



**SHEPHERDING FAMILIES IN ASIA:
Contemporary challenges and responses
for Bishops, Priests and Lay Leaders
From 16th – 20th May 2016
at Salesian Retreat House in Hua Hin – Thailand**

**SUMMARY REPORT of the FABC – OC & OLF WORKSHOP-SEMINAR
2nd June 2016**

Introduction

From May 16 – 20, 2016 ninety-nine (99) participants composed of 14 bishops, 24 priests, 2 religious nuns, and 59 lay leaders, who are all involved in family ministry, gathered at the Salesian Retreat House in Hua Hin, Thailand. They came from 14 distinct Asian neighbors (Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam) in order to listen and reflect together on Shepherding Families in Asia, focusing on current challenges and responses.

Our Objectives:

Specifically, this community meant

1. To understand current challenges from specifically Asian perspectives on marriage and family life that are contrary to genuine Christian teaching;
2. To empower bishops and priests with insights, means and guidelines in strengthening and safeguarding the sanctity of marriage and family life; and
3. To motivate the participants to identify, explore and devise pastoral plans to promote and strengthen good Christian families after the example of the Holy family in Nazareth, sustained by the Trinitarian relationships.

The Programme

To achieve the above goals a series of lectures, interactions, plus appropriate workshops by regional groups followed:

1. Bishop Mylo Vergara (from Pasig, Philippines) gave a situationer of families in Asia, sharing with us the results of FABC Survey done in November 2015. The data included:
 - a. The types of families in Asia as well as challenges that the families face.
 - b. Challenges mentioned were: mixed and interfaith marriages, marriage problems and conflicts, need for catechism and faith formation, poverty, migration, lack of prayer life or practice of faith, & deterioration of family members.
 - c. Each country identified its own more pressing challenges.
2. Fr. Francis Gustilo, SDB (from Parañaque, Philippines), gave a Theological Foundation for Family Ministries, namely a Theology from Below (moving up) that sets its foundation on the anthropological centrality of the person highlighting his/her intrinsic value as God given; and a Theology from Above (moving down) that focuses on the Trinity's selfless self-emptying, loving relationship as the family's basis for human relationships.
3. Mr. Frank Padilla (from Manila, Philippines) shared the intimate and critical relationship between family and evangelization. To shepherd the families is not only to equip families

with skills nor know about the Shepherd, but a conversion experience, *metanoia*, which is at the heart of family ministry, grounded in knowing the Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

4. Mr. & Mrs. Chan Chee Seung (from Hong Kong) shared how they grew as a Catholic family as well as their ministry with families. Very significant were the real cases they presented, which showed how these families went through difficulties and coped with their different situations needing assistance from Pastoral Family Ministers. The sharing highlighted the importance of concerted efforts to respond to the different needs of families, especially in terms of appreciating and living the Catholic Faith amidst secularism and multiple religious beliefs.
5. Fr. Cajetan Menezes (from Mumbai, India) proposed a Pastoral Support to Families through Diocesan Parish and BEC (Basic Ecclesial Communities) or SCC (Small Christian Communities) structures. Highlighted was the “Family Perspective” as a whole parish approach to effective grassroots pastoral care. Through the Parish Family Cell’s networking with other organizations, three goals were set, namely:
 - a. To make the family aware of its role and mission in the Church (Educative Goal)
 - b. To develop healthy family life (Preventive or Formative Goal)
 - c. To reach out to families in distress (Therapeutic or Curative Goal)

Activities of parish family cells (PFC) fall under three areas: formative, fellowship and service.

6. Archbishop Patrick D’Rozario (from Dhaka, Bangladesh) talked on the Spirituality of Family as an Essential Component of Pastoral Care. He drew up a spirituality for family as proposed in chapter 9 of *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) and from his personal experience as Pastor “who had visited 95% of the families in his previous diocese of Rajshahi.” This inspires us as shepherds being with our sheep. Pastoral visits by pastoral leaders is one key way of accompanying families.
7. Five three hour workshops were conducted simultaneously on day two to deepen our understanding on the various dimensions of Family Ministry. Formation, Structures, Socio-Economic factors, Accompaniment & listening and Spirituality. Fr James Gascon SJ and Bishop Gilbert Garceras of the Philippines as well as Fr Cajetan, Mr & Mrs Chan and Archbishop Patrick worked with the different regions with about 15 to 20 participants in each group.

Where to from here?

8. On the last day, the country groups sat down to review, evaluate and plan their next steps. The following is a summary of their reports:
 - All countries present have been inspired by the “Joy of Love” of Pope Francis and want to deepen their understanding of Family and their Ministry by a deeper study of the document. They would like to study it with collaborators in the ministry in their own countries.
 - All have also been very much touched by the call of Pope Francis to Accompany, Discern and Integrate in their ministry and to reveal and share the Mercy and Love of God.
 - Accompaniment became the byword for Ministry rather than Programmes. Empowering Lay people for ministry was important for many groups.

The following are some more specific plans from the various countries present:

1. Bangladesh
To train more lay collaborators for Family Ministry; To introduce a course in the Seminary on Family; To enable couples to see marriage as a vocation

2. India
To accompany those couples in the first five years of marriage with special attention to inter-faith couples; improve Marriage Preparation and link accompaniment and formation to the network of SCCs which are an existing resource and structure where families can be reached.
3. Indonesia
To raise greater awareness of marriage as a vocation. To better prepare couples to understand family and marriage, in particular inter-faith couples.
4. Malaysia
Emphasized the need to help couples understand marriage as a vocation. To strengthen spirituality in marriage. To connect the Family Commission to the BEC commission and work through BECs to reach families. The importance of accompaniment of couples through BECs.
5. Myanmar
To improve faith formation of couples so that families can be strong and transmit faith to the children. Establish a hotline for assistance to families.
6. Pakistan
To see families as Evangelizers. To train more lay collaborators; to introduce a program in the seminary; to accompany young couples more closely; to set up a cell system in the parishes.
7. Philippines
To strengthen regional structures and train Family and Life coordinators; to build partnerships and collaboration between all the various organizations to have better faith formation, seminary formation etc. To improve the marriage preparation resources available.
8. Singapore
Networking among organizations serving the family and Small Christian Communities. Train more lay collaborators. Accompany newly weds.
9. Sri Lanka
To empower and sustain couples in Family Ministry through ongoing formation and to implement accompaniment as a mainstay of Ministry.
10. Thailand
To train the Family Ministry team in July this year in order to have a greater impact.
11. Vietnam
To have a strong Family perspective in all we do, developing trained team members, developing SCCs to reach out to families at the grassroots and to strengthen all family ministry programs and structures at parish level.
These are a few of the plans mentioned. The challenges are many and the pastoral responses will need to be creative and multi-faceted. All are determined to study well the Post-Synodal Exhortation "Amoris Laetitia" and to develop ways to walk with families more lovingly and compassionately.

Conclusion

This gathering happened as a joint effort of two FABC offices: the Office of Laity & Family and the Office of Clergy. Both offices noticed the four days were characterized by a unique combination of a prayerful atmosphere through community participation in the daily Eucharist, praying the Liturgy of the Hours at different moments of the day, the spontaneous socialization during meals and breaks, plus the hospitable disposition of the hosts, that created felt

experiences of family, God's big family – the Church. For all that has happened, we thank the Triune God, and the Holy Family. We put our efforts at shepherding families in the Good Shepherd's hands.





DELEGATE TO THE JOINT PROGRAM OF FABC-OFFICE OF CLERGY/FABC-OFFICE OF LITTY & FAMILY

A Seminar-Workshop on Shepherding Families in Asia

May 16-20, 2016

Salesian Center of Spirituality in Hua Hin, Thailand



