

The charism of the Sa-Fa Family

Its essential aspects

In Christian language, a charism is a gift that the Holy Spirit gives to a person for the good of others. “The Spirit himself distributes his gifts for the good of the Church, according to the riches of her ministry and the variety of her ministries” (cf. *1 Corinthians 12:1-11*). The term “charism” is also used in everyday language to speak of a person with special gifts, especially for leading others.

The “Sa-Fa Family” is made up of all the people and groups who are part of or are connected to the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family and have Brother Gabriel Taborin as a common point of reference as Founder of the Institute, to which he gave the name and patronage of the Holy Family. In the Holy Family, all those who share the charism of Brother Gabriel find inspiration for their life and activities.

Charism is like the fountain for the river or the engine for the car. Those who share it enter into that dynamic that allows them to live and act today in harmony with the Sa-Fa Family and with the Church for the good of society.

But what does Brother Gabriel's charism consist of?

It consists of “being a brother” and building the community (the family, the group) looking at the Holy Family of Nazareth (with a reference to the Holy Trinity) to live the “family spirit” in Christian education, catechesis and liturgical animation.

Brother Gabriel's life and writings are a constant source of inspiration for those who wish to live his charism and the spirituality that flows from it. Charism and spirituality are mutually implicated. The particular spirituality of the Sa-Fa Family, lived in the Church, comes from the charism and the latter is actualized and transmitted through those who live that spirituality (see the Manual of Spirituality).

The various aspects of Brother Gabriel's charism manifested themselves progressively throughout his life. Every charism involves a human element (personal characteristics), a social element (family and historical environment in which the person lives) and a spiritual element (work of the Holy Spirit), which goes beyond human possibilities.

In summary, we can consider the three moments in which the essential aspects of Brother Gabriel's charism appear.

1. *In Belleydoux, the ecclesial aspect (1799 -1824)*

Gabriel places himself and acts in the local church as a lay animator.

His charism is manifested in the integrative vision of various activities, which have both a Christian-ecclesial dimension (animation of the liturgy, catechesis) and a human-social dimension (education in school), all of them lived with a missionary style.

2. *At Belmont, the spiritual aspect (1825-1840)*

These are the first attempts at foundation and the birth of the Congregation.

Brother Gabriel presents the Holy Family of Nazareth as the primary inspiration for the Brothers' spirituality, lifestyle and mission. Reference to the Holy Family and the divine Trinity is essential for forming the community.

3. *In Belley, the vital aspect (1840-1864)*

Brother Gabriel's main activity was the animation and government of his Institute through an extensive network of internal and external relations. As a true artisan of communion, Brother Gabriel used all the means at his disposal, especially the promotion of the “family spirit” through circular letters, correspondence and other communications, visits to communities and schools, annual meetings of all the Brothers and the sharing of goods. In summary: The charism was expressed in the realization of the mission of the Institute and in the development of the “spirit of body and family.”

Brother Gabriel reformulated his charism through his writings, especially in the various versions of the Rule of Life of the Congregation. In his reflection he discovered the two fundamental values of his charism: fraternity and the “family spirit.”

On the evangelical foundation of the name Brother, he writes: “Names of dignity inspire and demand respect, but the name Brother only communicates simplicity, goodness and charity. It is the name that Jesus Christ, the spotless lamb who was sacrificed for the salvation of the human race, chose for himself when he

wanted to express to us with a single word his immense goodness and his love: 'Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me. ' Did not the Divine Savior by this gesture want to designate with such a loving name those whom he calls to live in community and who in it want to follow the evangelical counsels? Indeed, is there anything more loving than the name Brother? All members of the Institute must love it and never allow themselves to be called anything else” (*New Guide* 6 and 7).

And on the “family spirit”: “Body and family spirit... is born of charity and, consequently, of God who is charity itself. All the members who form a Congregation in which this spirit truly exists, have one heart and one soul; they love and help one another, they share the joys, the sorrows, the successes and the failures of all; reciprocal attention and a close brotherhood unify the most diverse spirits and characters; what belongs to one belongs to all and the words “mine” and “yours” cease to have any meaning; each one considers himself less than the others and God reigns over all” (*Circular* 21)

The vitality of Brother Gabriel's charism has been demonstrated throughout history in his ability to adapt to the various circumstances in which he has been incarnated and has borne good fruit, always maintaining fidelity to his original inspiration:

- At various times throughout history, overcoming adverse situations and opening new horizons when favorable opportunities occurred.
- In geographical and cultural diversity, bringing out the best of each people and each culture in which it has been inserted.
- In the transversality of life states, opening up to intergenerational dialogue and all types of people, and caring for everyone, especially the most fragile.
- In the instances of formation and transmission of one's own spirituality. This is transmitted above all by osmosis, when the experience is shared in community life and in the common mission.

The members of the Sa-Fa Family are called today to a task of discernment in order to, either personally or by participating in the various instances of dialogue, deliberation and decision-making (meetings, assemblies, Councils, Chapters), maintain the essential aspects of the charism they have received and take advantage of the opportunities for human and spiritual growth presented by the various situations and trends of today's world.

The updating of the charism of the Sa-Fa Family in the aspect of mission leads today to its inclusion in a Church that is entirely ministerial, where various forms of lay ministries are promoted: Christian education, catechesis and liturgical animation are among them. “As an expression of the freedom of the Spirit in granting his gifts and as a response to the needs of individual communities, there exists in the Church a variety of ministries that can be exercised by any baptized person, man or woman. These are non-occasional services, recognized by the community and by those who have the responsibility of directing it. They can be called baptismal ministries, to indicate their common root (baptism) and to distinguish them from ordained ministries, rooted in the sacrament of order. We find, for example, men and women who exercise the ministry of coordinating a small ecclesial community, the ministry of leading moments of prayer, the extraordinary ministry of communion or other services, not necessarily of a liturgical nature” (*Instrumentum Laboris* 29 Synod 2024).

Mutual listening and the synodal style of walking together, religious and lay, are the best means to live communion and fraternity (today accentuating its universal dimension), and to periodically establish realistic projects for the future.

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