

FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES
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**THE CATHOLIC FAMILY IN ASIA:
DOMESTIC CHURCH OF THE POOR
ON A MISSION OF MERCY**

INTRODUCTION

To the Church in Asia

1. Gathered at the XI Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Colombo (Sri Lanka), we Asian Bishops proclaim the Joy of the Gospel of Mercy to the Asian Family.¹

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy has officially ended, but the merciful and compassionate God continues to shower his blessings upon us.

2. We share with you our reflection on the Asian family. We begin with the prayer with which Pope Francis concludes his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on love in the family (2016):

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of your love; to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer. Amen. (AL 324)

A truly beautiful prayer. A prayer of the family for all seasons. It reminds us of God's plan for the family to be a shrine of prayer and a sanctuary of life in communion. It recalls to us the inviolability of marriage, its sacredness and beauty. These are gifts of God's mercy and impel us to move forward in the renewal of the Catholic family in Asia.

¹ We note with sadness the absence of representatives from the Church in China. We express our solidarity with all the suffering Church.

FABC Vision of the Family – Major Lines

3. Renewal is not rudderless or direction-less. For the Spirit of Jesus has inspired the Church in Asia to fashion a vision for the Catholic family. The family is nothing less than the “focal point of evangelization towards a culture of integral life” (VIII FABC Plenary Assembly, Daejeon, 2004). The family is “to live the Eucharist” in Asia and be “Eucharistic” by loving, sharing and serving especially the poor and the needy (IX FABC Plenary Assembly, Manila, 2009). The Holy Spirit is calling the Asian Family to a mission of “New Integral Evangelization” (X FABC Plenary Assembly, Xuân Lộc, 2012).

Recent Ordinary Synods of Bishops on the Eucharist (2005) and on the Word of God (2008), the Extraordinary (2014) and the Ordinary (2015) Synods of Bishops on the Family, the International Eucharistic Congress (Cebu, Philippines, 2016), and recent pronouncements by Pope Francis (e.g., *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013; *Misericordiae Vultus*, 2015; *Laudato Si'*, 2015) have abundantly enriched the Asian vision of family.

Renewal of the Catholic family in Asia is oriented towards this vision. We wish to journey on the road to renewal by reflecting on the theme: The Catholic Family in Asia, Domestic Church of the Poor on a Mission of Mercy.

FABC Vision of a Church of the Poor

4. Church of the Poor is a vision where all members of the Church, be they materially poor or enormously rich in the goods of this world, live in a spirit of evangelical poverty, characterized by detachment from material possessions. They acknowledge that everything is a gift of God.

The Church of the Poor is one where before the Lord we confess our poverty of spirit, the poverty of our sinfulness, as well as our total dependence on God. It is a Church that pledges option for the poor, is in solidarity with them and strives to defend their rights and dignity. It is a sharing and serving Church that promotes social justice for the poor with their many faces. Its Lord is Jesus of Nazareth, who made himself poor that we might become rich with his grace.

On our journey towards that vision, we recall the Letters of John to the Seven Churches in Asia in the Book of Revelation. The Letters speak of daunting challenges to the churches as well as the promise of hope. Discernment and conversion are necessary for hope to be realized. We hear the plaintive refrain in the Letters: “Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (*Rev* 2:7,11,17,29; 3:8,13,22). We, too, listen and discern.

Questions for the Journey to the Vision

5. The Asian Family is at the crossroads. We are faced with a barrage of questions. Besieged by a thoroughly secularist, individualistic and materialist culture which is at the heart of the postmodern spirit, will the Asian family succumb to the spirit of “global indifference”? Or will it preserve that human and Kingdom value so characteristic of the Asian spirit – a deep dynamic sense of community as well as of mercy and compassion?

We raise these questions as we face a world full of contradictions. Battered by images of human suffering through natural disasters, the world’s compassion flows out in steady streams of relief aid. But the silent scream of millions in teeming poverty is literally ignored, like collateral damage in the uneven war of economic globalization. When millions of refugees flee from political and ideological wars, the world takes notice. But when hundreds of Christians are massacred and thousands of families flee for their lives, their homes and churches burned, hardly any protest is heard.

PART I – PASTORAL CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY

A. Family – Asianness

6. A significant Asian character of Catholic families is the fact that they are a very small minority in this massive continent of great ancient religions. Also an Asian character is the great number of interfaith marriages in most countries.

But Catholic families share values and characteristics that cut across the rich variety of Asian cultures, ethnicities, and religions.

We observe the close intergenerational family kinship in Asian families. This is palpably true for the nuclear Asian family of parents and children but also includes the extended family of cousins, nephews, nieces, grandparents and grandchildren. We see the great respect and honor, nay, affection that families give the elderly. Asian families typically love children and have the great desire to have children, for children are God's gifts and blessings.

We ourselves testify to a culture of caring for family members who are physically or mentally disadvantaged, the welcoming hospitality of Asian families despite their poverty, their support of one another in times of need, of grief, of disaster. For Catholic families, parents and children are participating together more frequently in the celebration of Holy Mass and praying more together.

7. These rich family characteristics are fundamentally due to a deep Asian sense of the sacredness of marriage and of family life, a deep sense that is culturally passed on from generation to generation. A general sense of the sacred is in fact a pervasive value in Asian cultures. It helps Asians to value and protect life from conception to natural death as well as preserve the stability of marriages.

Still, the minority status of Catholic families in Asia impacts their pastoral responses to the challenges that they face. Collaboration with families of other faiths would be absolutely necessary.

B. Major Pastoral Challenges to the Family

The Asian family faces challenges of far-reaching proportions. Among them are the following:

Persecution - Religious Freedom under Siege

8. The variety of races, ethnicities and cultures in Asia from Central Asia through South and East Asia and down to Southeast Asia, from the plains to the mountains, should be a great source of pride and joy. They are a rich mosaic of the human tapestry that God our Creator has gifted Asia.

But harmony and peace do not always reign. Violent clashes of culture and ethnicity, often with religious and political overtones, dot the Asian landscape.

In some parts of South Asia and Southeast Asia, Christian families have fled their homes for safety, literally driven away by religious bigots and radicals. Families have been massacred. Churches have been razed to the ground. Christians live in fear, in anxiety and insecurity, under the sword of anti-Christian laws that do not welcome religious pluralism. Numerous are the cases of abducted Christian girls, forcibly converted and forced into marriage.

And sadly, we see an increasing level of aggressive and militant religious intolerance in many Asian countries.

Poverty, Migration and Dislocation

9. While there are certainly regional economic differences – note for instance the level of economic development in the East Asian region, as well as in Singapore and Malaysia – pervasive and massive poverty is the condition of millions of families in South Asia and Southeast Asia. The evils of human trafficking, the lure of the sex industry for children, youth and adults, the willingness of many to be involved in child pornography are mainly due to poverty and deprivation.

The negative effects of economic globalization on poor families that cannot compete fairly against the rich and more powerful in a regime of free liberalized markets cannot be overestimated. Unable to access the sources and benefits of economic development that flow directly to the upper levels of Asian societies, poor families are of necessity drawn to seek a better future in urbanized centers in their own countries or serve as migrant workers in more developed countries as in Singapore and Malaysia and in the East Asian region, and especially in the Middle East and in Europe.

Such internal and external migration of family members is often to the social detriment of the families left behind. Conjugal bonds and family relationships are broken by prolonged absences. Children grow up without the guidance of both parents. Love cannot be expressed merely by remittances sent to support families.

Moreover, many migrant workers suffer inhumane treatment and the phenomenon has been called a “new slavery”. Their dislocation often results in the breakdown of families and the dysfunctional growth and development of children.

10. Sometimes the drive for a better quality of life begets a craving for higher lifestyles and for luxury goods and results in a narrow utilitarian one-child view of family.

Further, the materialistic self-fulfillment view of husband and wife in pursuit of their respective careers weakens conjugal bonding and, aside from the economic motive, convinces the spouses that only one child is the ideal. Their procreative gift from God is lost in careerism and economic ambition.

Political, Ideological, Cultural Conflicts and Divisions

11. Of enormous implications is the situation of families affected by internal armed conflicts, such as wars, political rebellions, terrorism and violent cultural, ethnic, and religious clashes. Such violence and conflicts result in temporary or permanent dislocation, internal and external migration of thousands of families to safer areas, regions or countries.

We now have the growing phenomenon of political, economic, cultural, climatic and religious refugees in various Asian countries – a phenomenon that has stirred international concern. The phenomenon of Asian refugees exacerbates biases and prejudices that are constant sources of division and conflict.

The most affected victims of conflict and war are children, traumatized by evacuations, and the roar of weapons. They grow up as “children of war”, their growth and development and their formal education seriously interrupted. Many are even recruited forcibly as “child soldiers”.

Ideological Colonialism and Cultural Values

12. In the wake of economic globalization, a secular, materialist and relativist postmodern spirit is insidiously creeping into the Asian psyche. It runs counter to treasured Asian traditional values of the family. Its emerging dominance is in reality a form of ideological colonialism, whereby the values of secular ideology impose themselves subtly and, almost inexorably, replace Asian treasured values in a new form of colonial mentality.

Ideological colonialism has introduced “a culture of the ephemeral” (see *AL* 39). New forms of love relationships and new forms of families alien to the Asian ethos, such as same sex unions, are developing. The new cultural ideology devalues marriage and life-long commitments. It promotes instead the practice of co-habitation, transitory love and passing commitments. Political international bodies, in giving grants to developing countries, support this ideology by demanding conditionalities to promote contraceptives and abortion in the guise of reproductive health. The sexual revolution and the fear of overpopulation are causative factors (see *AL* 42).

Further, in the internet lurk many dangers to impressionable minds with regard to human sexuality, such as pornography and the commercialization of the body (see *AL* 410).

On the other hand is the challenge from within cultures, such as the discrimination against and exploitation of women in some extremely patriarchal Asian societies. The thousands of female fetuses aborted yearly and the practice of girl-brides indicate the extent of women’s subservient situation as well as a low attitude towards marriage.

We likewise note that there are many instances of ideological colonialism of local sources when we label products as excellent (or poor) because of their Asian country of origin.

Bishops from East Asian countries, as in Japan, also perceive a significantly declining birth rate, an aging population and the loneliness of the old in the light of weakened family linkage.

We also discern the rising number of separated couples marrying other partners to the detriment of the children. Single parent families are also on the rise. They struggle hard to maintain and educate the children, but the desire and longing for the presence of the absent father or mother is always a source of anxiety for growing children.

Global Warming and Climate Change

13. The effects of natural disasters and extreme weather changes resulting from global warming and climate change on Asian families are enormous.

Asia is experiencing as never before stronger and more frequent typhoons, floods, land erosion, more severe droughts, prolonged El Niño and La Niña effects. These bring about the destruction of farm crops and the loss of livelihood. They dislocate thousands of families who are driven to look for a better environment for themselves and their children. They drive thousands of Asian families into deeper poverty and deprivation. They are the new “climate change refugees”.

Tensions within the Family

14. Asian families experience serious tensions from within that threaten the relationships between spouses themselves as well as among the members of the family. The environment of love is commonly broken by domestic violence that sometimes ends up in the hands of police. Children cower in fear and anxiety as their parents do violence on each other not only by words but also by action.

The inadequacy of decent housing among poor families, especially among urban poor, is a health and sanitation hazard. The lack of privacy is also a strong temptation to sexual crimes within the family. Undoubtedly, even though subtly, the gay or lesbian orientation of a member of the family leads sometimes to a silent discomfort and alienation. In some countries, the dowry system becomes a source of great tension at the very beginning of marriage. The harsh treatment of domestic workers is not uncommon.

Deterioration of Religious Faith and Spiritual Values in the Family

15. The creeping emergent global culture of secularism negatively impacts cherished Asian family values. It weakens religious faith, as it has already done in many developed countries in the northern hemisphere.

In some countries, the drive for higher standards of living results in less respect for the elderly and the disabled as they are considered burdens to the family. Consumerism replaces Gospel values of simplicity and responsible stewardship of created goods. In the language of Pope Francis, we are seeing the emergence of a “throw away” culture.

We recognize the positive contributions of the digital revolution to family and social life. But the digital revolution is ambivalent. Together with lights there are shadows. For we perceive the weakening of family bonds in this digital age. It is not unusual to see members of the same family gather together, but each one busy with the mobile phone, texting messages to friends. In the past, the family would gather and watch TV together. Now, mobile phones and iPads have replaced the TV. The sense of family togetherness is gradually being eroded.

Moreover, individualism, a fundamental attribute of the postmodern spirit, is luring the youth away from the family. With this is a gradual reduction of a sense of the family as sacred space of intimacy and love. As family bonds and family support weaken, young people today with even greater frequency than before find love and intimacy among peers and thus result in more teenage pregnancies.

16. We also observe that families do not have an adequate faith formation. Nor do they have the training to transmit their faith to others or exercise their faith in social engagement. Adult faith formation is lacking, making Catholic families vulnerable to the attraction of mushrooming religious sects.

Given the religious and cultural pluralism of Asia, there is a great percentage of interfaith marriages, often to the detriment of the Catholic party.

Yet the weakness of faith and the lack of faith formation of families are not entirely due to outside factors. We must humbly confess that we as leaders and shepherds of the faith have not evangelized our flock adequately that as a result there is a dichotomy between faith and life. Moral teachings are not followed. We need to examine our methods, approaches and language of evangelization in the light of this failure.

The Example and Challenge of Good Families

17. We cannot simply dwell on challenges as problems confronted by Catholic families in Asia. All over Asia are families from different cultural, social and economic backgrounds, families belonging to different religious traditions, interfaith families and families in difficult situations.

In varying milieus, many such families are examples of families that live according to the plan of God. They are parents striving to serve not only their own members but also others especially the poor and the needy, with the assistance of God's ubiquitous grace, on the journey to God's Kingdom. They edify other families and from them other families find support. How to support and maintain such families is a challenge.

Summarizing Questions

18. With these formidable pastoral challenges, we raise vital questions: How can the Asian family respond effectively to the challenges that it confronts? How can the Asian family reflect the communion of participatory communities that the Church envisions itself to be? And still a deeper question: how can the Asian family be a domestic church of the poor that can credibly proclaim from within itself the mercy and compassion of God?

Part II – REFLECTION IN THE LIGHT OF FAITH

Hence we need to reflect from the perspective of our faith about what the Catholic family in Asia should *be* in order to respond effectively and credibly to Asian pastoral challenges.

Fundamental Postulate: Communion of Love, the Ground of Conjugal and Family Love

19. In the fourth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminds us that “marriage is the icon of God's love for us” (AL 121, citing John Paul II, *Catechesis*, 2 April 2014, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 April 2014, p. 8). This implies that love in marriage is a reflection of God's own love. Divine love is at the heart of conjugal and family life. This is our basic faith-insight.

God's love is fundamentally a communion, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect charity and unity. So must conjugal and family love be communion.

In conjugal communion man and woman become one, “in a single existence”. Similarly, Tertullian noted with deep insight: “How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact, they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit” (*Ad uxorem*, II, VIII, 6-8: CCL I, 393; cited in *Familiaris Consortio* 13).

Such communion of husband and wife in marriage deepens the equality between them. St. Ambrose declares to the husband: “You are not her master, but her husband; she was not given to you to be your slave, but your wife.... Reciprocate her attentiveness to you and be grateful to her for her love” (*Exameron*, V, 7, 19: CSEL 32, I, 154; cited in *Familiaris Consortio* 25).

In family communion, the members of the family are united together, indeed through natural physical generation, but more profoundly through interactive reciprocal love and service of one another – an indescribable gift of God to the family.

A. The Catholic Family in Itself, *ad Intra*.

Eucharistic Family

20. The faith-reality of Communion with the Triune God and especially with Jesus in the Eucharist was a central emphasis of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist (2005), the Manila FABC Plenary Assembly on Living the Eucharist in Asia (2009), and the recent International Eucharistic Congress in Cebu (2016). The Eucharistic Congress reawakened our fading consciousness of the abiding and loving presence of the Eucharistic Jesus in our lives, in joy or in suffering, or in the ordinary seasons of life.

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus – His Passion, Death and Resurrection – draws everything and everyone to himself as the event of Salvation and Reconciliation (see *Jn* 12:32; also *Col* 1:20). Sacramentally memorialized in the Eucharist, the Paschal Mystery draws together the members of the family to the Lord Jesus and to one another. It is at the beginning of conjugal and family communion.

Undoubtedly, Eucharistic communion is first of all our communion of love with the Triune God. The Johannine biblical texts (see *Jn* 15:10; *1 Jn* 2:24; 3:24) on love and abiding in the Lord Jesus, in the Father and in the Holy Spirit (see *Jn* 14:16-17), speak of divine indwelling in the one who loves God and obeys God's commands.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the triune God is present in every baptized member of the family. Baptized in water and in the power of the Spirit, members of the family are children of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus. They are infused with new life and transformed into a new creation by the Spirit, and co-heirs of the Kingdom of God.

Into the Catholic family God has sacramentally poured forth his love and life, making it a "sanctuary of love and life", an icon of God's mercy and compassion.

The divine presence impels the family to be Eucharistic in the manner of the Eucharistic Jesus who sacrificed his very life "for the many" and then bequeathed his own Body and Blood to us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. By this total sacrifice, he demonstrated for us how to love, share and serve others, especially the poor and the needy. The family has likewise to have a spirit of sacrifice as it mightily struggles daily for a better life and strives to respond to the needs of others.

The lesson of sharing and serving is what Paul wanted to teach the Corinthians (see *AL* 118-27). He observed a division among them (*1 Cor* 11:18). He noted abuses in the Eucharistic liturgy. It was tainted by greed and neglect of the hungry and needy (*1 Cor* 11:21). The Corinthians had forgotten the meaning of the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup. These were meant to be signs of communion with the Lord, signs too of the unity of the various households or families. The Eucharist was meant to be a liturgy of worship, prayer, and mission.

For this reason, the family that is nourished continually in the prayerful celebration of the Eucharistic worship and enlivened by the Word of God in the Eucharistic liturgy has to be a school of prayer and worship. It is from a Eucharistic life of prayer and worship that the Holy Spirit sends the family to a mission of mercy and compassion in the world.

A Family of Faith, Domestic Church of the Poor

21. We recall the challenge of Jesus to families. When he was told that his mother and brothers were looking for him, he asked: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He pointed to his disciples and said: "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister and mother" (*Mt* 12:46-48).

He referred to his new family, a family not of blood but of faith. The example of the first disciples dramatically illustrates how they left their families to enter the disciple-family of Jesus. At the end, it is when “biological families” open themselves to Christ and to others that they become “domestic churches”.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, reminds us of the beginning of the Church. At the root of the Church’s identity is “the Church of the Poor”. It is a Church where rich and poor alike live a spirit of evangelical poverty and are in solidarity with the poor. Pope Francis himself has this vision: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” (*EG* 198).

The Lord Jesus wanted his community of disciples to follow his way of life, a way of poverty and simplicity, a way of humility.

“Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” (*Lk* 6:20, see also *Mt* 5:3). The first of the Beatitudes required the disciples to live evangelical poverty and recognize the utter gratuity of God’s gift of life and possessions. This required for the whole community of the faithful, for every household and family, a life of simplicity and sharing (see the life of the early Jerusalem community, in *Acts* 2:42-46 and 4:32-35).

Jesus identified himself with the poor and the needy, the least of his brothers and sisters (see *Lk* 6:20; *Mt* 5:3). In many ways, in words, attitudes and action, he expressed his preferential love of the poor. He was in solidarity with them, walked with them, ennobled them, called them to his side. He recognized the rich who were “poor in spirit”. He denounced greed and indifference to the plight of the poor and the needy (see the Parables of the Rich Man and Lazarus, *Lk* 16:19-31; also the Rich Fool and his barns, *Lk* 12:13-21).

The poverty of his life and death, the values of poverty and simplicity and dependence on God that he taught, his prophetic relationships with the rich and with the poor – these are the values that the Lord wants the Church and each household of faith to have and to live – simply to be a “Church of the Poor”. The Catholic family has, therefore, to be a domestic church of the poor.

Poor in fact was the Holy Family of Nazareth – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Mary and Joseph could only give the offering of the poor, a pair of turtle doves (*Lk* 2:24), when they presented Jesus in the Temple. They became refugees in Egypt (*Mt* 2:13-15). Joseph was only a carpenter (*Mt* 13:54-55). The Holy Family of Nazareth is the prototype of a domestic church of the poor.

The Family – “Missionary Disciple”

22. Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium* 1964, *Ad Gentes* 1965) and the papal magisterium (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, *Christifideles Laici* 1988, *Redemptoris Missio* 1990) have consistently taught that the whole Church is missionary. More recently and more forcefully in *Evangelii Gaudium* (see nos. 20-21, 24), Pope Francis has insisted on the identity of the Church as one “sent forth” to be a herald of Jesus and his Gospel, especially to the “margins” and “peripheries” of humanity, to the poor and the needy with their many faces.

How dramatic and vivid his vision of the Church as a “missionary disciple”! “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security” (*EG* 49).

If the whole Church, so also the domestic church, the family. The Catholic family is by identity a “missionary disciple”. Mission is the birthright of the Catholic family.

The Daejeon FABC Plenary Assembly succinctly enunciated an emerging Asian ecclesial maxim: “The family is the focal point of evangelization”. It is to be evangelized and at the same time it is sent forth to evangelize, to tell “the story of Jesus”.

Telling the story of Jesus is not in religious triumphalism but in humility, not with gloom but with joy, not with noisy words but with deeds. Such is authentic missionary discipleship.

The Family as Seedbed of Vocation

23. Although vocation to the priestly and religious life sometimes emerges from broken or irregular families, we cannot forget the fact that it is often in the family that the vocation to the priestly and religious life is sown and nurtured by the Lord usually in a family environment of religious faith.

B. The Catholic Family for Others, *ad Extra*.

Jesus-in-Mission: Mercy and Compassion

24. The Catholic family as a missionary disciple follows in the footsteps of Jesus. His was a mission of mercy and compassion, as he journeyed to the villages of Palestine, “doing good”. Jesus simply described himself as the “One who serves” (*Lk 22:27*).

With compassion, he taught the multitudes (*Mt 9:36*), hungry for the word of God. With compassion, he forgave sinners (e.g., *Lk 7:48; Mt 9:6; Mk 2:9; Lk 5:24*), healed the sick (e.g., *Jn 4:43-54; Mk 1:21-28; Mt 8:14-17; Lk 5:17-26*) and gave bread to the hungry, even promising them the food that does not perish, the Bread and Drink of Eternal Life, His own Body and Blood (see *Jn 6:54*). He insisted on the primacy of compassion in the practice of the Sabbath Law (see *Mk 2:27*), compassion for the untouchables, the unclean of Jewish society, for those who had no rights of their own, foreigners, widows, and orphans. He accepted those rejected by society such as lepers (see *Mt 8:1-4; Lk 7:11-17*), the blind and the lame (*Mt 15:30; 21:14*), even tax collectors such as Zacchaeus (*Lk 9:1-10*). His compassion and mercy transcended borders of race, gender, ethnicity, social and economic class. Whoever was poor and needy was the least of his brothers and sisters. They were all welcomed by Jesus and his table fellowship was with them (see *Mk 2:13-17; Mt 9:11*).

The Family-in-Mission: Doing the Mission of Jesus

25. In the footsteps of Jesus and as his faithful disciple, the Catholic family is likewise sent forth by his Spirit on mission. It is a mission of mercy and compassion to tell and share with others the values that Jesus lived, the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom that he proclaimed.

Even as the Extraordinary Year of Mercy ended this November on the Feast of Christ the King, the boundless gifts of God’s mercy continue to pour like rain on a parched earth. The Catholic family is a receptacle of God’s love, “*misera et misericordia*”, misery with Mercy, so to speak (see St. Augustine’s commentary on the encounter of Jesus and the adulterous woman, *Jn 8:1-11*, when “*misera* – the wretched woman” stood alone with “*misericordia* – God’s Mercy”). At the same time the Catholic family has to become an icon of God’s love for the suffering and the needy, *misera et Misericordia*.

Recalling and paraphrasing the words of St. John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* (see no. 23), it is by the silent witness of genuine and faithful Christian life, of authentic discipleship of Jesus, that the Catholic family most eloquently tells the story of Jesus, the compassion and mercy of God, to other families.

Discipleship and mission – these would surely make a difference wherever the Catholic family is located.

PART III – PASTORAL IMPERATIVES FOR THE CATHOLIC FAMILY

26. Our general pastoral imperative is one of discerning, accompanying, and doing.

When we discern the challenges that the Asian family faces and reflect in faith on the Catholic family in itself and *ad extra*, the consequence is ineluctable. The Catholic family has to respond with mercy and compassion, with the joy of the Gospel, to the pastoral challenges.

Yet we have to present a caveat: the minority status of Catholic families in Asia impacts the kind of response they can give to the pastoral challenges they face. Their influence in a society that is predominantly Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist would not be as powerfully felt as in the predominantly Catholic societies of the Philippines and Timor Leste. To face the challenges effectively, collaboration with families of other faiths would be necessary.

A. Responding to the Challenge of Religious Extremism and Violence

27. In view of violent extremism in various parts of Asia, the situation of Catholic families is undoubtedly fraught with the gravest danger. Massacres and burning of homes and churches are perpetrated by a minority group.

The Ever-Present God, Constancy of Hope, Fidelity to Dialogue of Life

But the Gospel is always one of bright hope. God is present in every nook and corner of our world, in every culture and race, tribe and nation. But God is especially present where the cry for freedom and peace, for mutual understanding and respect is raised, where the suffering feel alone and helpless.

The virtue and spiritual gift of prudence urges families to seek safety and refuge from mortal danger. The Spirit-given virtue of courage calls families not to fear but always trust in the Lord. Vulnerability is part and parcel of missionary discipleship – to be lambs in the midst of predators. In such situations, the Spirit of the Lord strengthens Catholic families against paralyzing fear, insecurity and hopelessness. It is in darkness that hope must thrive. Our God is not one who abandons his people; He is with us even when we think he is distant and does not hear the cry of the suffering.

Hence, even as it becomes increasingly difficult to pursue the task of interreligious dialogue, the Catholic family in the midst of a hostile environment needs to persevere in a dialogue of life. Fellowship, solidarity for the common good, friendship, a welcoming of the “other”, respect and understanding are required Gospel attitudes even when they do not seem to be reciprocated.

Christians and members of other religions have biases and prejudices against one another. But, except for a very small minority, they are not agents of radicalism and violence. They are fundamentally oriented towards peace and harmony in a social context of religious pluralism, where there are minorities and majorities. Hence we have to recognize the profound importance of a dialogue of life.

Solidarity with Victims

28. At the same time, Catholic families need to be in active solidarity with all victims of violent religious radicalism. Solidarity calls for advocacy, material and prayer support. Centers of refuge can be established in collaboration with other religious groups.

B. Responding to the Challenge of Poverty, Migration, and Dislocation.

29. The massive poverty of a great number of Asian families is a call by the Holy Spirit for the family to be truly a domestic Church of the Poor. It has to reach out to families in need. Love is not love when it keeps within itself.

Sharing, Defending the Rights of the Poor

From their own poverty and driven not only by the Asian trait of sharing with the needy but also by the Christian option for the poor, Catholic families share the little they might have, in generosity and joy, with others who are equally poor. And, *noblesse oblige*, the rich most especially have to share from the abundance of God's gifts to them and not only from their surplus.

Everyone in the Church of the Poor is called to defend the rights of the poor. Social teachings call for the creation of jobs, humane conditions of work and family living wage.

Promoting Social Justice, Removing Economic Imbalances and Corruption

30. Most urgent in the Asian poverty situation is for the whole Church, especially rich and powerful members, to promote social justice, remove economic imbalances and corruption that aggravate the poverty situation. Yet each family can contribute towards removing corruption by instilling in the children an abhorrence of bribery and refusing to sow seeds corruption in the family.

Economic imbalances are often entrenched in social structures. Concerted efforts by all citizens of various social, political, or religious groups would be necessary. Networks of collaboration among families in the grassroots, civil society, reform-minded business and political groups, and religious institutions would be effective in uprooting corruption from Asian social structures.

C. Responding to the Challenge of Asian Migrant Workers and Refugees

Conscientization

31. Asian families need to become more aware of the daunting problems that thousands of economic, political, religious, cultural and climatic refugees face. They also have to be more aware of the millions of migrant workers and the families they leave behind. There is a need to conscientize families and the general public in order to remove indifference that is temporarily shed off when media reports on heinous crimes committed by or against refugees and migrant workers.

Collaboration – Departure and Arrival

32. Families from countries of departure and of arrival need to collaborate. In countries of departure, through mediation of various organizations, clusters of families of refugees and migrant workers can be organized at local levels for mutual encouragement and support in the light of dislocation, separation and loneliness, of children growing up in the prolonged absence of parents or older siblings. Civil society, church groups, and government agencies can mediate and facilitate the organization of such clusters of support-families.

Similar local clusters in countries of arrival need likewise to be organized. The welcome that they can express to refugees and migrant workers, the active concern that they have for their legal, economic humanitarian needs and the moral support that they can provide will counteract exploitation and abuse, unfulfilled contracts, and inhumane working conditions.

Yet it is quite true that Catholic refugees and migrant workers and their families provide dynamism to the countries of arrival. Bishops from Japan assert that the future of the Church in Japan is in the hands of Catholic migrant workers.

D. Responding to the Challenge of Political and Cultural Conflicts and Divisions

33. The variety of cultures and ethnic groups within countries often carries mutual prejudices and biases. They find their way into the political sphere, where divisions occur along ethnic and cultural lines, as in minority-majority relationships. Indigenous peoples are often at the losing end. When armed conflicts occur, dislocation of hundreds or thousands of families take place.

Families from different religions and cultures need to come together and work for peace and harmony. There are interfaith groups in the conflict areas of Southern Mindanao (Philippines) called “Mothers for Peace” or “Kids for Peace”. They are peacemakers, “children of God” as the Beatitudes of Jesus would call them (see *Mt 5:8*).

Reducing Biases and Prejudices

34. It is in the family that biases and prejudices are reduced if not eradicated. Parents do the first catechizing of the children. They should set before their children the example of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels.

They need to tell their children the stories of Jesus welcoming and embracing with love all those discriminated upon or set aside by society, such as the daughter of the Syrophenician woman (see *Mk 7:25-30*; *Mt 15:21-28*), the daughter of Jairus (see *Mk 5:21-43*; *Mt 9:18-26*; *Lk 8:40-56*), the sick old man at the pool of Bethesda (see *Jn 5:1-15*).

The faith formation agencies of the local church have to provide systematic support to the efforts of Catholic families.

But formation in anti-discriminatory living should not only be among Catholic families. Families of interreligious marriages should similarly embark on the same formation journey. The support of their own religious groups, of civil society and the government is necessary.

Promoting and Sustaining a Dialogue of Life among Families

35. Ghettoism, isolationism or flight from a multicultural and multireligious social context are not the solution. At the beginning of peaceful and harmonious relationships among families in such social context is the ordinary dialogue of daily life, in the neighborhood, in markets and places of work, in offices and schools, in streets. Where such a dialogue of life is taking place, there is considerably less likelihood that violent cultural and political conflicts could arise or be abetted.

E. Responding to the Challenge of Ideological Colonialism

36. Ideological colonialism is the gradual domination of alien ideological values, without moral and religious roots, regarding the origins and final destiny of human life, regarding birth and death, gender and alternative forms of human relationships and of family. These are ideological secular values that are alien to the Asian spirit as well as to the doctrinal and moral teachings that should guide Catholic families. Such moral teachings instruct us to respect persons with alternative gender orientations and to provide pastoral care for them through apostolates like COURAGE.

In particular, we need systematically to promote responsible parenthood and natural family planning. This is not merely to counteract the support of international bodies and governments for reproductive health that promotes artificial contraception and abortion. More importantly, we believe that Responsible Parenthood and Natural Family Planning demonstrate our fidelity to the will and plan of God for the family. They are a countersign to purely secular values.

The main agents of ideological colonialism are the tools of social communication that report on or display the trivialities and ephemeral nature of new family values and relationships.

Necessity for Families to be Evangelized about Media

37. There is first the necessity of making families, especially parents, aware of the negative power of the tools of social communication in the communication and formation of secular materialist values. Modern communication gadgets can put aside family conversation and bonding as well as develop a throw away culture as gadgets are quickly overtaken by new versions. Tools of social communication are often the instruments of pornography and sexual allurements.

Families can learn together the good and the bad of the tools of social communication.

Necessity of Evangelizing Media

38. In a similar way, families can also discern together on how through media they can expand their knowledge of God, of their faith, the world of the poor; how they can use media in accord with the Gospel values of simplicity, sharing, solidarity with the poor, in defense of their rights and dignity.

Together, families can put pressure on the powers that control media, on the government and on media practitioners so that media could be truly channels of Kingdom values, of truth, integrity, peace and harmony, and development.

In a very practical way, the tools of social communication can be instruments in keeping the bonds of family and kinship firm and solid by keeping migrant workers and refugees in touch with their relatives and friends.

These are some of the ways by which families can evangelize media.

F. Responding to the Challenge of Climate Change and Global Warming

39. The over-all response of families to the ecological challenge does not stem from any scientific reason but from *missio Dei*. God's mission for families is to take care of and be stewards of the integrity of creation. This is the message of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* on the care and stewardship of creation, our common home.

We observe that States and international organizations are striving to agree on protocols to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that cause global warming and climate change. Scientists point to human responsibility as the main cause of GHG emission.

Hence individuals and families have a significant role to play on climate change mitigation.

Becoming Aware of the Reality of Climate Change

40. With the assistance of government and church institutions, of civil society, especially NGOs, processes of educating families about the reality, the causes, and the effects of global warming and climate change have to be initiated and supported.

It is in this way that families will become more concerned about the impact of day to day activities on the environment as well as about the care of the earth.

Simple ways of Mitigating Climate Change

41. Families are not entirely helpless before the universal scientific complexity of global warming and climate change. In truth, the cleansing of creation from the pollution that has endangered its life-support system should start from the family. The old adage “Cleanliness is next to godliness” is admittedly trite but never trivial.

Families can do ordinary things to mitigate global warming by reducing in their own homes the emission of GHGs. Some of these ways are saving water, changing electric bulbs to those that are brighter with less consumption of energy, switching off electric gadgets when not in use, using cold water for laundry, using motor vehicles with better gas mileage, having less beef for meals, not burning dry leaves and waste materials, reusing and recycling used materials, investing finances in ethically, socially and environmentally responsible investments.

In sum, living a simple but decent lifestyle is a call of the Holy Spirit that the family can easily respond to. And surely, our own pastoral programs can help mobilize families to act locally and think globally.

Acting together, families from different religions can make known their various concerns about the environment, pressure policy makers to enact environment-friendly public directives and laws. It is by acting on behalf of the care of the earth that families can give intergenerational justice to future generations.

G. Role of Government, Church, Civil Society and Non-Government Organizations

42. For families in Asia to respond effectively to the pastoral challenges, they need strong support from the public.

Raising Awareness

Government and church institutions, civil society and NGOs need to collaborate with parents in educating their families and making them aware of the challenges that confront them. They have to help families know the nature of the challenges and realize their impact. Strong collaboration is needed particularly to dismantle the mindsets of patriarchy that discriminates and exploits women as subservient to men.

Organizing and Empowering Families

They have to assist in organizing them into networks of families and providing them with necessary resources for their tasks. With such organizing and resource support, families can be properly empowered to meet the challenges.

Distinctive Role of the Church – Doctrinal and Moral Formation and Guidance

43. A fundamental task for church institutions is to provide families with the doctrinal and moral formation and guidance that would assist them in responding effectively to the challenges.

Such formation can be done most effectively in Basic Ecclesial Communities, where families themselves can initiate concrete action to address the pastoral challenges they confront.

PART IV – RECOMMENDATIONS TO EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES AND LOCAL CHURCHES

44. At the Daejeon Assembly on the Family, recommendations were made on establishing a family ministry towards a culture of integral life (see VIII FABC Plenary Assembly, *Final Statement*, 118-127). Such family ministry was meant to include but also go beyond the traditional family ministry that was mainly concerned with “pro-life” issues.

The question can rightly be raised: a decade or so after Daejeon, how far have family ministries moved towards the promotion of “integral life”?

In view of the Asian pastoral challenges that we have discerned and of the necessity of assisting families to respond to them effectively, we need to expand the Daejeon recommendations.

A. The Family as the Focal Point of Pastoral Programs

45. If we believe that the Family is the Focal Point of Evangelization, it is recommended that the pastoral programs of the local church be oriented to the development of God-fearing families, steeped in the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom so necessary for society.

B. Establishing a Family Ministry towards a Culture of Integral Life

46. Episcopal Conferences and local churches should set up:

1. “A Family Ministry that Forms and Empowers” the Family for Mission;
2. “A Family Ministry that Cares and Serves”
 - a. single parents, intercultural and interreligious families
 - b. families in difficult situations – broken, remarried, families with drug or alcohol dependent members;
 - c. families with physically or psychologically disadvantaged members
 - d. families of migrant workers and refugees
 - e. families of indigenous peoples, tribals, etc.
 - f. parental and youth counseling
 - g. child care programs
3. “A Family Ministry that Promotes Social Transformation”
 - a. Fostering Integral faith formation
 - b. Promoting social awareness in the family
 - c. Collaborating with families of other faiths in addressing social justice and peace issues

- d. Pressuring governments to respect religious freedom when conditionalities for economic grants are imposed that run counter to doctrinal and moral teachings
- e. Stopping the threat of religious violence
- f. Rejecting the use of children and minors in war
- g. Forming families into families of dialogue and peace
- h. Stopping child and women trafficking, sex tourism.
- i. Implementing the recommendations of the FABC seminars on climate change.

C. Formation of Conscience

47. Formation of Conscience has to be a special concern for the family ministry. Husband and wife make critical decisions together with regard to their marriage, their children, and their future together. It is most necessary to form an enlightened and right conscience when today individual freedom of conscience, totally independent of the will of God, is becoming a global norm. Doctrinal and moral guidance for parents is an imperative. They themselves have to provide such guidance to their growing children.

D. Youth Ministry

48. In the formation of God-fearing families, the pastoral care of the youth is of critical importance. They are “millennials” with values, ways of thinking, interests and skills that are quite different from the youth of 30 years ago. They are young men and women of a very secular digital age. Youth Ministry has to address their search for meaning, their restlessness, their psychological alienation and drifting away from their parents, their inner hunger for their ideals to be realized.

E. On the Formation of Pastoral Agents of the Family

49. Episcopal Conferences and Local Churches are to design modules of formation by which priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers and their lay collaborators take on attitudes and skills so necessary for the family ministry, such as pastoral discernment and accompaniment.

Even going back to seminary formation, the Plenary Assembly recommends that candidates to the priesthood be introduced into the pastoral care and accompaniment of different forms of families through pastoral exposure and theological reflection on the sacrament of marriage.

Likewise noted by the Assembly is the need for foreign missionaries to be inculturated so as to provide more effective pastoral accompaniment for Asian families with their rich variety of cultures and ways of life.

Of great significance in Asia would be the encouragement and support of episcopal conferences for lay movements dedicated to the sacrament and the life of marriage, and related to issues, such as Marriage Encounter Movement, Catholic Family Movement, Retrouvaille, Couples for Christ, Focolare Movement, movements dedicated to single parents and the like. They promote spirituality in marriage and family and are outstanding collaborators in Family Ministry.

F. Collaborative Efforts

50. Moreover, we recommend that episcopal conferences and dioceses work in partnership towards the formation and development of holistic family ministries. They should exchange information, share resources, even come together for family formation, the formation of lay leaders for participation in the renewal of families.

A notable example of this collaborative effort was the Asian Seminar on “Shepherding Families in Asia”, organized jointly by the FABC Office of the Clergy and Office of the Laity and Family in Hua Hin (Thailand) on 16-20 May 2016.

CONCLUSION – SPIRITUALITY OF COMMUNION FOR THE FAMILY

A. In the Depths of Being – Communion of Love

Communion with the Triune God

51. The fundamental response of the family to Asian challenges springs from the heart of the family. For it is in the heart of the family that we find the very center of its giftedness – the immeasurable joyful love of our God of mercy and compassion.

The Triune God loving the family, the family loving the Triune God – this has to be the lifegiving spring from which gushes forth every response, attitudinal or active, that the family provides.

Communion in the Family, Mutual Shepherding

52. Let husband and wife be ever aware that the fundamental ground of their communion with one another is the sacred bond of their marriage covenant by which they commit each other before God and the community to be united forever in a single conjugal existence. Ultimately grounded in their communion with God, this is at the heart of a spirituality of communion.

Wife and husband demonstrate in the concrete the depth of this spirituality by a daily decision to be faithful in love for each other. They shepherd each other, minister to each other, in the way of virtue and righteousness in the midst of daily challenges. And many and varied these challenges are in the Asian situation of religious and cultural pluralism, especially in interfaith marriages so common in Asia. Thus do they grow in grace before God in a communion of love and service, growing old together in God through trials and testing in the love and care of each other (see *AL 19*). At bottom, the vocation of marriage is a vocation to holiness, to communion with God.

Communion between parents and children is daily demonstrated in the love, care and service they have for one another. It grows through mutual shepherding. Parents shepherd their children to deeper communion with other members of the family and with God. Parental counseling helps in educating the children towards faithful love, but the most important factor is not precept but the living example of faithful love.

Conjugal and family love is a generous, patient, and forgiving love. Spouses and their children need to forgive one another for theirs is a love that is never perfect, never free from human fragility and weakness. It is through daily mutual, patient, kind and forgiving love, through loving care and service that an “interior freedom” for God and for one another is built. That interior freedom becomes connatural with communion (see *AL 320*).

B. Prayer – Building Communion with God and in the Family

53. Prayer is the absolute *sine qua non* for the family to build communion with God. Popular devotion, such as the Rosary, prayer before and after meals, novenas, especially devotion to the Holy Family and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

More importantly family devotion has to be directed to the Word of God. One of the most commendable practices of Basic Ecclesial Communities is for families to read the Bible and pray with the Bible. We pray that Episcopal Conferences conduct a campaign to provide a Bible for every family.

Prayer helps build up family togetherness. It strengthens the marriage covenant. It gradually transforms the family into a school of prayer and worship.

Special effort must be made by family ministries to encourage husbands to be prayer leaders. In many countries, readily observable is the minimal participation of men in prayer.

Prayer is more than external devotions. The young have to be taught in simple “contemplative” prayer as in Taizé forms of prayer and in Eucharistic Holy Hour devotions.

54. The family can choose a Saint to be the patron of the family and invoke the name of the Saint in devotional prayers and have a family novena of prayers to prepare for the annual fiesta of the Family Patron.

Parents need to build up the faith of their children by telling stories of holy men and women who have become saints through the ordinary ways of being family, such as Saints Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Guérin (the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux), canonized recently by Pope Francis, as well as the husband and wife team of Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi and Maria Corsini, beatified by St. John Paul II.

They should especially tell and retell the ultimate Christian witnessing of many lay martyrs in Japan, Korea, China, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, and recently in Laos, family men and women, lay catechists and teenagers. They constitute a treasury of heroes of the faith that made their families a domestic church. They should not forget the thousands of unrecognized martyrs in various parts of Asia who were killed because they believed in Christ.

55. Although many people from other religions join popular devotions, such participation cannot be presumed in interfaith marriage. Here loving dialogue before and after marriage on the necessity of religiously following the practices of one’s faith for the common good of the family is necessary. It is about the exercise of religious freedom and the optimum religious tolerance necessary for a happy marriage.

Such observation is also true for participation of the family or of the Catholic partner at the Eucharist in interfaith marriages.

C. Eucharistic Spirituality of Communion

56. At the summit of family prayer and worship is the Holy Eucharist. It is the sacrament *par excellence* of communion with God. It is the sacramental memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord – the ultimate saving event of reconciliation and communion with God, with our neighbor, with the whole of creation.

Participation of the family, led by the father and mother, at the celebration of the Eucharist, bonds the family in a supreme act of prayer and worship, in the sublime total self-giving of Jesus on the Cross. The family in piety and devotion has to feel with the heart the Eucharistic act of Jesus, his body broken for the family, his blood poured out for the family.

In the Eucharist, communion of the Family with the Triune God, with neighbor, with society and with the environment is complete, especially when the family makes it a regular practice to receive the Lord in Holy Communion.

The joy of love, *amoris laetitia*, is the indispensable ground of a family spirituality of communion that is Eucharistic.

D. From Communion to Mission

57. A Eucharistic spirituality explicates the reaching out in love and service that the spirituality of communion requires.

Love of God impels the family to imitate the Eucharistic Jesus, to live and share the meaning of the Eucharist, to “shepherd in mercy” each member of the family and to look beyond itself and reach out in communion with others to meet Asian challenges.

Together with other families they help evangelize the Asian world and transform it to an ever-closer reflection of God’s reign.

E. Family-in-Mission of Mercy, Sent by the Holy Spirit

58. From the heart of the family, the inner energy, the impelling inspiration, the driving force of the Holy Spirit impels the family to mission.

A family that is “spiritual” is alive in the Spirit and is energized into mission of mercy. It is thus that the Catholic family tells the story of the compassionate Jesus to other families and to Asian society.

A family that is united to the Triune God, united within itself among its members, united with others and with creation is stirred into life by the spirituality of communion.

F. Gratitude to Families

59. We, in this XI FABC Plenary Assembly, rejoice that there are many Catholic families in Asia who live the faith in the midst of a multireligious environment. We thank the Lord for them and commend them for their perseverance and witness in love, hope, and joy.

We offer our support to the families facing different problems within and outside their homes. We pray with them and for them that they continue to feel the blessings of our God of Mercy, be filled with hope, ever inspired by the example of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

G. Consecration to the Holy Family of Nazareth

60. May we always realize that Mary, Mother of Mercy, Queen of the Family and the Morning Star of New Evangelization, constantly accompanies Catholic families in Asia in this journey of transformative evangelization.

At the Manila FABC Plenary Assembly we consecrated Asia to Mary our Mother. Today in Colombo we consecrate the Catholic Families of Asia to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Under the guidance of his parents, Mary and Joseph, the Child Jesus learned obedience, the virtues of moral living, the ways of Jewish prayer and devotion, and grew in wisdom and knowledge. The Holy Family of Nazareth is the iconic Asian family for all times.

May Jesus, Mary, and Joseph be the companion of the Catholic Family in Asia to become in word and in deed a domestic church of the poor on a mission of mercy.

*Approved this third day of December in the year of our Lord 2016, the feast of St. Francis Xavier,
Patron Saint of Missions, Apostle to Asia.*