d'Aix-en-Provence (France), handled by Serge Mackowiak, examining magistrate ; Cases 533/93 to 578/93, Tribunal for children of Aix-en-Provence (France), handled by Judge Permingeat.)

Although the Belgian Parliamentary Commission of 1997 admitted that members of the Family had not committed any offense in Belgium, " No infraction was discovered in Belgium", it went on to say that children in the group had been victims of sexual harassment.

Similar allegations were then repeated in a report by Gyula Hegyi representing the Opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee to the Council of Europe in April 1999. (Doc. 8379 20 APRIL 1999)

Similar allegations about The Family have been included in a booklet circulated by one of the federated entities of the Belgian State, the French-speaking Community of Belgium ; in a booklet by the Austrian State Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family ; and in booklets by certain Romanian government departments.

A misleading depiction of The Family is being perpetuated, which is no doubt influencing other governments and civil authorities in their treatment of The Family's members, as these reports pre-suppose the group to be a "dangerous sect".

b) The media in France and other countries is relentless in their " anti-sect " campaign, often quoting portions of these reports. As the parliamentary reports are considered authoritative, The Family has little opportunity to present the " other side ". They are rarely, if ever, given space in the newspapers or magazines to offer a defense or rebuttal.

c) This has all influenced public opinion. When their members tell their religious affiliation, those they are speaking with are often alarmed, believing them to be members of a dangerous sect. This has created barriers in their contact with the public, and makes it difficult to share their faith. Some of their members, when sharing their faith by distribution of literature or other acceptable means, have been harassed and suffered verbal abuse by the public and some have even been taken for questioning by local police officials.

d) Another result is for the children and teenagers living in their communities, especially those who attend public schools. Should their membership in The Family become known, they find themselves in a very uncomfortable position as both teachers and other students take a very low opinion of them. Some teenagers have actually sat in classes where the teacher, apparently following the curriculum, describes The Family as a group that abuses children.

e) Yet another result of the Parliamentary Commissions is the impetus this has given to the organisations that fight against new religious movements, the " anti-cult movements " of which ADFI is a prime example. ADFI has boasted publicly that they were behind the raids against their communities in 1993 in the south of France, and continues to affirm their guilt, even though all those accused were granted a " non lieu " in January 1999 by Judge Philippe Assonion of the Tribune de Grand Instance of Aix en Provence, and thus were pronounced " not guilty ". The Parliamentary

Reports and subsequent support that ADFI and other groups have received has invigorated their campaign against them, and has assisted them in expanding to other parts of Europe.

f) Certain members of The Family, part-time or full-time, have experienced prejudice when facing issues in the civil courts, for instance in matters of custody when a marriage has broken down and one of the spouses is no longer a member of the group but is seeking custody of the children.

19. Lawsuits initiated by the movement. Results.

The Family in Australia sued the government for the duress suffered by the children due to the raids against the communities in 1993. This was successful, and a generous settlement was reached in benefit of the children.

20. The movement and human rights.

The decision-making processes and structures of The Family are democratic. The movement advocates respect for and compliance with officers of the law. The movement also holds the sanctity of life as one of its fundamental beliefs.

Women's rights: Women hold equal positions of responsibility in The Family as do men. No difference of responsibility, rights, privileges, benefits or leadership are accorded on the basis of gender. Very few jobs in The Family are considered the exclusive domain of either gender. The Teamwork elected by members to administer each Home is always a mixture of men and women. The Continental Officers are also a mixture of male and female. The current spiritual leader of The Family, Maria, is a woman.

Children's rights: The rights of children living in Family communities are clearly upheld in several sections of The Charter. Simply speaking, their rights include having their physical and emotional needs met ; to be free from abuse of any kind; to reside with their parents (unless in the case of marital separation in which case the parents must reach a mutual decision on the custody of the children); and to receive an adequate education. Although many of their members choose to home school their children, parents are responsible to ensure the children receive an adequate education, and if they are not able to do this by home schooling for either legal or practical reasons, they are expected to enrol their children in public schools.

Individual Rights: The rights of individuals in The Family are also upheld in The Charter. Personal matters such as marriage, divorce, choice of medical care, the decision of where to live and with whom to live, are made by the individuals concerned.

From " The Charter ", **BASIC RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS:**

"Charter Members have the right to individual choice and self-determination. God endows each Charter Member with gifts and talents, which, along with their experiences, education and training--physically, intellectually and spiritually--help to compose the unique person they are. Each individual has the right to exercise his personal initiative, faith and choice in the use of his gifts, talents, education and

experience, providing these are consistent with the goals of the overall Family and the "Fundamental Family Rules," and with the agreed-upon goals and Home regulations of the Home in which they reside. If they determine that they cannot exercise these rights in their present circumstances, they have the right to attempt to change their circumstances through their Home council meetings, through the election of the Home's officers, through moving to another Home or the pioneering of their own Home."

Racial-integration and non-discrimination : The Family accepts into its full-time and associate membership any individual who qualifies, regardless of race, ethnicity, colour, class or culture. Their Homes are racially mixed. Members of multiple nationalities live under one roof. No differentiation is made between members as far as their race or colour. Some marriages are of mixed race, depending on the wishes of those concerned.

Attitude to AIDs victims : While The Family does not allow an individual with AIDs to join a Home as a Charter member (for the protection of the other members), Family members have sympathy and concern for those who are HIV positive or afflicted with an active case of AIDs. Their members visit and assist in hospitals and other institutions for AIDs victims. Those with AIDs may join The Family as Fellow or associate members.

Attitude to physically and mentally handicapped : The Family takes responsibility for those who are already members, no matter what befalls them. Those already members of The Family who become handicapped or otherwise limited physically through sickness, accident or advancing age, as well as any handicapped children born to parents in The Family, continue to be included as full members and treated with consideration of their special needs.

Although those with severe physical or mental handicaps are rarely accepted as new Charter members, due to the somewhat demanding rigours of communal missionary living, they are very welcome as Fellow or associate members, and most choose that path.

Human rights in the world at large:

The Family has been very active in attending international human rights conferences/meetings as well as in interacting with other new religions in their efforts to fight for religious freedom for minorities.

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This profile will be updated as far as new pertinent elements will be brought to the attention of and will be controlled by Human Rights Without Frontiers.

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