

The Spiritual Family

What is the difference between a spiritual family and a religious cult? The difference is a function of the culture. Just as one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter, one man's spiritual family is another's religious cult. The spiritual families I will explore are those that will be well accepted, even invited, into most communities. If one wanted to design a family that would be considered a religious cult, consider that community negotiations, in a manner similar to those employed by the BDSM family, might be required.

In a friary, there is a family of brothers, each of whom has given all his worldly goods to the church. The brothers spend their days in study, celebrating God, and performing charitable work.

Assume that when AFFEERCE began the friary was already in place, encumbered by a million dollar mortgage with payments of \$4,170 per month. The friary has eighty bedrooms, for the sixty brothers in residence. Twenty are reserved for visiting brothers from other friaries and monasteries. There is a large chapel for daily services open to the community, a common eating area, a large kitchen (they jokingly call themselves the order of eaters), two meditation rooms, a large library, a business office, and a smoking room. Utilities run another \$4,000 per month.

Prior to AFFEERCE, the over \$8,000 in housing costs came from collections and the general wealth of the church. With AFFEERCE, the brothers receive a housing distribution of \$22,200 a month. Ground rent is \$96,000 a year or \$8,000 a month (Churches receive no tax exemptions). The \$6,200 of excess becomes \$3,100 in rebate. The \$3,100 can be distributed to the brothers as an allowance, leaving each brother with an additional \$38 per month in their spending account. The brothers receive the standard \$35 per month in cash distributions, or a total personal spending allowance of \$73 per month. The \$13,200 food distribution leaves an excess of \$4,000. The \$2,000 per month rebate is used to purchase clothes and furnishings.

This means 100% of collections, donations, and disbursements from the church hierarchy can now be used for charitable work. Charity still has a place in AFFEERCE despite the food and housing distributions. Singles and small families can be in need of clothes and sundry items, with the loss of a job or business failure. Poor budgeting could cause small families to have food shortages at the end of the month. Also, after natural disasters, there can be a few days of confusion before distributions are transferred. The sick, and injured, single or in small families, could require more care than the \$300 disability distribution pays for. Other non-AFFEERCE nations will also need charitable help.

AFFEERCE is very conducive to church families. This is not because churches receive any tax breaks but simply because large families create wealth. And AFFEERCE means potential liberation from the church hierarchy. If the brothers are offended by the latest sexist or homophobic comment from Rome they can simply break away. There are no more financial ties that bind.

The creation of wealth by large families means that grand cathedrals and spiritual centers can arise whenever sixty or so people dedicate themselves to that end. Once built, they are self-sustaining, housing the spiritual family.

In an AFFEERCE economy, charitable work can actually fund charitable work! Picture a monastery of 100 sisters and brothers with another wing for 100 severely physically and mentally disabled patients. The sisters and brothers give these developmentally disabled patients the best care possible. The housing distribution for

each patient is \$370, the food distribution, \$220, the cash distribution, \$35, and the disability distribution, \$300. Of this \$925 per patient per month, it costs only \$350 to feed, clothe and house each patient. After all, the mortgage and utilities for the entire monastery are easily paid out of the \$40,000 housing distribution received by the brothers and sisters. Medications and orthopedic appliances are covered by the medical distribution with hospital affiliation. So each patient has \$575 in excess allotted funds, which corresponds to a \$287 rebate per patient, all of which can be used for additional charity.

Congregations might choose to create ministerial families for their local rabbi, pastor, or other spiritual leader. There are many parishioners whose life centers around the church or synagogue; socials, pot-lucks, bingo, and so forth. These parishioners would feel most at home in a family of like-minded individuals, deacons, cantors, students of religious study, and the local spiritual leader as the head of household. Such a family not only supports the local church or temple buildings but their administration, by supporting the local ministerial staff. Lay members of the ministerial family will form an intermediate level of the local hierarchy, plan events, and clean and maintain the chapel. In return, they have fast access to spiritual guidance and the agape love that comes from living in such a setting. Outside employment for one or two family members can lead to a far more prosperous church.