



65th ICCFR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
(International Commission for Couple and Family Relations)

In cooperation with Cisf
(Centro Internazionale Studi Famiglia)



***REFUGEE AND MIGRANT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:
Preserving family life through hard challenges***

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Anne L. Berger, Chair ICCFR – Rome, 15 November 2019

Hello everyone and welcome to the 65th annual ICCFR Conference. This year the ICCFR has the distinct pleasure and tremendous good fortune of organizing this conference in collaboration with AICCeF (the Italian Association of Couples and Family Consultants), Cisf (the International Center for Family Studies), The Community of Sant'Egidio, OAS Lazio (the Lazio Provincial Association of Social Workers), and the Rome Bar Association.

ICCFR has been around since 1953 and its membership consists of professionals from 3 different walks of life; social service workers, family lawyers, and social policy makers. Our board reflects these 3 disciplines. In alphabetical order our current board is composed of:

- Francesco Belletti – Italy – Director of CISF
- Marie DeBlic – France – social services provider
- Christine Galea – Malta – tireless worker with the CANA movement
- Katharine Hill – U.K. – director of Care for the Family
- Anne Hollonds – Australia – social policy maker
- Sven Iverson – Germany – Managing Director Assoc. of German Families
- Agnes Law – China – professor in Social Work
- Anita Rodarte – USA – family lawyer
- Suzie Thorn – USA – family lawyer
- and myself – USA – family lawyer

And all of you come from every continent except Antarctica. Please raise your hand if you are from:

- Europe
- North America
- South America
- Africa
- Asia
- Australia

I especially want to recognize 2 Former chairs who are with us at this conference:

- John Chambers – U.K.
- Marc Morris - Flanders

The Commission was born as a way for professionals from all of these different disciplines to come together in one place without a rigid agenda so that they could discuss with and learn from each other over a 3-day period without constraints and without a fixed ideology. The conferences, held once each year, were and are open to all and – very importantly – were and are dedicated to free and open dialogue. So please be prepared to meet and learn from one another at every level.

Diversity and inclusion is what ICCFR is all about. We come from many different points of view. Some of us are very conservative, some middle of the road, some progressive, and some radical. Some of us do not fit into any of these categories. We come from countries with many different political systems and many different philosophies. We speak different languages with different historical roots. We pray in different ways and have different customs. Hopefully what we all have in common is open minds and the conviction that we can learn something from one another.

If you have ever seen some of the marvelous photographs taken from space, looking down at Earth, I defy you to locate a boundary line or a national border. Earth is our planet and we need to share it with one another.

We can explore new ways to solve problems. We can listen to colleagues who have found new and perhaps different ways of helping people. And we have to hold on to our basic humanity at all times.

Our Italian collaborators have worked tirelessly to put together what I believe will be a fabulous – no, more than fabulous – conference for you this year. The energy and warmth with which they have tackled this project is five-star in every respect. Please give them a warm and enthusiastic hand of applause.

And a special thanks goes to Dr. Francesco Belletti who put all of the myriad details of this conference into place in 2 languages simultaneously (a feat I could never match!). He will probably sleep the sleep of the just for a week after we all go home. But he has done a flawless job – thank you!

Finally, for those of you who have never attended an ICCFR conference before, you are in for a surprise. Our conferences have a unique element – our discussion groups. Each of you has been assigned to a discussion group. You are not limited to discussing what went on in the workshops you have chosen to attend, or what you heard in the keynotes. You are free to discuss any subject that the group finds interesting and stimulating. The discussion groups are an opportunity for a truly free-flowing exchange of ideas and professional insights. I think you will find them to be one of the best parts of the conference.

The theme of this year's conference is refugees and migrant children and families – how to preserve family life in difficult circumstances. We all read (or perhaps these days stream) the news and we see children being separated from their parents, parents who send their children to other countries without them, refugee families living in tents and temporary shelters, and most tragically, people dying every day trying to reach what they perceive as safety. As social workers, social policy makers, and family lawyers how do we help these people and also preserve societal structure? I do not have all the answers but I hope that this conference will help us all to find some of them.

You will be treated to 3 fabulous keynote speakers:

- Thuomas Martikainen, an academic scholar from Finland
- Robert Simon from California, USA a forensic psychologist
- Sir Mathew Thorpe from the UK, a justice of the High Court.

and, in addition, there will be 12 workshops, each presented by a noted expert in his or her field and each of you will have chosen 2 of those workshops to attend while you are here. I know you will learn a lot from whichever you have chosen.

Finally, I can't say enough about our host city – Rome! One of the great seats of history and culture over several millennia, Rome has some of everything and something for everybody. It will be a unique multicultural experience for those of you coming here for the first time and a renewal of your love affair with the city for those returning here.

So now go out, enjoy the wonderful social programs that have been organized for you, profit from the superb quality of our keynote presenters and workshop presenters, share your ideas with your co-professionals, and marvel at the world's Eternal City.