

Childless Couples, Elderly Challenge Catholic Families in Japan
By T S Thomas

Negombo: Decrease in birth rates and increase in aged parents are posing some visible threats to the family life in Japan, one of the few developed countries in Asia.

This was revealed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan (CBCJ) at the eleventh plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) now underway in Negombo, a coastal city near Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital.

"Japan became an aging society in 1970, an aged society in 1994 and a super-aged society in 2007," CBCJ president Archbishop Joseph M. Takami of Nagasaki told more than 140 bishops, FABC officials and invited guests.

At the assembly, Archbishop Takami presented his Church's response to a working paper that the FABC has circulated among its members to elicit suggestions to make families agents of the Church's mission of mercy in Asia.

The Japanese prelate called for immediate steps in catechizing the Catholic families on the sacrament of marriage.

According to the National Census of 2015, Japan has 32.6 percent one-person households, only couple households account for 20.1 percent, couple and children households 28.1 percent, single parent and children households 9.2 percent.

At the same time 16.8 percent of those above 65 years live in one-person households.

The archbishop said that majority of Catholics are alone in their families and the families whose members are all Catholics are not many particularly in the big cities.

"Majority of marriages are those of interfaith," he pointed out.

Although Japan is considered a developed country, 12.1 percent of the general population in Japan are poor, according to a census in 2012. The archbishop pointed out that one among six children in Japan is poor due to "increase of single parent households and nearly one third of workers are of non-regular employment," he pointed out.

"However, spiritual poverty is more visible and crucial than material poverty," said the prelate who pointed out as matters of real concern the growing incidents of child violence and child neglect, discrimination, hate speech on internet and suicide cases.

Another challenge to the Catholic families in Japan is deterioration of faith and spiritual values in the family because of influence of consumerism, materialism, relativism, individualism, higher standard living, and the development of the social communication technology.

The archbishop said the parents and the pastors should know how to manipulate and dominate the information technology for their quality of life and the evangelization of others.

The prelate, who heads the Archdiocese of Nagasaki, one of the most affected cities devastated by the nuclear bombs during Second World War, pleaded for abolishing nuclear power stations in the world.

The nuclear power stations in Japan are repeatedly under the threat of earthquakes and tsunamis.

The prelate also pointed out that Japan is facing the effects of global warming and climate change with very strong rains, floods and unpredictable and irregular weather.

He expressed solidarity with victims and those suffering from the natural disaster. However, he observed that Christian volunteers went to help and support people in difficult situations.

The prelate recommended promotion of Small Christian Communities as an answer to all the problems and challenges families are facing in Japan.

He urged FABC members to unanimously agree to spread the SCCs in their countries.

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[T S Thomas of Matters India (www.mattersindia.com) prepared this report for the FABC Office of Social Communication.]