

BILA 1 ON THE FAMILY
11th to 16th June, 2007
Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand

***“Avenues/Approaches to respond to Challenges in Pastoral Care to Families
in the 21st Century”***

I. Introduction

- 1.1 In the Final Document of the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held in Korea in 2004, the bishops expressed the need for clear guidelines to respond to changes in family values and interpersonal relationships. This Bishops' Institute of Lay Apostolate (BILA) I meeting on the Family, is one of several efforts made as a follow-up of the FABC Assembly. The meeting had the following specific objectives:
- To jointly reflect how the family is affected by the policies of globalization, the new work culture in Asia, materialism, consumerism, misuse of the internet etc.
 - To explore different avenues/approaches to respond to challenges in pastoral care to families in the 21st century.
 - To promote networking with a view to sharing resources and training personnel to assist the younger churches in Asia.
- 1.2 Seventy six delegates from Bangladesh, Hongkong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand gathered at the Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand from 11th to 16th June, 2007 for the first BILA meeting on the Family to reflect on **“Avenues/Approaches to Respond to Challenges in Pastoral Care to Families in the 21st Century”**. The delegates included 10 bishops, laity, sisters and priests from the Episcopal Family Commissions in Asia.

II. INSIGHTS:

2.1 From the daily Gospel sharing sessions:

The sessions of Gospel sharing, at the beginning of each day, made the participants realize the importance of keeping in touch with the values of Jesus to respond to the present challenges faced by families so as to build families and communities of love and care.

2.2 From the sharing from different countries:

1. The family is a receptacle of all that is affecting society
2. The growing divide between the rich and the poor makes basic needs like food water, healthcare and education inaccessible to a growing number of people.
3. Large scale migration on a long-term basis for employment causes a void in the life of the spouse and children left behind.
4. The trend towards live-in relationships, postponing of marriage, temporary commitments in marriage, avoidance of children works against the good of the family.

5. The new work culture with unlimited working hours and shifts hampers couple and parent/child relationships.
6. The growing affluence in the middle class affects traditional family values which are being eroded by the consumerism & individualism promoted through the media
7. The rise in the divorce rate due to poor spousal relationships often arising out of the above socio-economic forces, non-transparency between spouses and shallow faith is a pastoral challenge to the Church.
8. The displacement due to war and human rights' violation is a sad reality affecting families in a number of Asian countries.
9. The increasing number of inter-faith marriages is a reality which must be faced. If entered upon with respect, tolerance and understanding such marriages can be a good opportunity for inter-religious dialogue. Special preparation for both partners in a mixed marriage is necessary to help the spouses understand the value of establishing harmonious homes wherein the children can grow up as moral and upright human beings. Youth, in particular, have to be made aware of the implications of an interfaith marriage.
10. The challenges posed by the 21st century demand a more structured and systematic approach to family ministry, which should include research.

2.3 *From the sharing of personal experiences:*

1. The number of non-traditional families is on the increase.
2. Victims of broken marriages must be treated compassionately and helped to deal with the pain of a broken relationship.
3. Marriage, being a life long vocation, needs adequate preparation.
4. The Family Movements, which have supported and strengthened families, are indicative of the Spirit working in the Church.
5. Though migration of parents for work causes much pain and brokenness especially among children/youth in families, a vibrant youth ministry can help them rise above their pain to become 'hope givers' in their families. Love and concern of neighbours in such situations will alleviate the problems.

2.4 *From the Inputs:*

1. Lowering of labour standards is causing extreme stress and hardships to families. The Church plays an important role as a moral and objective force to speak out against injustices to workers and to minimize inequalities in society.
2. The social neglect of the needs of migrant workers must be remedied.
3. Parents can act as consultants/active players in youth ministry.
4. The Small Christian Community (SCC/BEC) as a new way of being Church should be made a pastoral priority. The SCC/BEC can serve as an extended family to support families that are in difficult situations. In their turn, stable and strong families ensure a vibrant SCC/BEC.
5. The family is a sanctuary where the dignity and sacredness of each person is valued and upheld.
6. Families should stay in touch with Jesus through prayer. The Eucharist should be the source of strength of family life. Our deepest nature and calling is to be "One Bread, One Body, One People"

III. RECOMMENDATIONS:

i. At the Diocesan/Parish Level:

1. Foster a strong prayer-life to sustain families.
2. Form a body of lay experts and clergy in each diocese/parish who will collaborate with experts to accompany families through their difficult situations.
3. Organize at the diocesan/parish levels ongoing formation programmes for families, starting with youth, marriage preparation, parenting, faith-formation and building strong relationships.
4. Nurture mutual support groups: couple to couple, single parents, mixed marriages, estranged spouses, children/youth/families of migrant workers.
5. Initiate an outreach to Catholics married outside the Church.
6. Help men to accept their fatherhood and joint responsibility in the family.
7. Organize post-annulment and post-divorce healing programmes to cope with the pain of a break up.
8. Plan structured forms of accompanying mixed/inter-faith marriages.
9. Establish care-giving groups for the elderly since they will constitute a growing segment of the population in several countries.
10. Adopt a holistic approach to Family Ministry, establishing connectivity with other related ministries to the family.
11. Seminary formation should include an orientation and exposure to family life and to the SCC/BEC.
12. Have a Family Commission with a full time staff in each diocese. This would provide a structure to implement the above-made recommendations, support families and network with other bodies.

ii. At the Regional Level:

1. Networking and collaboration within the Region to share expertise/resources among countries and exchange information
2. The FABC Office of Laity & Family to link with the Episcopal Commission in dioceses and regions.

IV. CONCLUSION:

We thank the FABC Office of Laity & Family, ASIPA and the Youth Desk for organizing this BILA I meeting on the Family which helped broaden our perspective on family ministry, making it more relevant to meet the challenges of the 21st century. All the participants agreed that it was, indeed, a fruitful meeting when they sensed so powerfully the working of the Spirit in their midst. Beyond the differences of cultures and backgrounds, there was a commonality in problems affecting family life in Asia and a felt-need for jointly searching avenues for dealing with these problems. We learned from one another their approaches in responding to the challenges (especially India, Singapore and Hong Kong). All were one in their realization that “**the future of humanity passes by way of the family**” (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 86)

