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1. INTRODUCTION

by
FRANZ-JOSEF EILERS, SVD

The texts in this publication were presentations at the 8th annual meeting of bishops and secretaries responsible for social communication in the FABC bishops' conferences – the "FABC-OSC Bishops Meet," November 22-28, 2004, in Negombo, Sri Lanka. The theme, "Family in Communication, Communication in the Family," was chosen in view of the upcoming VIII FABC Plenary Assembly, 2004, in South Korea. We wanted to explore the different communication dimensions of Family. Because of this, we also invited married couples to share their views and relevant experiences.

Family communication starts with husband and wife themselves. The different inputs at our conference showed that, already here, difficulties in communication arise. (1) Because of pressures in work and society, both husband and wife do not have enough time for each other; and in this way the danger of slow alienation arises. It calls for setting the right priorities; and also for the courage to follow them through. (2) Something similar can be said about communication between parents and children. Here, parents very often do not have enough time and energy for their children. Social concerns and economic pressures easily preoccupy them, so that children are left on their own, or to others from outside, including the all-pervasive communications media. The media can easily become intruders and "surrogate" baby sitters in the family; but they do not necessarily contribute to mutual trust, community, and positive moral growth. Such situations need a lot more assessment and attention also from Church bodies; and this very often is missing.

Therefore, the final statement of the conference calls for a positive view of the media and proper understanding of the media culture. This needs adequate communication formation and media awareness in families.

A Reference and Resource Paper also for the Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly.

"The image of the family as presented in the media is not always positive; and encouraging Christian family values is very often neglected. Therefore, there is the urgent need to see and develop them as instruments of knowledge, understanding, development and fulfillment." Families are to develop a "culture of love in and through mutual communication, which is also the communication with the Creator – the Trinitarian God – as the center of Christian family life."

Family situations are always dynamic, and therefore also need quite an amount of discernment and listening to the Holy Spirit. The spirituality of family and communication still have to be developed, but will be different from family to family.

"The communication between spouses, and between them and their children, as well as the communication with other families, should be patterned after the communication of the Trinitarian God, and the communication between Jesus and the Father. This calls for deeper communication spirituality in the family." This then becomes the basis for sharing between family members; but also of their common use of the modern communications media and the involvement of traditional ways and means of communicating.

The appendix to this FABC Paper presents five World Communication Day messages from Pope Paul VI, to Pope John Paul II, which were written on themes related to family. There is no other theme in the annual celebrations since 1967 which was so often repeated as Family and Communication. It shows that the Church is concerned in a special way about the family. An analysis of these papers reveals that not only do the Popes see family as important; they are also aware of special communication issues in family life.

Lacking, however, are more serious studies and research on the presentation of the family in media – TV or the new medium Internet, for example. Which values are presented? And how is the family as such projected in the different programs? Such studies have to be done locally and on the national levels, to see concretely the media situation of individual countries.

The final statement of the Negombo conference gives concrete points and recommendations, which should be followed

through also on the national level, which address the bishops' conferences, but also the dioceses and parishes.

We hope that this presentation will contribute to a deeper understanding of the communication dimension of family and its everyday realities. This might also contribute to developing a communication in the different Church communities as "families" before the Lord.

F-J Eilers

FABC-OSC Executive Secretary

2. FAMILY AND COMMUNICATION COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY

by

ANTHONY ROMAN

The Asian Family

The FABC has dealt with varied subjects pertaining to religion and society in Asia. Over the years, it was able to set relevant guidelines for different Church ministries. Among those it considers of utmost priority is the apostolate for the Family.

In several plenary statements, the Asian Family was seen to be under attack. Values opposed to the Gospel are said to be systematically brought into the sacredness of the home. The FABC calls these "anti-family forces" and "death-dealing forces."

The fourth FABC Plenary Assembly in Tokyo (1986) said: "The Asian family is the cellular receptacle of all Asia's problems: poverty, repression, exploitation and degradation, division and conflicts. The family is directly affected by religious, political, economic, social and cultural problems of Asia, by the problems relating to women, health, work, business, education, etc."

"The Asian Family is a microcosm of Asian reality," declared the Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly in Manila (1995): "It is bombarded on all sides by anti-family forces of dehumanization and disintegration, ranging from material and moral poverty to secularistic values and external pressures leading to anti-life types of

bio-ethics and practices of abortion and contraception. Children, as many other areas of life, become the unwilling and innocent victims. Young girls and boys are also exploited through illegal labor practices and sex tourism."

Thirty years after FABC's inception in 1970, it again lamented the death-dealing forces directed towards the family: "At this juncture of history, we painfully witness the breakdown of the family in many places of our continent, especially in urban centers. Many are the forces arrayed against the sanctity and endurance of the values of family life. Individualism, hedonism, materialism, consumerism, interference from the state, a contraceptive mentality and a technological life-style, all adversely affect the stability of marriage and family life, and endanger the stability of our society and its values" (Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly, Samphan, 2000).

But "the family is the strength of our Asian society" (Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, Taiwan, 1982). "(T)he Christian family is a miniature Church, the Church in the home. The missionary grace and vocation of the Church must be realized and fostered in the Christian family, first of all" (Third Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate, Taiwan, 1982).

The FABC "believe that the family as a social unit is a sacred and important treasure. The Christian family is rightly referred to as the 'domestic church,' where members assist one another toward a fullness of life in Christ through the ordinary circumstances events of life" (Fourth FABC Plenary Assembly, Tokyo, 1986).

"The family is (also) the 'way of the human person,' the place where a human being becomes acquainted with life and social existence. It remains a place of strong emotional involvement. It is the place for one's expected recognition as a person. It ensures the necessary stability to the mission of education. It is recognized as the ultimate refuge from the danger of marginalization" (15th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Rome, 2002).

Families can truly be "effective agents" and not merely objects of evangelization. The Seventh FABC Plenary Assembly

(Samphran, 2000) affirmed this, echoing the Holy Father's apostolic exhortation *"Ecclesia in Asia."* Boldly, the assembly stated that renewal in the world starts in the family:

"The family embodies for its members the mystery of Trinitarian love in the heart of our world. It can be called a 'sacrament' of God's love and is, in fact, the domestic church. It is the school and sanctuary of love, where human beings first experience love and learn the art of loving and praying. Asia has a millennial tradition of great respect for the gift of the family. The family is the bearer of the heritage of humanity; and the future of humanity passes on by way of the family. It is also the cradle of faith-formation and the school for imparting Gospel values, the first arena for socialization and development of the child. 'The family is not simply the object of the Church's pastoral care; it is also one of the Church's most effective agents of evangelization' (EA, 46). Renewal in the Church, therefore, should begin with the family."

Pastoral care for families

The Sixth FABC Plenary Assembly (Manila, 1995) listed "The Asian Family" as one of five concerns requiring "pastoral focus." It stated thus: "Discipleship in Asia has to denounce anti-life and anti-family pressures, policies and practices and foster bioethics that is in accord with God's law and the Church's teachings in order to promote the family as a 'sanctuary of life and a school of life.'"

A ministry for families "is geared to the fundamental call of both the human and the Christian community. The service of the Church is needed to help build this unit into one of love and communion, able to provide for the needs of growing children. The minister will also guide people to solve modern problems" (Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church, Hong Kong, 1977).

Cardinal Macharski of Krakow listed three pastoral tasks to support the family ("Pastoral Care of the Family," paper presented at the 4th World Meeting of Families, Manila, 2002):

1. The Church must "look for ways to deepen the relationship between God and the family, and help the family discover in a more and more complete manner the presence of God, and at the same time, be molded in the light of His grace." The Church does this by proclaiming the word of God, because "it reveals to the Christian family its true identity, what it is, and what it should be according to God's plan. With the celebration of the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with Christ's grace so as to achieve holiness and glorify the Father. The care of the Church for the spiritual development of the family is also expressed in prayer for the family itself. In this way, the Church embraces every family and contributes to make them powerful of the power of God."
2. "Marriage alliance on the basis of faithfulness to God and man" should be strengthened. Married couples must understand "the essence of (their) marriage communion" and "orientation towards procreation." Young people must also be guided and prepared for married life. They should have a deep understanding of family as domestic church, and of what "matured love means in the context of the community of life." This "will contribute to the enrichment of the entire Church (Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation to the Sacrament of Matrimony, Rome, 1996, 2)."
3. Adequate structures should be set up, with manpower and other supporting resources, for the pastoral care "of all marriages and families in every aspect." "In fulfilling the Church's pastoral duties towards the family, the different associations and groups of families 'in which the mystery of the Church of Christ reveals itself and in certain measure lived (*Familiaris Consortio*, 72) are of utmost importance. They are the expression of the great dynamism of families and people who understand the role of this basic cell of society in the life of human beings."

The need for support groups was also mentioned in the FABC East Asian Meeting (Taiwan, 2002) as one solution to the problems facing Asian families today. Stress was given to reach out to family members in crisis, to the education of children, and to uplifting women members in the family.

Communication ministry for families

The FABC Third East Asian Regional Laity Meeting (Korea, 1982) proposed a different approach to caring for families. Participants of that meeting highlighted the importance of "communication" in the family:

"(T)he door for the Laity to participate in the life and mission of the Church is the Family. And the evangelizing task within the Family starts with giving more time for communication among family members and with showing concern for one another. Family prayer is an important element in the evangelization of family members and also in helping them become evangelizers. Since as Catholics we are a minority in this region, having 'Neighborhood Family Communities' to care and encourage one another will contribute to greater participation of the Laity in the life of the Church."

A three-directional communication process needs to constantly happen in the family. First and foremost is **communication with God** through prayer and the sacraments. Communion with Life Himself is necessary to sustain life in the family. Second is **communication among family members**. Intimate exchanges between parents and children and between siblings pass on and help develop moral sensibilities especially of young people. The third is **communication between families**. Solidarity with other families is a direct consequence of finding or renewing solidarity with God and with family members. This is living out the concept of "community" where families help each other in the journey through life.

Competing forces, however, come in the way, barring this three-directional communication from happening. Most urban homes, for example, are no longer conducive for heart-to-heart talks among family members, much less for talking with God. Receiving rooms are now filled with gadgets and gizmos – receivers of communication happening elsewhere – that interfere with "live" conversations. Often family members talk about what and who is on the television screen instead of their own individual selves. Icons and sacred pictures that adorn family altars, once the center of people's identity and purpose, are now mere conversation pieces. The patterns of communication in the family have indeed changed.

Asia's Communication Landscape

Let us look briefly at the Asian communication environment, and see possible hindrances to intimate sharing and dialogue in the family.

Television

Television has permeated Asian societies in the last fifty years. UNESCO (2000) reports that among the top ten households in the world changing TV sets every year from 1980-1997 are five Asian countries, with China and Sri Lanka at the helm. Mongolia, India and Thailand are included, along with Senegal, Oman, Ghana, Guinea and Benin (Source: World Culture Report 2000 – Cultural Diversity, Conflict and Pluralism).

About a third of Asia's population are children 15-years and below. About the same proportion of TV viewers in the continent are then young people. But do children get the right programs for their age? AMIC (Asian Media Information and Communication Centre) studied children's viewing patterns and TV programs in seven Asian countries in 1996. The results were published in a book entitled "Growing Up with TV, Asian Children's Experience" (2000). Here are some of the findings:

In **China**, more than 60 percent of children aged 6-8 years old watch children's programs, while more than 80 percent of children aged 12-15 years old watch programs for adults or general viewing. Children aged 6-10 years old spend more time than other age groups watching mostly cartoon series from Japan and US. (60 percent of the world's animated cartoon series are made in Japan, reported TIME-Asia in 2003.) About 22 percent of the watching time of the 15 years old group is spent on programs produced in Hong Kong or Taiwan. These are adult programs with love and family life themes or "chivalrous conduct in olden times as subject." The average viewing time for girls is 57 minutes daily; for boys, it's 53 minutes daily. The most popular programs watched from March-April 1996 are adult programs, locally produced and from Taiwan. Parents are most concerned about how TV wastes children's times, and interferes with study. Violent and love scenes are also problematic for parents.

In **India**, children's programs refer exclusively to cartoons and other foreign children's programs. They are for very young children and there is very little that is available for older children. Older children consider children's programs too "kiddish." There is no single Indian-made children's program but only those dubbed into Indian languages. "Children in India, at least those living large metropolises are fast catching up with their counterparts in the West in terms of the extent of TV exposure. The average in Delhi was 26 hours per week irrespective of socio-economic status. This puts TV viewing ahead of being in the classroom, playing, chatting with friends and members of the family or any other recreational activity. Nearly 90 percent of what the children watch are adult/general audience programs dominated by movies, movie-based programs and serials. The peak viewing hours for children, on weekdays, are between 8pm and 10pm. These are also the peak hours for adult viewing, which means that unless the family has more than one TV, everyone has to watch the same programs."

Of the four media available to children in **Indonesia**, TV is considered most entertaining, followed by radio and magazines. Children aged 6-15 years old spend an average of 3.5 hours daily watching TV. Programs specifically designed for their consumption, however, account for only 3.62 percent or 4.6 hours per week of the total weekly TV fare. Children then also watch other programs, which are not intended for them. Adult movies are considered "more attractive, suspenseful and often humorous."

Almost all households in **Malaysia** have TV (97%) and radio sets (96%). About 82 percent of children 5-9 years old spend their free time watching TV, home videos or playing computer games. For them, watching TV is entertaining, informative, a way to "pass time," and a suitable "companion" that eases boredom. Like in other countries, TV stations offer a limited range of material for children. Thus, children also watch programs for general family viewing. Older children, however, are more actively seeking information-based programs, thus the popularity of National Geographic Specials along with X-Files, Superman and Chinese Drama. Younger children are often controlled by parents as to which programs to watch. But parents often need to put up with

tantrums when children do not agree with their choice of programs. For many parents, though, watching TV is better than other unproductive activities. The medium is a "surrogate baby sitter."

Nepal is quite different from the other countries studied. In 1996, there were only 250,000 TV receivers posting a ratio of only 13 TV receivers per 1,000 population. About 64 percent of households owned a TV set; 72 percent of urban households and 52 percent in semi-urban areas. During weekdays and Sundays, average TV viewing time for children is one hour; on Saturdays, it can extend to about three hours. More than half (53%) of children mostly watch entertainment programs for adults. About 15 percent watch education programs for adults; 18 percent watch educational programs for children; and 14 percent watch entertainment programs for children. About 88 percent said that the programs they watch are their own choice, and 11 percent said they were chosen or imposed on them by others in the family. "TV viewing in most Nepalese homes is generally a family activity, and particularly for those with only one channel available, whatever program comes is watched by everyone regardless of age, for lack of other choice." "Across age groups, more children watch adult entertainment programs as age increases." Reasons for watching include "to be entertained" (59.8%), and "to learn something," or "to be aware of current events" (22%).

Singapore is the other side of the coin. Its "small size, hi-tech and uniformly urban nature makes the provision of island-wide media services" possible and efficient. A TV measurement method was adopted using the People Meter, an electronic device that finds out who is viewing what programs at which time. Favorites among children are programs meant for general viewing: movies, dramas, sit-coms, the bulk of which are Chinese-language programs. Singaporean viewers average 3.6 TV watching hours on weekdays and 4.3 hours on weekends. Younger viewers have a penchant for cartoon series but this is outgrown as they increase in age. Children watch certain programs simply "because (they) like it," proof that Singaporean audiences are not passive about what is being offered to them. They exercise autonomy in the choice of programs to watch.

In Vietnam, living conditions affect children's access to television. Children of poor rural families have less access than their urban counterparts. About 62 percent of children in urban areas watch TV daily. In rural areas, about 59 percent of children have daily access to the medium. Some 37 percent of children with TV access spend 30-60 minutes daily in front of the TV set, 26.5 percent extend up to two hours, and a fifth (20%) spend up to three hours. Yet TV viewing among Vietnamese children is not regular as their other counterparts in Asia. About 62.5 percent said they have no time to watch, some 14.3 percent have no TV sets or not allowed by parents to watch. More than 7 percent said there is no electricity in their area. The Central TV station, the Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City TV, the largest stations in the country, relay most of their programs through over 50 local TV stations. The two city stations produce high quality and interesting programs for children.

Much have already developed since the study was conducted. Alternative forms of entertainment have been introduced but we see that across Asia children are entrusted to the television medium for quite a significant period of time each day.

Internet

In January 2000, there are an estimated 40 million Internet users in Asia. The continent was ranked third among the world's continents with the most Internet users. (At first rank were Canada and USA with 120 million users, Europe is at second with 70 million). Asian countries at the helm were Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan (Source: www.apmforum.com/news/apmn39.htm).

Newsbytes Asia reported (1999) that there will be a 422 percent increase in the number of online users in Asia over a five year period; and the number is expected to reach 228 million by 2005. Most of Asia's users are in Japan, but by 2005, China is expected to surpass all other countries in the region. About 37.6 percent of Asia's online users, roughly 85 million, will be Chinese in 2005. (Source: www.commerce.net/other/research/stats/wwwstats.html)

There are mixed assessments about the role of Internet in society. Some analysts say that the Internet is a "hotbed of vice," a

source of illicit material. Others saw it as the great leveler of the information divide wrought by different patterns of media consumption and media accessibility. Still others saw the opportunity for learning and called the Internet another *window on the world*. Information is power and the use of the Internet at whatever cost can advance peoples' lives.

But does the Internet indeed help propel people's growth — materially and morally? "Web Studies," an anthology of researches on the Internet phenomenon (2000), suggests that the Internet has evolved into a "virtual shopping mall" more than a place to learn. Entrepreneurs found a new channel to pump up their revenues from advertising. Search engines like Yahoo, MSN, Google and others have multiplied their services to become "web portals" — the start and end point for net surfing — to win not eyeballs but sticky eyeballs. These eyeballs have demographics that are sold to advertisers.

Research on China has found that nearly 80 percent of Internet users are below 36 years old, and that more than 50 percent are below 25 years old. Three out of five (60%) Internet users in China are men. Nine out of ten (90%) Internet users in the mainland have completed high school, and about 50 percent are now in or have completed college. Nearly three-fourths (74%) of Internet users access online news for professional or academic work, while the rest do other activities. This can be anything from plain browsing through websites or engaging in another dimension of Internet life, voyeurism. Certain websites allow visitors to enter private dormitories and observe residents in private form doing private things. While in chat rooms, netizens equipped with webcams (that tiny gadget used to capture and transmit photos and video clips via the Internet) can show themselves, or *all* of them selves, to "enliven" the session.

Prolonged use of the Internet can affect people's ability to handle emotions or shape world-views. A recent study by the Korea Education and Research Information Service found that 20 percent of teenagers who daily use the Internet for more than 3 hours show symptoms of psychological disorder if they are unable to do this. More than one-fourth of the youth surveyed (25.

8%) said habitual Internet use distracts them from studying. About 60 percent of the respondents have accessed porn sites and experienced "verbal violence" online.

The Nanyang Technological University in Singapore also recently found that one out of five Singaporean youngsters aged 12 to 17 have met face to face with a stranger whom they first encountered in Internet chatrooms. 27 percent met more than six strangers, which is much higher than their counterparts in Nordic countries, where only 16 percent agree to such meetings. Another troubling statistic is that 10 percent of the youths surveyed thought that they were going to meet another teenager, but were shocked to find an adult who had introduced himself as a child on the Internet. Only 20 percent of Singaporean parents believed that their children had access to pornography — but in reality, 66 percent of Singaporean teenagers have already accessed porn on the Net.

A telephone poll conducted in mid-2001 in Taiwan revealed that traditional values are fading more quickly among people who surf the Internet. Among the 2031 respondents, few rated "honesty" highly as a positive trait. Few are opposed to premarital sex. A Catholic mother fears that Internet cafes, numbering about 4000 throughout Taiwan, have become "dens of iniquity." A high school student, however, said he likes to visit the cafes because of entertainment which he cannot enjoy at home.

Internet café owners in Taiwan share the parents' concern about porn sites but they cannot prevent children from online gaming, which is a fad among urban young Asians. Games like Counter Strike have become so popular a sequel has been developed. Internet cafes in Philippines are packed with young people with eyes transfixed on computer screens, body swerving as they maneuver virtual battle ships for the next kill. If they are not in Internet cafes, most likely they are in their favorite gaming arcade, seated in space shuttle like booths battling with a device called joystick. This brings us to another happening in urban Asia that robs opportunities for communication in the family, video gaming.

Video Games

Japan emerged as the leader in the gaming industry in the

last years. Games running on Play Station2 and Nintendo's Game Cube rule the video game universe, despite a frontal attack from Microsoft with its black Xbox. Although it currently experiences a slack because of alternative forms of entertainment like the cellular phone, Japan's creative minds are always a step ahead to maintain that leadership.

Game giant SEGA spearheaded a remodeling effort to give new twists to lackluster gaming software and to revitalize the market. Players are given more realistic experiences, emulating through graphics emotions when driving at high speeds, for example. Programmers actually get behind the wheel, test-drive cars, rent out racing circuits to experience the sense of "drifting." SEGA's Rally Championship series is still a favorite with gamers around the world.

The thrust according to a SEGA executive is "to break the mold and create unconventional games." Unfortunately, Japan's education system does not teach entertainment and business but SEGA programmers are now headway into teaching at a private animation school in Tokyo. Such an initiative could "build confidence among game creators who have ambitions to *influence the world.*" Gamers in Asia, mostly young people, can then expect more thrills, more shrills, more violence, and more emotional involvement in upcoming gaming software. What other emotions besides "drifting" will future games elicit?

Cellular Phones

An alternative form of entertainment has emerged that almost immediately changed lifestyles of Asians, Filipinos especially. The cellular phone, which was considered a luxury some five years ago, has spread like wildfire in urban areas. It is estimated that some 12 million mobile phone users are in the Philippines alone. But Filipinos use the SMS (short-messaging system) or texting service to avoid the high cost of voice conversation. Some 120 million text messages are processed daily and these go far beyond Philippine borders. In a country, where about 2300 people leave daily for jobs overseas, the cellular phone is indispensable for keeping family members in touch with one another.

Much of human experience has then become "mediated by electronics and telecommunications networks." "Membership to our culture – the shared experiences with people – becomes based less on traditional criteria like location, ethnicity, kinship ties or religion but rather on affordability and our ability to purchase access to the network" (Celdran, David, "Text Revolution" in I, The Investigative Reporting Magazine, April-June 2002). The phenomenon of cellular phones has also created a gap between those connected and those who are not. There is a perceived elitist membership into the culture of cellular phone users, while non-members remain as outsiders.

Common to mobile phone companies in the Philippines is the "mobile chat" service, which operates in much the same manner as Internet chat rooms. Users of this service are mostly young people, aged 30 years old and below. Acquaintances are made here, which can lead to intimate relationships.

Shopping Malls

A new way to spend leisure time has emerged, "mallng" or hanging out in shopping malls. In Manila (Philippines), "where there is already a high concentration of them, shopping malls are acknowledged as the 'new plazas,' replacing the traditional social center" of towns and cities. "There is not one municipality or city in Metro Manila that does not have at least one mall" and new ones are upcoming. "I, The Investigative Reporting Magazine" (2003) reports that top Filipino mall developer, SM, plans to build two new shopping malls per year within the decade. 45 more malls are scheduled for construction during the same period. Another mall developer plans to build some 100 strip malls in several provinces across the country.

Although mallng brings family members face-to-face with each other, topics of conversation mostly focus on what items to buy, and what to do. Malls are becoming the "new down towns" where people do not only shop. A vast array of goods and services are available under one roof, family members would not have the time to sit down and dialogue. Younger children are ultrasweet to parents only because of an ulterior motive and if parents try to avoid the trap, chances are they will have to face

tantrums. Older children, meanwhile, look somber and aloof - signifying a lot of things. But with peers, they are more communicative even boisterous. Malling is often less relaxing even stressful. Although one emerges as better informed of what's new and what's "in," malling is never the same as quiet moments of recollection or intimate sharing with a trusted person. But young Filipinos still flock to the malls even on weekdays and regard them as the ultimate hang out place.

Observers, however, are wary about the phenomenon. Aside from manipulating people to buy through aggressive (sometimes offensive) marketing schemes, malls seem to introduce another "divide" among people; a notion of "othering" or "us versus them." "Not everyone is allowed inside malls - those who are not properly dressed or suspicious looking are denied entry so as not to "upset the malls' carefully calibrated environment." Prices are also mostly exorbitant. A certain attitude among those who can afford to buy is quite observable when passing by those with lesser items to carry. Scholars Rimmer and Dick (1998) described the new urban geography of Southeast Asian cities as follows:

"The attitude is reminiscent of 19th century attitudes toward the threatening London crowd, which was regarded as being uneducated, uncouth, and unpredictable. The attitude of the middle class in Southeast Asia towards the urban mass is also not so very different from that of the colonial Europeans to their indigenous subjects. A common language does not bridge the cultural gap or the economic divide."

Conclusion

The present communication landscape in Asia is not an all evil phenomenon. The media of communication present tremendous possibilities for learning and enriching our moral sensibilities. They even offer opportunities to live and strengthen our divine call. They are "gifts" which should be utilized, but with good discretion and judgment. Audiences need to be critical consumers of media.

Socialization is also important for the development of a healthy personality. People should go through the process of socializing, experiencing each other's lives and learning from such experience.

But if we must stand against the forces that try to hurt our family and our humanity, we need to foster and deepen genuine communication in the family – a communication that is three-directional: first, with God through prayer and the sacraments, with family members in intimate sharing and dialogue, and with other families in solidarity and living as a community.

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- TIME-Asia
- Far Eastern Economic Review
- I, The Investigative Reporting Magazine
- FABC-OSC. Communication INFO

3. COMMUNICATION AND THE FAMILY

by

BISHOP JESUS Y. VARELA, DD

Introduction

There are several ways one can approach the topic of family and communication. We can approach it singly, first one and then the other. We can also approach it as a single combined subject (which we are doing in this Conference). Again there can be several ways we can approach the combined subject of family and communication. I propose for this conference to approach it from the perspective of Theology, the science of God. God is communication. God is family.

GOD IS COMMUNICATION

God is the paradigm of all communication. He is the first and foremost communicator: the primordial analogue in the analogy of communication.

Communication has two movements: towards within the unit and towards outside of the unit. This is what the theologians call AD INTRA and AD EXTRA communication. Within the Godhead, which is a Trinity of Persons, namely: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, there exists an AD INTRA communication. On two levels: the cognitive or intellectual and the affective.

On the cognitive level, the Father eternally thinking produces the eternal Word who is called the Son. When thought is articulated it becomes a word. In God this Word is a Person. He communicates back. The Father and the Son, thinking back and forth, produce the eternal Spirit, which is the life of their mutual

communication. The Word spoken by the Father is a living Word. It is life and life-giving.

On the affective level, the Father eternally loves the Son. Love begets love. The Son eternally reciprocates the Father's love. Their mutual loving produces the eternal spirit. *Procedit ab utroque*. The Spirit is the eternal fruit of their mutual love. The Spirit is also a Person.

Affective communication through expressions of love may not be verbalized, but it is communication at a deeper level than words.

GOD IS FAMILY

God is not a singular Person. If He were, He would not be able to communicate. He would be engaged in an eternal soliloquy, or if you will, an eternally narcissistic introspection. But this would not be communication. Communication involves a sender and a receiver.

The thinking and the loving within the Godhead is an eternal flow of communication between distinct Persons. This results in perfect happiness that needs nothing else to fulfill and complete it.

But God is not selfish. He wants to communicate the Trinitarian happiness to other outside of Himself. Since there was no being outside of Himself at the beginning, He invented or created the other, namely, the world. In the creation, God communicates, shares Himself: *AD EXTRA*.

In the movie *Castaway*, Tom Hanks is the lone survivor of the plane crash. He finds himself all alone in an uninhabited island. To keep his sanity he paints the face of a man on a derelict volleyball. He names it Wilson. He strikes an endless conversation with this ball and develops a personal and emotional relationship with it. Creator and creature become one in mind and heart. Creator invents creature according to his image and likeness. This is what happened when God created the world. He left on it His imprint. The creature cannot be identified with the Creator. But it carries His imprint.

We can draw an analogy from art and music. Michelangelo, Raffaello, Botticelli, Picasso, Dali, all left behind their virtual autograph on their respective masterpieces. So much so that we can distinguish a Michelangelo from a Raffaello, a Picasso from a Dali.

So it is in music. A Mozart is distinguishable from a Beethoven, a Vivaldi, a Verdi and so on. Each one leaves a distinct imprint on their compositions that distinguishes their opus from that of the others. The created imitates the creator.

God invented the world outside of Himself, to communicate and share His happiness with a reality or being outside of Himself. The created world bears the imprint of the Creator. The galaxies and the constellations, the suns and the planets, the moons and the satellites, all reflect and proclaim the glory and grandeur, the wisdom and the beauty, the order and the harmony of God. This the AD EXTRA communication by God with beings outside of Himself. In time, this outward communication took the form of DIVINE REVELATION, a direct communication of divine truths that are beyond the natural comprehension and understanding of the creature. God revealed Himself at a level that the human being, for all his intellectual capacities, just could not reach without the special divine aid called GRACE.

THE MASTERPIECE OF GOD'S CREATION

From out of this vast created universe, God took a clod of earth and produced His masterpiece: MAN. He breathed into his nostrils life. He endowed him with spirit, an intellect and a free will. He made him unto His own image and likeness. Then He gave him a companion from out of his own ribs, and called her WOMAN. To them both He gave the mandate: *Increase and multiply and fill the earth.*

This mandate was to fulfill His desire to replicate Himself—His total Self—over and over again in order to populate heaven with creatures who are His complete image and likeness, who are capable of sharing His happiness and His glory. This capacity was given only to man and woman. This power or capacity is what theologians call *POTENTIA OBEDIENTAILIS*. Obeying this

mandate to copy God the Trinity, man and woman become a trinity of father, mother and offspring. The family becomes the complete image of God.

Forgive my irreverence- if irreverence it might be- but I dare say that man is more honorable in the eyes of God than the angels. For angels cannot procreate and therefore will always remain individuals. They can never become a trinity.

AD INTRA COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

Every man and woman is born into a family and in turn can form another family, another trinity, *ad infinitum*, until the end of the world.

The family, as the complete image of the Trinity, is destined to affect also, the AD INTRA and the AD EXTRA movements of communication that we see in God.

The AD INTRA communication is what transpires between husband and wife, between parents and children, and children among themselves.

Between husband and wife, their communication is both unitive and procreative. The unitive end of the communication is achieved then they become one, not only in body, but above all, one in spirit, mind and heart: Two in one flesh, one mind, one heart and one spirit. This singular and unique kind of communication is basically expressed and accomplished in marital intercourse. The marital union of husband and wife, in God's plan, is the medium that conveys the message of love and fidelity. Without love and fidelity, marital and any sexual union, for that matter, is a sham. A lie. It is a breakdown of communication, a miscommunication, a dichotomy between medium and message. It is like saying "I love you" with the lips, but the heart is elsewhere. As the popular song from *Moulin Rouge* says: "Whenever we kiss, I worry and wonder; your lips may be near, but where is your heart?"

The totality of husband and wife relationship must be a continual and endless sign or medium of the message of love and

fidelity. From the very first morning kiss through the multifarious activities of the day, until the last goodnight kiss, every word and action must signal love, devotion, affection and fidelity.

Communication is the lifeblood of family. The breakdown of communication signals the end of family life. If the family is an intimate communion of love and life, as the Pope says in *Familialis Consortio*, it is communication that sustains that intimacy in communion. Without communication, communion starts to atrophy.

There are various levels of communication. It starts at the physical level. Physical attraction starts the ball rolling, so to speak. This is followed by stolen glances that lead to staring, then, one can hardly take one's eyes off the other. It might be beginning of, but certainly not yet, love. At that level it is no better than an infatuation.

When words are exchanged, communication graduates to the verbal level. Terms of endearment, mutual understanding pass from one to the other. A degree of agreement is achieved when mind meets mind,

But even at this stage, communication is still superficial. There is a deeper level. Oftentimes it is called gut-level communication. It is at the level of the heart. At this level words sometimes become superfluous. Body language is sufficient to convey the message.

Communication within the family generally goes through all these phases. Generally I say, because it is difficult to stereotype human relationship which is the basis of intra-family communication.

Skin-deep and verbal communication by itself can hardly establish a lasting relationship. Physical attraction rubs off with time. Even intellectual exchanges can become boring. It is gut-level communication that perseveres. This is the communication of heart to heart. It sees beyond defects and imperfections. It forgives failures and lapses. It makes allowances for foibles, idiosyncrasies and eccentricities. It is understanding at the emotional and spiritual levels. This is what we call empathy.

Communication within the family is tri-dimensional: 1. Between spouses, 2. Between parents and children, and 3. Among siblings.

1. Between spouses, of the many ways of communication open to them, the defining expression is marital intercourse whereby they become one flesh. This is the primary reason why they are married. For this reason, a man leaves father and mother and clings to his wife, as Scriptures says. Now, their every marital act must be open to the transmission of life. For, while the act is most pleasurable, it is not only for the pleasure of it that they engage in marital embrace. The marital act has a unitive and procreative meaning, as we have already said. The union of the sexes is the means designed by God for man and woman to fulfill the mandate "Increase and multiply". This is the way by which they become a trinity.

Their act of love is holy, sacred. It is a sacrament. It is the sign of the union between God and humankind, between God Yahweh and His covenanted people, between Christ and the Church. Their relationship is expressed in the Old Testament in spousal language. In the New Testament the Church is called the Bride of Christ. At the wedding rite, the groom is told: "Love your wife, as Christ loves the Church".

By their mutual love expressed in the marital act, spouses evangelize each other, becoming to each other a witness of Christ's loving relationship with the people, the Church.

2. Between parents and children, a relationship of love, duty and responsibility is established by the very fact of procreation. Parents are the natural teachers of their children. They communicate to their offspring, - by word and by witness - basic skills of survival, lessons in social living, values and spiritual exercises, faith, culture and religion. The child in turn feeds back its needs, love and reciprocation by crying or by other non-verbal but understandable signals. As the child grows, it becomes capacitated to convey messages of love and other lessons that adults might have forgotten or now take for granted.
3. Between siblings, the older and more experienced share their

knowledge and skills with the younger ones, also by word and by example. The latter-born are advantaged in the sense that in addition to what they learn on their own, they also possess what the older sibling know. Their mutual exchanges of knowledge and affection contribute to build up family and community. Not only the parents but also the children are responsible for their becoming a trinity of love, a complete image of the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AD EXTRA COMMUNICATION

The family does not exist in isolation. It is not insulated against the influences of its environment. The family is part of the main. It is surrounded by other families and the rest of the world. Its long-term end is to live with other families, form together with them a larger community and walk in pilgrimage to their common destiny: the Kingdom or Reign of God. This is God's plan for all mankind. To achieve this end, mutual communication is indispensable.

Human communication has a very long history. It began at the very beginning of time, at the crucial moment of Creation. The ways of communication have gone through an interesting evolution: from the rudimentary and simple communications during the Stone Age to the quite sophisticated I.T. revolution of the Modern Age.

Man always saw the need to communicate. He is social being by nature. He has to communicate with his contemporaries as well as with the future generations. Archeology has unearthed carvings and drawings on the walls of the primitive caves, that told the story of that particular age. Indian tribes have been known to communicate messages of love and war by smoke signals. Later the pen and the scroll were invented, followed by the printing press, then telephone, radio, television and now internet and websites.

Family in communication takes on a special importance in the context of evangelization because of the mandate "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you". This is addressed to the family as well as to the individual. The family has first to be

evangelized. Then in turn it has to evangelize. And in the measure that it is evangelizing, it becomes more deeply evangelized. It has been said- and I subscribe to that truth- that no one is saved or lost alone. We are saved and lost as a community, as a family. For we have been called to community and destined to be community, a trinity.

We are God's people. We are inheritors of the universal call and mission. He planted the seed of His Plan in our first parents. It is now the mission of their progeny-us- to carry on the task of communicating, broadcasting the Good News that we have been called by God to become trinity and be like Him to enjoy the happiness and the glory of His Kingdom with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

4. COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES AND CONCERNS, STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE FAMILY

by

ALLWYN & ENID FERNANDES

A: Enid and I feel deeply honoured to be invited to speak to you today on a topic that has been an intricate part of our lives. When we first met each other 29 years ago, I was already in mass communications for five years. But my meeting Enid brought me face to face with a new communications challenge – I had to unlearn and relearn the art of communications! From communicating with a faceless, non-interactive audience, I had to now learn to communicate face to face, at a deeper, more intimate level with a human being of a different gender! Nothing that I had learnt before had prepared me for this kind of communication! Here was I, a completely rational, logical, result-driven individual, who said what needed to be said and wrote what needed to be communicated. Suddenly, I was interacting with an individual with feelings, emotions, sensitivities and intuition very different from mine! It was much later in life that I came across the book, 'Men are from Mars, women are from Venus'.

E: Yes, Allwyn was a good writer and communicator in print when we first met at a Catholic magazine where I was helping out. I was just out of college, was not looking for a relationship with one person. I came from a sheltered existence, where the parish was the centre of my life, where we always had good priests who gave me a positive experience of the church. I studied in a women's college with wonderful nuns. And here came this young man into my life with very different, and strong views, with a much wider experience of the world of political, social and economic issues – but completely ignorant of communications as I understood it!

A: So we muddled along for 21/2 years – meeting, talking, quarrelling, making up, wondering whether we were meant for each other, some days feeling life was beautiful and other days not so... till one day we decided to go for a communications programme for couples conducted by an American Jesuit named Dick McHugh. That was an eye opener for me. It taught us how to pick up each other's feelings and thus to understand and listen to each other rather than just throwing our frustrations and disappointments at each other.

That was before the days of Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter weekends. Today's courting couples are indeed lucky to have the benefit of the Engaged Encounter Weekend. That session with Fr Dick McHugh taught us how to communicate with each other, to get through to each other, instead of just throwing our ideas, thoughts and emotions at each other. It taught us the basic lesson of interpersonal communications – information is giving out, communications is getting through. Communications is not just about telling you what I think and feel; it is about understanding also how you think and feel – and also how the children think and feel because the challenges of bringing up children today are huge.

E: Both of us have come a long way since then. It is now more than 26 years since that programme which was a turning point in our lives. We've had our fair share of ups and downs in the 26 years since then, but they have enriched and strengthened us in many different ways and deepened the bonds between our children and us. And our communications has undergone a change

as the children and we have grown in years. We also did the Marriage Encounter about 8 years after we got married. The point we wish to make is this: that Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter are powerful tools to learn the art of communications within the family. We Catholics are lucky that the Church offers them to us at virtually no cost. What we need to do is strengthen the Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter movements and make more couples aware of them. They help not only to respect and communicate with each other, but also to respect and communicate with the children as they grow towards adulthood — letting them alone to discover the basic truths of life for themselves, **but**, and the **but** is important, letting them know that you are around to provide a listening ear when they need it, without thrusting yourself on them.

A: Having said that, we thought we would share with you our experiences on communications issues and concerns in the family today from our experience of an Indian family. In some ways, it is a typical Indian family experience; in some ways it is not. For instance, one of the first tough decisions Enid and I took was that she would give up her job when the children came and stay at home to look after the children. It is a decision that we have never regretted even though it has cost us a lot in financial terms. But it is not a typical family situation today because the costs of housing, living and educating the children are so high that both husband wife need to work to give children a fair chance at life. This is increasingly a challenge that couples today face — in India certainly, and we are sure in the rest of Asia too. Women need to work not only for the extra money, but also because they do not know when their husbands will lose their jobs, especially with many companies offering their employees "Voluntary Retirement Schemes" in mid-life. Often, because the men have not been trained to do any other kind of work, they are not able to get a job. At that time, the wife's job is really a lifeline.

E: The decision to give up my job was a tough one for me to take, not only from the financial point of view but also from my own need for personal and professional growth. In financial terms, we did without a lot of luxuries and we still do without a lot of goodies that two-income families can enjoy. But more than that

it meant I would be denying myself my own career, the daily opportunities for interaction with a much wider cross-section of people, and my own money to spend on what I wanted for the family — like a dinner set that I was able to buy only after 25 years of married life! Husbands have other priorities!

These are not easy decisions for a modern young woman to take, especially a woman who has worked outside the home. A woman who has worked outside the home always yearns for that daily opportunity to go out and interact with a wider circle. This has nothing to do with our commitment to our families or to our being wives and mothers. Some of my friends did try to balance both home and work but many of them ultimately gave up their jobs for the good of the family, especially when the children were 8-10 years old because that is the time when the children are too old for the crèche and too young to be left alone.

I don't know whether my daughter will take the same decision that I took — I know each generation will find its own answers to its own challenges. Today it is even more difficult to give up a job because of rapid technological changes that makes it more difficult to get back into the mainstream of working life. For instance, when I quit working, there were no computers in my office. But when I wanted to get back to a working life, computers had changed the scene dramatically and I was not equipped for the world of work today. Similarly, even a teacher will have to be comfortable with online learning and teaching in another 5 years — which she will not be able to if she opts out of the system like I did.

But I do know that if today my children are mature, balanced individuals who will not hesitate to come and tell me first about some new challenge they are facing in their lives, it is because I was always there for them when they came home — from school, from the playground, from a social get-together. More than that I was there to listen. But I was able to listen because I had both the inclination and the time. And I did want to impart certain values to them.

There are many mothers who suffer the anguish of having the inclination but not the time to be there for their children and to listen to them, simply because they are commuting long hours to work and back and then managing the responsibilities of running a home.

On the other hand, there are mothers who have the time but *do not know* how to listen. This is where we see the church working towards setting up or strengthening Family Service Centres run by professional counsellors with programmes like Family Encounter on the lines of Engaged Encounter or Marriage Encounter. With children being influenced so powerfully through the media and peer pressure, we need help today in communicating with children.

Bringing up children with a particular value system also has to be a conscious decision involving both parents who are in tune with each other. As parents, we had to have our own family value system in place first – which meant I had to communicate with my husband and determine our family value system no matter what the rest of the extended family or the neighbourhood or the world outside said. In the ultimate analysis, as parents we are our children's first role models. To be a role model, we had to first be happy with ourselves and with each other before we could expect to reach into their world. Too many parents are not able to communicate with each other and come to an agreement on what line to take. The result is a dissonance that children, especially teenagers are quick to take advantage of.

A: I must say that Enid staying at home meant a great difference to our children. Especially because my work as a journalist meant that I would not be at home most evenings because those are the busiest hours in a newspaper office. In later years, when Enid began leaving home in the morning along with the children to teach at a school close to our home, I was lucky to have a laptop that enabled me to work from home because it gave me the flexibility of having lunch with the children and then leaving for work. This meant a great deal because we did not have the luxury of having our evening meal or praying together most days.

E: That brings me to: what are the communication issues and concerns in the family today? One is the long hours that fathers, and in many cases, mothers, have to put in at work today. The 9 to 5 job is over – even for women secretaries. New technologies like email, direct inward dialling, robotics have meant that jobs of secretaries, telephone operators and packers in factories have

vanished. In most companies even the few jobs that are left are from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., inclusive of travel time. Many young women are now going into the new professions of marketing, training and communications, which means even longer hours for preparation and also travelling to other cities. All this is putting new stresses and strains in family relationships.

A: On the one hand, new technologies have made life difficult and disruptive of relationships, but on the other hand they have also created new opportunities for staying in touch. Gone are the days when you had to walk if you wanted to talk. I remember our courtship days - if we parted after a quarrel, we had to wait till we met again or till she reached her office the next day before I could call and make up. No so today! Mobile phones, SMS, email, chat rooms enable us to stay in touch with each other and our children all the time – one of the new joys we have experienced in recent weeks is that of seeing our son via a web camera, even though he is more than 12,000 km from us.

E: But while new technologies enable us to stay in touch, it is not the same thing as being together at the same table under the same roof. Unlike earlier, when long distance calls were expensive, Allwyn now calls me several times from his mobile when he is travelling. But it is not the same as being together. There are times when you need a father at home to put his foot down and reinforce what a mother says.

Allwyn at least comes home in 3 or 4 days. There are others who are working in the Gulf or on a ship or in other towns. They can come home only once in six months or a year. That kind of separation can lead to great stresses and pressures on family communication. And it is not only carpenters and masons who are getting separated from their families. I think of my own son who is a software engineer. I know that software engineers often travel to customer sites to complete a job in time. I wonder what kind of stresses he will face when he gets married.

A: Yes, many of the new jobs in today's world involving the services industry mean travelling to customer sites and completing a job to the customer's satisfaction. I do know that there are many in the computer software industry in India who cannot take their fami-

lies with them when they go on 3 and 4-month assignments. One of the assignments my company was involved in a for a leading Indian software company was making these employees and their families feel that the company appreciated the difficulties they face as a result of their having to go where the job is.

This means providing domestic back-up support like making a plumber available if a leaking tap has to be fixed, ensuring social support from older wives of senior employees if a child is seriously ill or needs hospitalisation, ensuring flex time when the employee is back at the home base so that he can spend more time at home, providing counsellor and similar facilities if the family needs it. Companies do this not out of wanting to do good, but because they want to make sure that the employee is able to concentrate on his job without having to bother about minor problems back home.

I offer you an idea: can the parish church play the same role as the company? Can it identify women volunteers and professionals who can provide a family support network of the kind that I talked about? Could this be a new outreach programme, a programme needed for our day and age? Could this be an outreach programme that could also reach out to families of other faiths and be a new means of evangelisation for the Church in Asia today?

E: Allwyn talked a little while ago of increased connectivity enabling families to stay in touch electronically. **But being connected does not necessarily mean being in communication with each other.** That's typical male thinking! The fact is that with laptops and non-stop connectivity, a father or mother may be physically present in the house itself and yet not be fully in it! Take, for instance, our situation and I know that this is also the situation with other families. When Allwyn was running a biotech news bureau for the whole of the Asia-Pacific region, he was on the computer, online in the mornings before he left for work because the sun rises in Japan, Australia, Hong Kong and Thailand several hours before it does in India.

And when he came home in the evening, he was on line to the US where the day was just beginning! So, though he was in the

house he was not part of it. His mind was elsewhere. So, today, even though a family may not be separated by distance, there may yet be less time for the family – because though the man is in the house his mind is elsewhere.

A: Yes, non-stop connectivity causes its own problems. I know a man who works in the logistics department of a computer company. His job has nothing to do with software. Rather, it's his job to ensure that if any computer system breaks down anywhere in India, resulting in the railway or airline online reservation system to break down, he has to get that spare part into the machine by coordinating the physical movement of that spare part, as well as getting the nearest engineer there to fix it. He has to ensure that "down time" is the least.

Today in the industry or services sector there is no more frightening situation than the words, "the system is down". This poor man is virtually glued to this laptop and his mobile all the time. Even on Sundays. If a plane has not taken off, he has to find another flight or find an alternative route by train or road, sometimes even hiring a bullock cart to get the part to a remote rural destination where a power plant or a continuous process chemical industry is located. He's not a software engineer. He is a logistics man, a new field of employment today, like supply chain management.

E: I remember the 'good old days' when Dad used to leave home at 7 in the morning and come home by 6 and take us to Church and then for a walk or a treat and was always home for family rosary and dinner. Today's and tomorrow's children are denied those simple pleasures. But then because daddies and mummies work so hard today they have access to the new tools and toys and books that are an essential part of their lives.

A: Take television, for instance. We had no television in our home for 4 years out of choice. Then, when we realized that not having television was making the children more curious, we decided to buy one. The next step was teaching the children to use it responsibly, a task that my wife took up.

E: In the old days, you only had to worry about how much

time your child spent hanging out with friends. Today, it is a question of how much time the child spends watching TV and also what he/she is watching on TV. Also, you have to teach children today not just what to watch on TV, but also how much time they should spend on the Walkman, on the telephone, on the landline as well as the mobile and the SMS - because all these are as addictive as friends or TV!

We have to monitor also how much time your child spends on the computer and also on which sites. Do you allow a child to surf at will? Do you allow a teenager to get into chat rooms, which all their classmates are getting into without any guidance, and chatting with strangers without realising the risks involved? These are difficult questions. How do you tell a child anything about these new tools when you do not know anything about them yourself?

A: Yes, although I have used a computer since 1987, I have never been to a chat room till last year. And I was so bored, that I quit and never tried again. My wife struggles now to chat with her son even though the software has all been set up and all she has to do is to click, click, click to reach him. Parents need guidance – a great deal of it. And this is what church homilies and meetings at Small Christian Communities must be about. Not just reading something from Isaiah or St John or listening to a sermon on St Teresa of Avila when we have a saint of our own times, Mother Teresa. Isaiah and the prophets stood in the market place and warned people about the dangers of their times. We need increased inputs – and at a much faster pace – about fast-developing situations in our own times. How many parents know for instance that the computer should not be in a bedroom but in the hall, so as to subtly discourage your teenage child from accessing adult websites offering a distorted view of life?

E: Yes, and the bigger the house, the greater the privacy and the freedom to explore without being discovered – and the greater the danger to the children. And it is not just the computer that is a source of danger. You can have direct marketing companies ringing up your daughter and asking her what cosmetics or what brand of undergarments she uses and getting into an unwanted conversation with her. This is already happening. Or she could

be getting an SMS about a new form of contraception and asking her to dial a number for more information. The company sending out the SMS does not know or does not care that the number is that of a child or a teenager.

Mobiles are so common today and information is so easily available and accessible that even school children now need to be guided to prevent them from being swamped with unnecessary information at too early a stage in their lives. Today, parents give their children a mobile to enable them to stay in touch with them, little realising that this tool also enables others to reach them without their parents knowing it.

A: All this calls for greater involvement on the part of parents with their children. But this means having the inclination and the time to do so. It means also greater discipline and self-sacrifice on the part of the parents—perhaps having to forego a late night movie on the TV that has been widely advertised and which the children know will be on that night. We cannot tell children "Do as I say, don't do as I do." They do not understand that you as an adult are more mature to watch it.

E: It's tougher when there are grandparents in the same house. They want, they perhaps need, to watch movies or serials in the afternoons, which the children don't want to or don't need to. The most popular such serials now are about mother-in-law daughter-in-law relationships. Or soaps about extra-marital affairs. How do you handle this? Or how do you work out how much time the children spend before the TV? We asked our children when they were young to choose which programmes they wanted to watch and I made it a point to sit with them and watch it myself and tell them what was realistic and what was not. I put what they saw into a context. It helped ensure not only that they did not become zombies before a TV set, watching the flickering screen for hours on end, but also that they were able to understand and relate what they saw to life.

A: There are other new concerns coming up that we would like to share with you. Concerns that arise out of inevitable changes in society and in our way of thinking, working, socializing. Enid talked earlier of how life revolved around the

home and the parish church. Today, our people no longer live in parish ghettos, physically or otherwise. And as they move out, their thinking changes. Increasingly, young people are meeting their life partners at work or in social settings because other communities too are undergoing change. This means meeting people with a different value system, different attitudes to life.

E: This puts new stresses on family relationships. How do you tell a young son or daughter that I do not object to a particular girl or boy, but that I am concerned that their value systems are different? And then, if the relationship culminates in marriage, not only have the couple to adjust to each other, but even the family members have to adjust to the new person from a different culture and a different faith. Then there is the question of bringing up the children. A Hindu or Buddhist mother may leave her child with her mother-in-law, yet object to her talking to the child about Jesus and Mary – either because she wants to bring the child up in their faith or no faith at all – "let the child choose when it grows up."

A: I wonder how equipped the Church in Asia is to help us face these new realities. Except for the Philippines, Christians form less than 3% of the population. I cannot speak for the rest of Asia, but certainly in India I see no awakening to the new realities. How many priests and nuns are really trained to deal effectively with young adults? How many are trained to provide pastoral care for those in mixed marriages? Often the attitude is: these are the rules, accept them if you want to get married in the church or get out. This is not an exaggeration. The approach is coercive, not persuasive, accept the official position or face the consequences.

A good example is insisting on baptism certificates for admission of children of mixed marriages to our schools, even when the number of Catholic children is less than 10%. I remember a Catholic mother who ran up against this hurdle when she wanted her daughter to be admitted to a Catholic school. The nun at the convent school was obstinate and the parish priest whose help she sought made fun of her. I can still hear her telling me: "My marriage is going well. My husband allows me to go to church and to take the children with me, though he will not allow them

to be baptized. I know that someday I will succeed in that. All I want now is for my children to be brought up in a Catholic atmosphere. But the priest made fun of me. I would not have minded if he could not help me. But did he have to make fun of me?"

We reflected on this incident later and came up with three questions:

- 1) Is baptism an end in itself or is it a means to an end? The way it is being pushed by the Church in India, it seems to be an end in itself. For us, it can only be a means. Baptism through carrots or coercion only makes a mockery of the sacrament and encourages people to engage in duplicitous relations with the Church.
- 2) The second question we asked is, "Is she not a daughter of the community? Is she dead to the community just because she married a Hindu? The problem is that Church rules are written by men who do not understand how love drives a woman. Some wise man once wrote: Love is only a moment in a man's life, for a woman it is her whole life." A woman does not take a decision to marry someone quickly or lightly. We have to reach out to our sons and daughters who get marry outside the community, even if they have a church ceremony.
- 3) That brings me to the third question: how many priests, nuns and lay people have we prepared for this new specialised ministry whose need is beginning to be keenly felt, the ministry of mixed faith marriages? Just look at the marriage statistics in dioceses across India. Look at the statistics of broken marriages and the summons before Church tribunals. The Church has woken up and issued new rules: engagement for a minimum of six months, compulsory Engaged Encounter Weekends, compulsory involvement in Small Christian Communities. Some of these steps are good. And though couples resent rules sometimes, I know many who appreciated these sessions after experiencing them. But what about after the wedding? There is clearly a need for pastoral care for couples in mixed faith marriages or where one of the partners has no faith. We also see this ministry as being driven

more by lay people, not just priests and nuns.

E. We also see it involving lay people of goodwill of other faiths because you need their help to build bridges in difficult situations. At the end of the day, what matters is that the two people who have committed themselves in marriage to each other live fully-integrated lives that strengthen and protect the family as an institution and bring up their children to experience the love and caring of the one Eternal Father of us all. What we see in Europe and the US, and our own experiences, tell us that the family has to be protected as an institution at all costs and that we have to go all out to do it. In a continent where we are just less than 3% of the population, we will have to do this by joining hands with people of other faiths because when families around us start crumbling, when problems disrupt the peace and stability of the family next door, we cannot expect to escape the impact. You cannot ignore the fire in your neighbour's house because when the wind changes direction, you may not have a firewall to protect you.

A/E: So to wrap up, we need to:

- 1) Strengthen the Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter movements and perhaps also introduce more Family Communication components/sessions in parishes to help parents update themselves on the times we live in, and to communicate with their children in the language and idiom of our times. Professional counselling a must, especially when there is a block in communications. Prayer without professional help under such circumstances can only be an escape and a form of band-aid. Prayer is one part of the solution, professional help is the other necessary part.
- 2) We must set up Family Support Networks in parishes for families experiencing separation because of the economic situation and job needs.
- 3) We must work towards a Ministry for Mixed Faith Marriages, involving lay Catholics and also people of other faiths, because the family as an institution has to be protected and supported at all costs.

5. FAMILY IN COMMUNICATION
by
DR. CHAINARONG MONTHIENVICHENCHAI

As you know, in any movie or theatre or musical production, there has to be a cast, the people who make it happen. For any musical show the job of casting director is extremely important. Many come to try out, but few can be chosen.

The first requirement is that the individual selected for the role already created by the author will fit the part in looks, voice, style, and talent. Miscasting can be costly.

The second need is that the whole group blend together, that they have what is called "chemistry". No show can be successful even with a string of excellent actors if, when you put them together, nothing happens.

Unfortunately, our family productions don't have casting directors. We meet and marry without the guidance of an experienced selection committee and when our children come along we have to take what we get whether or not they blend in and sing harmoniously.

Indeed in our family we need a casting director who can communicate and put the right people into the perfect roles, but since we don't have one, the next best thing is to do our best in order to understand the cast we already have.

In this presentation I will share quite a great deal about me, my family and my family circle.

My wife and I have four children: two sons and twin daughters.

My parents have eight children and I am the eldest. My wife, Christina, comes from a family of seven children and she is the youngest.

Together with in-laws and their children, our family circle, like many other families in Asia, is fairly big by any world standard.

One of the personal dilemmas I have in today's presentation is just how much to share of our family stories, mistakes and achievements. On the other hand, I don't want to sound as if we think we have all the answers.

Throughout this presentation, you will see that Family in Communication in my opinion is the family whose members are happy, loving, peaceful, feel good, and above all understand each other.

They are **not** frustrated or angry, fearful or want to punch someone in the nose!

The family, in my opinion, will most likely have at least some of the following attributes:

Seek first to understand... then to be understood

To learn to seek first to understand and then to be understood is vitally important for any *Family in Communication*.

In the last few decades, studies have shown that children and indeed all of us are born with pre-packed personalities.

Children will not have to be very old before we can sense their personalities.

The Popular Sanguine will laugh a lot, love fun, and enjoy being with people. Catherine was the life of the party from the time she was two years old.

The Powerful Choleric will give orders as soon as he can talk. My brother's young son, Ball, at 2 years old looked up at his father one night, pointed in front of him with his finger and stated clearly, "Daddy, here!" My brother moved immediately to his side and Ball knew he had his father under firm control.

The Perfect Melancholy, who is well-behaved and can be disciplined by a disapproving glance, will start lining up his toys in rows when he is still a toddler. Our son Charles (with his new hair style)

when he was young put all his dinosaur toys in certain order on his bed each day and if anyone moved one of them, he knew.

The Peaceful Phlegmatic is the child more eager to please as he wants to conform to our wishes and will do whatever makes people happy. Our eldest son, Peter, as a Phlegmatic child, went out with us several times a week and sat quietly and politely wherever we placed him, causing us no trouble.

As we became acquainted with the different personalities, we found explanations for the behavior of ourselves and our children. We developed a new way to communicate with those people who are not like us and began to accept our children as God made them to be, not as we might want them to become.

Right or wrong

As you already know, logic would dictate that whenever two disagree: one is right, and the other is wrong. But family life is not always logic; it's psycho-logic. Both are right—each from his or her point of view.

These kinds of perception pictures brings us to realize that the way we see the world is not necessarily the way other people see the world.

In fact, people do not see the world as it is; they see it as they are—or as they have been conditioned to be.

We each look at the world through our own pair of glasses—glasses that come out of our own unique and conditioning experiences, glasses that create our value system, our expectations, our implicit assumptions about the way the world is and the way it should be.

One of the main reasons behind communication breakdowns is that the people involved interpret the same event differently. Their different natures and background experiences condition them to do so. If they then interact without taking into account why they see things different, they begin to judge each other.

Differences

My wife and I recognize that, whether we like it or not, God has called both of us to be the human directors of our family production. It is important that our jobs is to have unity in our communications. It is obvious that no show could make it through the first rehearsal if there were two directors each giving his or her own creative instructions.

What would happen if I say to our children who are our cast, "This show is going to be a comedy and were all going to wear colorful costumes."

And my wife says, "No, this is going to be a drama and we're all going to dress in symbolic black."

The cast, or indeed the children, would be so confused that there would be a stalemate, a defection, or an insurrection. Without unity of purpose little can be accomplished in any group activity. Yet there are families, the most important unit in the history of mankind, that the cast functions daily under conflicting information. Mother say one thing and Dad another. The little ones don't have to be very old before they assess which director to go or avoid. Unfortunately few parents spend time discussing and agreeing upon general household procedures.

I remember years ago when two sons, Peter and Charles, were still young. I came home one day after being away from communication with our young children for more than a week. I was feeling somewhat guilty about this lack of communication, and when I feel guilty, I tend to become a bit indulgent.

Because I was often way, my wife had to compensate for my indulgence by coming on a bit too strong. Her toughness caused me to become a little softer. My increased softness caused her to become a little harder. Thus, the discipline system in our home was sometimes driven more by politics than by consistent application of principles that create a beautiful family culture.

When I arrived at home that night, I went in and yelled, "Boys, are you there? I'm home."

Charles ran out from his bedroom, looked at me, and then shouted back to his brother, "Hey, Peter, dad's nice." In other words, "He's in a good mood."

What I didn't know was that these boys were in bed under threat of their lives. They had used every conceivable excuse to get up and keep playing and goofing off. That had gone on until my wife's patience had come to an end. She had sent them to bed with a final command: "Now you boys stay in bed or else!"

So when they heard Dad's voice, a new ray of hope was born. They thought, Let's see what kind of mood Dad is in. If he's in a good mood, we can get up and play some more. The words, "Hey, Peter, dad's nice," were their cue. We started wrestling around in the front room and having all kinds of fun.

Then out came Mom. With a mixture of frustration and anger in her voice, she shouted, "Are those kids still up?"

I quickly replied, "Hey, I haven't seen much of them lately. I want to play with them for a little while." Needless to say, she didn't like my response, nor did I like hers. And there were the boys, watching Mom and Dad arguing right in front of them.

The problem was that we had not communicated and discussed on this issue and come up with agreements we were both willing to live with. I was too much a product of my moods and feelings, and I wasn't consistent. At the same time, I must admit that I didn't show respect for the fact that these boys were in bed and should have stayed in bed. But I also hadn't seen them for several days. And a pertinent question was "How important is the bedtime rule anyway?"

The solution to this problem was not worked out immediately during that night, but eventually we found time to sit down and discuss and conclude that the bedtime rule wasn't that important for our family- particularly as the children became teenagers. We felt that what were normal bedtimes for many families were important and fun family times for us. The kids would sit around and talk, eat, and laugh- particularly with my wife, since I typically went to bed earlier if I were at home. That

thing that enabled that synergistic solution for our family was acknowledging the differences and allowing all of us to do what we individually and collectively felt strong about.

Sometimes living with differences and appreciating other people's uniqueness is hard. We tend to want to mold people in our own image. When we get our security from our opinions, to hear a different opinion-particularly from someone as close as our spouse or children-threatens that security. We naturally want them to agree with us, to think the way we think, to go along with our ideas. But as someone once said, "When everybody thinks alike, nobody thinks very much." Another said, "When two agree, one is unnecessary."

Over the years my wife and I have come to recognize that one of the very best things about marriage is our differences. We share a commitment and value system and destination, but within that, we have great diversity. And we love it! Most of the time, that is.

She tends to more logical and consequential-more "left brain." I tend to be more "more right brained," to look at things more holistically.

When we first married thirty years ago this month, this difference created something of a problem in our communication. It seemed I was always scanning the horizon, looking at new alternatives, new possibilities. It was easy for me to change course midstream if I thought I saw a better way. On the other hand, she tended to be diligent and precise. Once we had a clear direction, she work out the details, burrow in, and stay the course, no matter what.

This gave rise to a number of challenges when it came to making decisions together on everything from setting goals to buying things to disciplining the children. Mind you, our commitment to each other was very solid, but we were both caught up in our own ways of thinking and it seemed like a lot of work to try to make decisions together.

For a time we tried to separate areas of responsibility. In

doing the budget, for example, I would do much long-range planning, she would keep the records. All this proved to be helpful. We were both contributing to the marriage and family in our own areas strength.

But when we discovered how to use differences to create synergy, we came to a new level of richness in our relationship. We discovered that we take turns listening to each other and have our eyes opened to a whole new way of seeing things. Instead of approaching problems from "opposite" sides, we were able to come together and approach problems with shared and much greater understanding.

This opened the door to all kinds of new solutions to our problems. It also gave us something wonderful to do together. When we realized that our differences were part of a greater whole, we began exploring the possibilities of putting those parts together in new ways.

In preparing this presentation, we wife also played a big role. I go for the big concepts, the holistic ideas and the right brain ways of saying things. She challenged and interacted with me on the ideas, arrange the content, and suggest better words choice. And we love it!

This has brought us together in a whole new level of communication and contribution. We've found that our togetherness is much better because of our differences rather than in spite of them.

As I was preparing this presentation, I also invited our children and cousins to contribute by sharing their opinion on any attribute which my wife and I had outlined for this task. Under the topic of differences of Mom and Dad, Cecilia wrote to me and shared her thoughts as follows:

Cecilia: If you wanted advice about something, you'd go to Dad, and he'd give it to you. He'd say, "I'll do this." And he'd outline everything.

But sometimes you didn't want advice. You just wanted some-

one to say, "You're the best. You're the greatest. They should have chosen you as cheerleader instead of that other girl." You just wanted someone to be really supportive and loyal to you, no matter what. And that was Mom.

Cecilia continued to say:

In fact, she was so loyal, I was always afraid she was going to call whoever I was mad at and bawl them out to say, "Why are you being so rude to my daughter? Why didn't you choose her to be the lead in the play?"

She thought we were the greatest. It wasn't so much that she thought we were better than other kids, but she thought a lot of us. And we could feel that, even though we knew she was prejudiced about us and usually exaggerated what we did. But it felt good to know that someone believed in you that much. And that's what she instilled in us: "You can do anything. You will rise and accomplish your goals if you just stick with it. I believe in you and you can do it."

Somehow Mom and Dad taught us the best of what they were.

Understanding, not misunderstanding

One of my sister-in-laws is known for her inordinate attachment to buying Sanyo appliances. She seemed to have an obsession about Sanyo that my brother was at an absolute loss to understand. She would not even consider buying another brand. Even when they were just starting out their family life and on a very tight budget, she insisted to drive a long way to the big city where Sanyo appliances were sold, because no dealer in their small town carried them at that time.

What bothered my brother the most was not that his wife like Sanyo but that she persisted in making what he considered illogical and indefensible statements that had no basis in fact whatsoever. If she had only agreed that her response was irrational and purely emotional, my brother thinks he could have handled it. But her justification was really upsetting. In fact it was such a tender issue that both of them were afraid to look each other in the eye.

Luckily, both of were very open. One day while spending their weekend at a beach resort where the small refrigerator in the hotel room was Sanyo. They started talking about their other appliances. Then she began to open up.

She said that as a young girl, realized that her father worked very hard to support his family. He worked as a school teacher, and to help make ends meet, he went into the appliance business, using the front part of his house as a showroom. One of the main brands he carried in the small store was Sanyo. When her father returned home after a full day of teaching and working late into the evening selling Sanyo appliances, he would lie on the couch and she would rub his feet and sing to him. It was a beautiful time they enjoyed together almost daily for years. Often during this time he would talk through his worries and concerns about the business, and he shared with his young daughter his deep appreciation for Sanyo. During an economic downturn and he was out of teaching job, he had experienced serious financial difficulties, and the only thing that enabled him to stay in business was that Sanyo financed his inventory.

As his wife shared these things, there were long pauses. My brother knew that she was tearing up. This was a deeply emotional thing for her. The communication between father and daughter had taken place spontaneously and naturally, when the most powerful kind of scripting takes place. And perhaps his wife had forgotten about all this until the safety of their year of communication, when it could also come out in very natural and spontaneous ways.

My brother's eyes began to tear as well. He finally started to understand. He had never made it safe for her to talk about it. He had never empathized. He had simply judged. He had just moved in with his logic and his counsel and his condemnation and never even made an effort to really understand.

The 17th century French Philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) once said, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of."

When my brother and his wife returned from their weekend at the beach resort, they felt so renewed, so bonded to each other,

so affirmed in the preciousness of their relationship. They didn't even need to talk.

There's no way to have rich, rewarding family relationships without real understanding. Relationships can be superficial. They can be functional. They can be transactional. But they can't be transformational- and deeply satisfying- unless they're built in a foundation of genuine understanding.

In fact, at the heart of most of the real pain in families is misunderstanding.

Work out the solution together

TV Watching

Some years ago, my wife and I had read a great deal about the impact of television on the minds of children, and we had begun to feel that in many ways it was like an open sewage pipe right into our home.

We had set up rules and guidelines to limit the amount of TV watching, but it seemed that there were always exceptions. The rules kept changing.

We were constantly in the position of dispensing privileges and judgments, and we had grown weary of negotiating with the children. It had become a power struggle that occasionally caused feelings to flare in negative ways.

Although we agreed on the problem, we didn't agree on the solution. My wife wanted to take an authoritarian approach inspired by an article she'd read about a man who actually threw the family TV set into the garbage! In some way that kind of dramatic action seemed to demonstrate the message we wanted to send. But I favored a more principle-based approach. I didn't want the children to resent the decision, to feel it was not a win for them.

We realized however that we in fact were trying to decide how we could solve this problem for the children when what we needed to do was help them solve it for themselves.

At one family night we introduced the subject "TV-how much is enough?"

Everyone's interest was immediately focused because this was an important matter for all involved.

Charles said, "What's so bad about watching TV? There a lot of good suff on. I will get my homework done. I can actually study while the TV is on. My grades are good, and so are everyone else's. So what's the problem?"

Catherine added, "If you're afraid we're going to be corrupted by TV, you're wrong. We don't usually watch bad shows. And if one is bad, we usually turn to another channel."

Charles added, "Besides, what shocking to you is not all that shocking to us".

Cecilia said, "If we don't watch certain shows, we're socially out of it. All kids watch these shows. We even talk about them everyday at school. These shows help us see how things really are in the world so that we don't get caught up in all the dump things that are going on."

We didn't interrupt the kids. They all had something to say about why they don't think we should make any drastic changes in our TV habits. As we listened to their concerns, we could see how deeply they were into their feelings about TV.

Finally, when their steam was spent, we said, "Now let us see if we really understand what you've just said." And we proceeded to restate all we had heard and felt them say. Then we asked, "Do you feel that we truly understand your point of view?" They agreed that we did.

"Now we would like you to understand where we're coming from."

The response was not very favorable.

"You just want to tell us all the negative things people are saying about watching TV," Peter said.

"You want to pull the plug and take away our only escape from all the pressure we feel at school," Catherine added.

We listened empathically and then assured them that this was not our intent at all. "In fact," we said, "when we've gone over these articles together, Mom and I are going to leave the room and let you kids decide what you feel we should do about watching TV."

"You're kidding!" they exclaimed. "What if our decision is different from what you want?" "We'll honor your decision," we said. "All we ask is that you be in total agreement about what you recommend that we do." We could see by the expressions on their faces that they liked the idea.

So, all together, we went over the information in the two articles we had brought to the meeting. The children sensed this material would be important in their upcoming decision, so they listened very attentively.

We began by reading some shocking facts. One articles said that the average television diet for a person between the ages of one and eighteen is six hours a day. If there is cable in the home, that increases to eight hours per day. By the time they graduated from school, they will have spent thirteen thousand hours in school and sixteen hours in front of a television set. During that time they will have witnessed twenty-four thousand killings.

We told children that, as parents, those facts were scary to us and that when we watched as much TV as we did, it became by far the most powerful socializing force in our lives-more than education, more than time spent with the family.

We pointed out the discrepancy concerning TV program directors who claim there is no scientific evidence to link TV viewing to behavior and then quote evidence showing the powerful impact a thirty-second commercial has on behavior.

Then we said, "Just think about how different you feel when you watch a television show and when you watch a commercial. When a thirty-second commercial comes on, you know it's an advertisement.

You don't believe a lot of what you see and hear. Your defenses are up because it's advertising, it's just hype, and we've all been burned by it again and again. But when you're watching a show, your defenses are most likely down. You become emotionally invested, vulnerable. You're letting images come into your head, and you're not even thinking about it. You're just absorbing it. Of course, the commercials impact us in spite of our defensiveness. Can you imagine the impact the regular programs are having on us when we're in a much more receptive posture?"

We continue these discussions as we read more. One author pointed out what happens when television becomes the baby-sitter for parents who are not cautious about what their children watch. He said that unsupervised TV watching is like inviting a stranger into your home for two or three hours every day to tell the children about a perverse world where violence solves problems and all anyone needs to be happy is the right beer, a beautiful car, good looks, and lots of sex. Of course, the parents are not there while all this is happening because they trust this television character to keep the children as quiet, interested, and entertained as possible. This teacher could do a lot of damage and causing problems no one could solve.

After discussing the negative impact of watching too much television, we turned to some of the positive things that might happen if we changed our habit. In one of the articles a study was quoted which showed that families who cut back on TV watching found more time for conversation at home. One person said in the article, "Before it was, like, mostly we'd see Dad before he left for work. When he came home, he'd watch TV with us, and then it was like, 'Good night Dad.' Now we talk all the time, we're really close.

As we shared this information, we got up and left the room. About an hour later we were invited to return for the verdict.

Catherine later gave us the full report of what happened in that vitally important hour.

She said that after we left the room, her brothers and sister quickly appoint her the discussion leader. They knew she was an

advocate of watching TV, and they anticipated a quick resolution.

At first the meeting was chaotic. They all wanted to speak up and get their views known in a hurry so they'd be able to get a liberal decision-perhaps to cut down just a little on the amount of TV they were watching. In order to satisfy us as parents, someone suggested that they all promise to do their household chores cheerfully and get their homework done without being reminded.

But then Peter our eldest son spoke up. Everyone turned to listened as he told how the articles had impressed him. He said TV had put some ideas into his mind that were not what he wanted to be there, and he felt he would be better off if he watched a lot less TV. He also said he felt the younger children in the family were starting to see things far worse than what he had seen as a young boy.

Then Charles the younger brother spoke up. He told everyone about a show he had seen that made him feel scared when he went to bed. At that point the spirit of the meeting became very serious. As the children continued to discuss the issue, a new feeling gradually began to emerge. They started to think differently.

Cecilia then said, "I think we're watching too much TV, but I don't want to give it up altogether. There are some shows I feel good about and I really want to watch." Then others talked about shows they enjoyed and wanted to continue to watch.

Catherine added, "I don't think we should talk about how much time to watch each day because some days I don't want to watch at all, but on the other days I want to watch more."

So they decided to determine how many hours each week-rather than each day-would be appropriate. Some thought twenty hours each week-rather too much; some thought five hours would be better. Finally, they all agreed that ten hours a week was about right, and they appointed Catherine as the monitor to ensure that the decision was carried out.

This decision proved to be turning point in our family life. We began to interact more, to read more. We eventually reached

the point where television was not an issue. And, although we have a separate TV room in our home, today-aside from news and occasional movie or sports event-we hardly ever have it on.

By involving our children in the problem, we made them participators with us in finding a solution. And because the solution was their decision, they were invested in its success. We didn't have to worry about supervising and keeping them on track.

By the way, we have no television during meals. Because our breakfast and dinners are the focal points of our family day, we want no interference in our conversation. This rule was agreed upon and accepted as fact. The minute the meal is announced, everyone is to come to the table, no matter what they are doing.

Many of the children who visited our home were amazed at the conversation that took place at our dinner table. When I asked them, "What's it like at your house?" their usual reply was, "Oh, we all watch TV."

Having fun together

Probably the most important dimension of family is having fun together-genuinely enjoying one another, enjoying the home environment, making home and family the happiest, warmest in people's lives. Having fun together is so vital and so important that it could even be listed as a tradition in and of itself. And it can be nurtured and expressed in many ways.

In our family we've built a lot of social camaraderie around music and humor. Our four children play piano as well as other musical instruments. They have fun together and often entertain us with their repertoire.

We also have a number of hilarious movies and every now and then watch them together and have the funniest times. Everyone enjoys them immensely.

Humor puts things in perspective so you don't take yourself too seriously. You don't get hung up on small issues or other little irritating things that can be divisive and create polarization in the family. Sometimes it takes only one person to inject a

little humor into the situation and change the entire course of an event.

Learning together

There are so many opportunities to learn and do things together as a family. And this can be tremendously renewing in all dimensions. For example, singing in the car when our family went on trips together. Sharing in a family member's particular hobby or interest is another example.

Learning together is socially and mentally renewing. It gives you a shared interest, something fun to talk about.

Another vitally important learning tradition is reading. Family can read together. At the same time, children need to read on their own- and to see their parents read as well.

When Charles was young, he asked me one day if I ever read. I was shocked but immediately realized that he had never seen me read. Almost always I read when I am alone. In fact, I cover the equivalent of two or three books every week. But when I am with my family, I am fully with them and I don't read.

I have recently read some research which indicates that the number one reason children don't read is that they don't see their parents read. I think this is one of the mistakes I have made over the years. I wish that I'd kept my study room more open so that my children would have seen me reading more often. And I wish I'd been conscientious about sharing what I was reading and what excited me.

Relatives, not recreation

While television commercials would have us believe that weekends were made for recreation, there are some meaningful things that can be done with our weekends and leisure time.

In today's fast-paced society, we often lose sense of family so vital in our own feelings of self-worth. Could we restore some of this sense of family if we visited with the cousins, aunts and uncles, and grandparents? While cousins seldom become best

friends, knowing them and other relatives gives our children a better sense of their heritage, a sense of belonging.

Relatives not only help our children realize their roots, but they can also fill another important role. They can be a role model for our children. Parental love and encouragement is vital but other adults who are close to our children, who care about them, are also important to give them a balanced setting on which to form their views.

Our teens specially need someone they can talk to and communicate about problems or questions they may have but don't want to go to Mom or Dad about. We can help them by allowing an "aunt" or "uncle" into their lives whom we know will reinforce our standards.

When my son, Peter, went to study in the UK, he lived with his young uncle, John, during school holidays. John became this person to Peter. John was 15 years older than Peter, but the two of them spent many hours daily talking late into the night. John helped Peter work through some of his feelings just by listening and offering sensible opinion now and then. I am most grateful that John was willing to be a positive example for Peter in his shaky teen years.

Piak, my younger brother: *One of the things I appreciate most about our family is this huge intergenerational support network. My kids are growing up very close to their cousins. A lot of them are the same age, and they're close. They're the best of friends. And I think this is going to make a tremendous difference when they're teenagers. They'll have the huge network of support. And if someone starts having problems, there will probably be too much support to ever let anyone go off the deep end.*

By now, I believe, you can see that aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and other extended family members can have a tremendous positive influence on the family. Many activities lend themselves to larger family involvement, especially major holiday celebrations such as Christmas and New Year, and Songkran festival in our country. But almost any family activity can be broadened to include extended family members

It would be a pity if communication with extended family members was limited to only phone conversations and visits a couple of times a year.

Private time

There is no way I can describe the value of private time with my wife. For thirty years, the two of us have shared some time together each day. Every now and then we spend time away from children, away from phones, away from office and other people and everything else.

We go out to dinner, to a movie, or to a concert, or to a beach or to a foreign land. We share what's going on in our lives. We discuss any issues or concerns. And when we can't be together, we talk on the telephone.

That rich communication, that bonding, builds our marriage and strengthens it so that we go into the family arena with deep love and respect for each other and with a tremendous sense of unity that helps us pull together instead of apart.

This kind of 'retreat' time is vital because many of us are so busy following hectic schedules, being tyrannized by the telephone, and meeting small crises that we go for long periods without any deep meaningful communication with each other.

When a couple comes together to work through matters in their shared stewardship- particularly in dealing with children- it opens the flood-gates to insight, synergy and strengthened resolve. The insights are more profound and the solutions more practical and workable- and the entire process is enormously bonding and unifying to the relationship.

Praying together

Catherine (daughter): *When I was growing up, it was very important to my parents that we all went to Sunday Mass together. At the time I didn't think it was important. I didn't understand why they thought it was important. But they did, so we all went to church together and sat together. And I have to admit as young children we were bored together most of the time, especially dur-*

ing the homily. It was as if in the eyes of the priests we were not part of the congregation in the church. He spoke of things we hardly understood.

But as I got older, I began to notice that we were more aligned as a family than was the case with a lot of my friends. We had common values and goals. We relied on one another to solve problems and find answers. We knew what we believed, what we all believed.. We were together. And "Sunday Mass" wasn't just a matter of once a week for our family. Religion and praying were treated almost as an educational process. We had lessons- formal and informal-where our parents would teach us about what was right and wrong. They would listen as we disagreed, then help us figure things out and find our own answers. But they taught us about values and faith.

We also had little family tradition. For example, we prayed together every evening. It was sometimes grueling to listen to my brothers go on and on. But as I got older I realized how much I learned as I listened to them. I learned what was important to them, what they needed and wanted, what they were afraid of or concerned about. Now that I think about it, I realized that it really drew us all together.

We also prayed and fasted in times of emergency. I remember when my grandma was in the hospital with cancer. A call went out to our entire family-aunts, uncles, and cousins. We all gathered in family prayer and fasted together for her. It gave us strength to be together. And when she passed away, it was wonderful to have everyone near. The unity was overwhelming. And although there were tears and sadness, it was a lovely, strengthening bonding funeral. I came away from it with a special understanding and appreciation for the full circle of life, from birth to death. And I think the fact that we all share common beliefs made things much more meaningful to us.

In conclusion

Former US First Lady Barbara Bush said it beautifully to the graduating students at Wellesley College, "...As important as your obligations as a doctor, lawyer, or business leader will be,

you are human being first, and those human connections- with spouses, with children, with friends- are the most important investments you will ever make.

At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent..."

One thing my wife and I learn throughout our thirty years as a family is that it is not the size of the house or the money given to the kids or spent on decorating the rooms that makes family happy, loving, understanding and peaceful but it is the creativity, warmth, and excitement that children feel when they are at home.

It is when each person in the family is appreciated and loved, and when relationships among all members in the family are good.

I'm talking about the spirit of the family- the feeling, the chemistry, the climate or atmosphere in the home. It's the character of the family- the depth, quality, and maturity of the relationships. It's the way family members relate to one another and how they feel about one another. It's when your happiness comes primarily from the happiness of others in the family.

It's the spirit or feeling that grows out of the collective patterns of behavior that characterize family interaction. These things, like the tip of an iceberg, come out of the unseen mass of shared beliefs and values underneath.

And, all of these can be achieved mainly because the family is the *Family in Communication*.

6. FINAL STATEMENT

BISHOPS' MEET 2003
24-29 November 2003
Negombo, Sri Lanka

We, 30 participants of the FABC-OSC Bishops Meet 2003, Bishops, Secretaries of our National Communication Commis-

sions and married couples from 11 Asian countries, met in Negombo, near Colombo, Sri Lanka, from November 24 to 29, 2003, to study and discuss "Family in Communication, Communication in the Family."

The family provides the first experience of love and communication. Today it feels powerless and endangered under the impact of global economic, social and political developments including the mass media. The bonds that have held our families together for centuries in the face of tremendous material hardship and poverty are loosening. This is de-stabilising marriage and family life and endangering the very foundation of our societies.

This meeting explored Asian experiences of family communication in today's context from three perspectives - theological, social and experiential, with couples from three Asian countries sharing deeply how their own families were coping with change.

The Theological Perspective

The Holy Trinity is reflected in the human family. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. They communicate with each other in an eternal, interpersonal relationship of love (ad intra communication). The Trinitarian God through creation communicates His life and love to the world. Further, through Divine Revelation, God communicates His redeeming love to human kind (ad extra communication). So father and mother and offspring become a trinity. They relate in love among themselves and with the rest of the world.

The Social Perspective

The Asian Family, a unique microcosm of Asian reality, is now entering into a new media-culture influenced by emerging communication technologies. The new technologies enable family members to relate to each other even though separated by long distances. Many though are also bewildered by the disruption of traditional lifestyles. Older family members are unable to comprehend and cope with the new technologies, while young people seem to be swept along by them without any understanding or

awareness of their impact. Opposing values beamed into the sacredness of the home also adversely affect family hierarchies and inter-personal communication.

The Experiential Perspective

The experiences of three couples from three different Asian societies highlighted certain similarities: the need for a clear and deep understanding and agreement between parents on family values; their willingness and ability to enter into a 'listening dialogue' with their children; the awareness that family communication evolves as the family grows in age and number and under the impact of social and economic developments sometimes forcing family members to work at odd hours or long distances from home. Prayer is an important aspect that enriches communication between spouse and spouse, parents and children. In a continent where huge masses of people are often struggling to make both ends meet, it cannot be forgotten that material poverty can also be a hindrance to communication.

The Church and Christian families cannot be oblivious to these changes. Fully conscious of the Church's responsibility for this, we present the following orientations:

Orientations

The means of communication are gifts from God (*Communio et Progressio*, 2; *Aetatis Novae*, 22). They are powerful tools for good. Nevertheless, forces of commercialism or ideologies opposed to Christian and human values are vying for control of new media technologies through subtle, and sophisticated manipulative techniques. Hence, the importance of Communication Formation and Media Awareness for families. Parents need to be aware of media/electronic games that promote values other than spiritual and moral. Young people must understand the new media culture in order to better integrate it into their lives (cf. *BISCOM IV*). Media must remain instruments for knowledge, understanding, development and fulfilment.

True Christian family life is a "witness of life" and a spiritual exercise in itself (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 21, 41 & 76). Family

members respect, listen to, dialogue with and heal each other. They grow in holiness through a spirituality that evolves over time. The family is a cradle of love, which enables each member to feel nurtured and find fulfilment in a life-giving environment.

In Asia, it is necessary for Christians to work with communities of other religions striving to protect age-old values of family and community, self-sacrifice, respect and caring.

We recognize that no single solution is valid for every family in every situation for all stages of growth and development. A family situation is always dynamic. It grows in age, maturity and even its economic situation changes with time. Keeping this in mind, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

1. It should be the special concern of Bishops' Conferences to be involved in any way possible in the promotion of communication in families, and groups of families.
2. Parents should teach by example. Good communication between spouses creates and sustains a "culture of communication" in the home. Setting aside time for the spouse and children despite pressing economic needs, is key to good communication within the family.
3. Families are encouraged to share media like watching TV programs together. Parents and children discussing together the use of TV, with the children even participating in the decision about the use of TV, can be an enriching experience of communication and a means for growth and maturity for all.
4. Encourage Asian practices of sharing in the celebrations of family events with the extended family, neighbours, both Catholic and other communities. Catholic families must be made aware of the family apostolate. Look for what is unique to each culture and promote family togetherness through communication like story telling (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20). Outreach to the sick, elderly and those specially challenged helps to bring people together.
5. Preparation for marriage should include also the development

of sufficient awareness for the need and ways of non-verbal communication, the ability to listen to each other, accepting each other's feelings, and putting oneself into the other's shoes (cf. Mk. 1:31).

6. Ensure a better dissemination of information that promotes Christian values and strengthens the quality of our faith. Publicise more Church-related rating of movies, where available. Review and assess TV serials and children's programmes on a regional and/or language basis to encourage wider viewership of good programmes.
7. It is important to honour communicators who develop good programs and stand for values in social communication. Such endorsement, especially when given in collaboration with other religious and cultural groups, can be powerful signals for other professionals.
8. Seminarians and priests are to be prepared early enough for pastoral services, not only for Catholic families but also inter-faith marriages. The first encounter of an inter-faith couple with a Catholic priest is often crucial. Inter-faith marriages also in their communication need special pastoral care.
9. Promote marriage-enrichment movements like Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter as well as youth movements preparing for life (cf. BISCOP IV). In a continent where Christians are a minority, we must work with other churches, religious organisations to improve the communication abilities of couples and families.
- 10 Work more closely with NGOs and existing bodies that are concerned about the media influence, especially the impact of media, on children.
11. The spirituality of the family is to be developed within the family itself, through its relationship with God, its interpersonal, and relations with others. Encourage families to pray, and attend liturgical services together.

Negombo, Sri Lanka
27-Nov-03

II. WORLD COMMUNICATION DAYS' MESSAGES ON FAMILY

- a. 1969 Social Communications and Family
- b. 1979 Social Communications for the Protection and Development of Childhood in Family and Society
- c. 1980 Social Communications and Family
- d. 1994 Television and the Family: Guidelines for good Viewing
- e. 2004 The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness

a. 3RD WCD 1969: SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS AND FAMILY

Beloved Sons and Daughters, men of good will everywhere,

The observation of the third annual "World Communications Day" with the theme "Social Communications and the Family" affords us an opportunity which we accept with pleasure, as we have done on previous similar occasions, of inviting all those who are interested, to a positive and fruitful meditation on this subject. Indeed, who can claim today not to be affected by a phenomenon of such world-wide proportions as the ever growing expression of the press, radio, motion pictures and television, or by their immense influence on families?

One obvious consideration comes at once to mind: the instruments of social communication have now penetrated into the very heart of the family circle. They influence people's time-tables. They change established habits. They form the subject of conversation and stimulate discussions. Above all, these instruments have an impact on the psychology of those who use them. This impact, at times truly profound, is exercised over the emotions and the intellect. It extends to the moral, as well as the religious spheres. There is hardly a news item or matter of discussion, one may almost say, that is not brought within the family circle by the means of the printed page, or an audio-visual means, so that it can influence the conduct of one and all, awakening the most diverse reactions.

The advantages of this new situation are undeniable. There is no doubt that the intellectual development of young people is hastened. Their cultural heritage is enriched. Their hearts and spirits are more easily alerted to the great problems of human community, such as peace, justice and development. It is also clear however, that the persuasive force of these new means can be utilized for good or evil. Moreover, an abuse, even be it only quantitative, of audio-visual programmes, can bring with it a deterioration of the values of family life; as a result, it may well set people apart, instead of bringing them together. It is necessary then, to form consciences, to use intelligently these sources of cultural enrichment. This is a new chapter added to the traditional duties of educators. It is time that the family undertake its *aggiornamento* in this area, so that with the indispensable co-operation of the school, the family may progressively take care to train consciences to come of their own accord to calm and objective judgments leading them to accept or reject the various programmes that are offered to them.

The work of education however, does not stop here. It is necessary that a dialogue be established between families and those who are responsible for social communications. The families are called upon not simply to make known their wishes and criticisms, but also to show understanding for those who, often at the price of strenuous effort, provide them day by day with so many elements for their culture and entertainment.

The communicators must, in their turn, know and respect the needs of the family. This presupposes at times much courage on their part, and always a high sense of responsibility. It means in practice that they should exclude on the one side all that can damage the family in its existence, its stability, its order and its happiness, for every attack on the true fundamental values of the family — whether it be eroticism or violence, the defense of divorce or antisocial attitudes among young people — is an attack on genuine human welfare and the good of society. On the other hand, communicators have the difficult task of educating the public to know, appreciate and love values that are often unknown or despised but which are the strength and the glory of a given society; such as, the dedication of one's self to a great ideal, the

sense of sacrifice and the hidden heroism of daily routine.

We invite all families to collaborate with those associations which by constant contact make known their yearnings and just requests to those responsible for social communications. May this World Communications Day mark the beginning of a genuinely fruitful and constructive dialogue, heralding a more tranquil future in this troubled area of modern living.

The question of the presence of Christians in the professional world of social communications now calls for close consideration. If there is a sector of present-day life where this presence is especially necessary and desirable, it is surely that of social communications. Families should not be deterred by any misgiving they might have when one of their members wishes to embark on such a career. Evil that is much more publicized than good, is not bound up with one particular profession more than with another. Thanks God, in the world of social communications, no less than in others, there are shining examples of moral living, both in professional and in family life. There are those in the world of journalism, the theatre and the field of motion pictures who live out their faith in God in the calm and conscientious exercise of their profession. The very history of Christianity teaches us that the force of evangelical leaven increases rather than diminishes in proportion to the difficulties caused by one's environment. The evangelical leaven gathers force by vivifying and transforming an environment. Young people who have received a solid moral and religious formation and who are inspired by a genuine ideal are therefore, to be encouraged to engage in the different activities of social communication.

A realistic appraisal of the situation leads one to see that the influence of these techniques, far from being lessened will be on the increase in the society of the future. Nothing should be left undone in order that this influence have a positive effect on every family.

We hope that Our voice on the occasion of this World Communications Day will be heard in every country to encourage good production in the field of social communications; to enhearten those who employ these means in the service of family life and thus contribute towards a happy future for the great family of mankind.

Pope Paul VI

**b. 13TH WCD 1979: SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR
THE PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILD-
HOOD IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY**

Dear Brother and sisters, dear sons and daughters,

With sincere confidence and lively hope, that is, with the same sentiments that have marked my pastoral service in the See of Peter from the beginning, I turn to you, and especially, to those among you who are active in the communications field, on the day which the Second Vatican Council decreed should be devoted to this important subject. (*cf. Inter Mirifica*, 18)

The theme to which I wish to draw your attention is, implicitly, an appeal to confidence and hope because it has reference to childhood. I address myself to it all the more willingly because my beloved predecessor Paul VI had already chosen it. Since the United Nations Organization has proclaimed 1979 an "International Year of the Child," it is fitting that we should reflect on the special need of that vast group of recipients, the children, and on the related responsibilities of adults and, especially, of those working in the media, who can and do exercise such a profound influence on the formation or, alas, deformation of new generations.

It is this influence that accounts for the seriousness and complexity of the theme: "The role of the media in the protection and development of children in the family and in society."

Without claiming to analyze, much less to treat exhaustively, all aspects of the theme, I wish to remind you very briefly of what children expect and have the right to receive from the communications media.

Children are both fascinated by and defenseless against the adult world and adults themselves. They are naturally inclined to accept whatever is offered to them, be it good or bad. This is something of which you, the media professionals and, especially, those of you working in the audio-visual media are well aware. Children are drawn to both the "little screen" and the "big screen," and they perceive sooner or better than others the emotions and feelings produced.

Like soft wax on which even light pressure leaves a mark, the soul of the child is open to every stimulus directed to its intellectual powers, its imagination, its affectivity and its instincts. Moreover, the impressions received at this age penetrate more deeply into the psychic world of the human person and condition, often in an enduring way, its later relations with itself, others and the environment.

Precisely because the wise men of paganism already saw how sensitive the child is in this first phase of life, they set down the well-known pedagogical principle that *maxima debetur puero reverentia*, "The greatest reverence is due to the child."

In the same perspective the stern warning of Christ is evidently justified: "it would be better for anyone who leads astray one of these little ones who believe in me, to be drowned by a millstone around his neck, in the depth of the sea." (*Mt. 18:6*) Certainly the "little ones" of the Gospel include children especially.

The example of Christ should be normative for the believer who seeks to draw inspiration from the Gospel for his own life. This same Jesus comes to us as one who welcomes children with love, defends their spontaneous wish to draw near to Him, praises the trusting simplicity that is typical of them, because it merits the kingdom, and draws attention to the inner transparency that so readily disposes them for the experience of God. He does not hesitate, in fact, to draw a surprising parallel: "Whoever welcomes one such child for My sake welcomes Me." (*Mt. 18.5*)

As I had occasion to write recently: "The Lord identifies himself with the world of the little ones... He does not manipulate children nor make them a means to an end, but calls them and gives them a place in His plan of salvation for the world." (*cf. Message to the President of the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood, in L'Osservatore Romano, April 21, 1979*)

What, then, should be the attitude of responsible Christians and especially, of parents and workers in the mass media, who are conscious of their duties toward children?

First of all, they will have to accept the burden of fostering the child's human growth. The idea that one should be neutral

toward the child and allow it to grow up in a spontaneous fashion may seem to show respect for the child's personality but, in fact, it makes a dangerous lack of real concern.

Such lack of commitment to children is unacceptable. In fact, children need help if they are to develop to maturity. There is a rich treasure of burgeoning life in a child's heart, but the child is not able by itself to discern among solicitations it perceives within itself. It is adults — parents, educators, mass media people - who have the duty and are in a position to help them to be discerning.

Is not every child a bit like little Samuel of whom the Scriptures speak? Samuel was unable to interpret God's call and, therefore, asked help from his teacher who initially gave as his answer: "I did not call you. Go back to sleep." (*I Sm 3:5-6*) Shall we cultivate a similar attitude that may suppress the stimuli and calls to better things, or will we be able to help the child understand, as in fact Eli the priest finally did with Samuel: "If you are called, reply. 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"¹ (*I Sm 3:9*)

The possibilities and means you adults have at your disposal in this area are vast. You are in a position to stimulate the child's mind to listen or else to deaden it and even- God grant it may not happen- to poison it irreversibly. You must act in such a way that, thanks to an educational commitment on your part which does not kill the spirit but is always positive and invigorating, the child will understand and grasp the copious possibilities of personal development which enable it to become a creative member of society.

Encourage the child, you, especially, who work in the mass media, to pursue its quest of self-knowledge by offering it recreational and cultural programs that will help in its search for identity and a gradual entry into the human community. It is important, therefore, that in you program the child should not be a simple puppet or nonentity introduced for the purpose of bringing sentimental tears to the jaded and disenchanted eyes of apathetic viewers or hearers, but should rather be a genuine protagonist and a valid model for the young.

I am well aware that in urging you to such a human and poetic effort ("poetic" in the authentic sense of embodying the cre-

ativity of true art) I am implicitly asking you to give up deliberate attempts to gain the highest possible Nielsen rating and the immediate success it represents. Is not the real work of art one that makes its way without ambitioning success and that is born of real talent and a self-confident professional maturity?

As a brother I ask you not to exclude from your production plans the opportunity of making spiritual and religious appeal to the hearts of children. In saying this I am making a confident request for your collaboration in the spiritual work of the Church.

I also turn to you who are parents and educators and to you who are catechists or in charge of the various Church associations, and I ask you to reflect in a responsible way on *the problem of the use of the communications media in dealing with children*. This is a *matter of supreme importance* not only in an enlightened formation that will develop their critical sense and a self-discipline in the choice of programs and will promote their real growth as human beings, but also in the advancement of society as a whole in the direction of uprightness, truthfulness and brotherhood.

Dear brothers and sisters, dear sons and daughters, childhood is not just any period of human life, nor can we artificially isolate ourselves from it. As a son or daughter is flesh of the parents' flesh, so all children together are a living part of society. For this reason, what is at stake in the years of childhood is the fate of life in its entirety: the lives of children and of the rest of us, which is to say the lives of all.

Consequently, we shall serve children by setting a high value on life and by choosing the side of life at every level. We shall help them by showing their fastidious and sensitive eyes and hearts whatever is noblest and highest in life.

As I lift my gaze to this ideal, I seem to see before me the sweet face of the Mother of Jesus, who in her utter commitment to the service of her divine son, "kept all things in memory." (*Lk 2:51*) Inspired by her example, I pay homage to the mission all of you have in the area of education. Trusting that you will carry it out with the love its dignity calls for, I give you my heartfelt blessing.

Pope John Paul II

c. 14TH WCD1980: SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS AND FAMILY

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is in obedience to a direction of the Second Vatican Council that the Catholic Church celebrates (on the 18th of May) the World Day of Social Communications. In one of its Documents, the Council ordered that a day should be set aside each year in all the dioceses of the world, and that on that special day the faithful should pray for a particular intention, namely, that the Church's work in the field of communications might be effective. In addition each one was to reflect on his own duties regarding the communications media and to make a contribution for the support of the Church's social communications establishments and undertakings.

In the years since the Council's Decree on the Social Communications Media, the World Day has come to be an increasingly important event in the Church's life. In many countries, Catholics have been joined by the members of other Christian communities in the celebration; a practical manifestation of solidarity admirably in keeping with the ecumenical principle "not to do separately what we can do together". Let us thank God for it.

This year, in harmony with the theme of the coming Synod of Bishops which will be considering the problems confronting the family in the changed circumstances of modern times, we are invited to focus our reflection on the relationship between mass media and the family. One circumstance which intimately affects all families today is the prevalence of the social communications media: the press, the cinema, the radio, and television. It is a rare home indeed to which entry has not been gained by one or other of these. Where once, not very long ago, the family consisted of parents and children with the addition, perhaps, of a relative or two or a servant, now the circle is, in the sense, extended to admit the more or less permanent "company" of announcers, newsreaders, entertainers, commentators on sports and current affairs, with frequent visits as well as famous and influential people of every nationality, persuasion and profession.

It is a state of affairs with very great potential for good, but also with built-in risks that may not be disregarded. The family

of today suffers its share of the strong tensions and of the growing disorientation which is affecting modern social life in general. Certain of the stabilizing factors which in the past helped ensure its solid internal cohesion have now been diminished or have altogether disappeared. Formerly, there were compelling reciprocal interests and demands of tasks in which every member had to take part, to keep the family together in almost uninterrupted community throughout the working hours, thus permitting it to play a decisive part in the training and education of the children. In today's altered working conditions, however, the members of the family are often widely separated from each other for the greater part of the day.

The obvious difficulties of this situation can be seriously aggravated by the communications media. If media programmes frequently present a distorted picture of what a family is, or caricature family life, or if they misrepresent or play down the family's function as an educator; members of the family, accepting these distortions passively and uncritically, may quite easily begin to imitate the conduct and adopt the attitudes presented to them notwithstanding its deficiencies or superficiality. It may not occur to them to question the values implied, nor may they have the opportunity or the capacity, even if they do, to challenge the producers or to engage in constructive dialogue with them on the issues. There is the further risk, it is real and great, that the family may abdicate the responsibility, which rightly belongs to it, of shaping the children's attitudes to life and training their sense of values, and may cede it unwittingly to the media.

In this connection, it is wise to be alert to the growing influence which the mass media, and especially television, are exercising on the developing minds of the young, particularly as regards their vision of man, of the world and of relationships with others; for the vision furnished them by the media often differs profoundly from that which the family would wish to transmit to them. Parents, in many cases, do not show sufficient concern about this. Generally, they pay vigilant attention to the type of friends with whom their children associate, but do not exercise a similar vigilance regarding the ideas which the radio, the television, records, papers and comics carry into the "protected"

and "safe" intimacy of their homes. And so the mass media often enter the lives of the youngest members of the family with no possibility of the necessary explanations or corrections from parents or other educators which could neutralize any harmful elements and which could equally, employ the many valuable aspects to assist in the process by which children are gradually transformed into well-adjusted men and women.

It is undoubtedly true, on the other hand, that the social communications media can be a most valuable source of cultural enrichment for the family and for each of its members. Well-ordered reading, listening and viewing can contribute greatly to the stimulation of dialogue and interchange within the little community, and can create broadening of interests which will involve the family in the activities of the larger human family outside. Through the media, a certain participation is also frequently made possible in religious events occurring in distant places, something which is a special comfort to the sick and the housebound in particular. The family's consciousness of the universality of the Church, and its awareness of the problems of all races and peoples becomes more vivid. Thus the media can greatly assist in drawing the hearts of mankind closer together in sympathy, understanding and brotherhood; and the family can acquire a deep and loving "family feeling" for the whole human race. Benefits, these, which should not be underestimated.

But in order that the family may really draw such benefits from its use of the media and at the same time protect itself from any harmful effects, it is necessary that its members, particularly the parents, shall make more active use of their critical faculty. They must take a more searching look at the content of the programs offered to them. They must exercise judgment on the messages which the media are transmitting to them. Further, the family needs to take a deliberate decision regarding the amount of time it can responsibly afford to spend with the media, taking account of the various other activities and tasks which it must attend to.

In short: it is the duty of parents to educate themselves, and to educate their children, to appreciate the value of communication, to make an intelligent choice between the programs available to them, and then, having made that choice, to make a reasonable and con-

scious judgment as to whether the message coming from the program merits to be accepted or rejected. In families where this kind of control is exercised, the media will be less a danger to the well-being and proper functioning of the home, but will, on the contrary, be a valuable aid in preparing the gradually maturing younger members to take their place in society.

It is evident that the family needs to be able to count on the goodwill and integrity, as also on the sense of responsibility, of the media professionals, the publishers, editors, writers, the producers and directors of the broadcasting media, dramatists, commentators, entertainers, newsmen and women. All these are categories in which the laity are predominant. To all of them men and women, I want to repeat something which I said last year in one of my journeys abroad: "The great forces which shape the world – politics, the mass media, science, technology, culture, education, industry and work – are precisely the areas where lay people are especially competent to exercise their mission" (Limerick, October 1, 1979). Undoubtedly, mass media is one of the great forces which is shaping the world at this moment, and it is in the field of mass media that increasing numbers of talented and highly trained people are finding their lifework and vocation. The Church thinks of them today with love and concern and earnestly prays for them all. There are few vocations which make such demands on the energy, the dedication, the integrity and the conscience of a man and woman as are made by a profession in the media. At the same time, and let this not be forgotten, the truly dedicated professional communicator of today can be a force for good in the world which has few parallels.

I earnestly invite all media workers, therefore, to join us in the Church's day of reflection and prayer. We beg the Almighty together to deepen their consciousness of the tremendous opportunity which is theirs to serve mankind and shape the world towards good. We ask Him to endow them with the understanding, wisdom and courage which they will always need in bearing their awesome responsibility. We beg Him to keep them always intensely mindful of their audiences, which for the most part are families like their own, with overworked parents often too tired to be alert, and with children who are trusting, impressionable,

vulnerable, easily led. For remembering this, they will keep in mind also enormous consequences which their work may have for good or ill and will not easily be false to themselves or to principles of their noble calling.

My special Apostolic Blessing goes today to all mass media workers, to all families, and to all those who search through prayer, reflection and consultation to put the communications media to the best use for the service of man and the greater glory of God.

Pope John Paul II

**d. 28TH WCD 1994: TELEVISION AND THE FAMILY:
GUIDELINES FOR GOOD VIEWING**

Dear Brother and Sisters,

In the recent decades, television has spearheaded a communications revolution which has profoundly affected family life. Today television is a primary source of news, information and entertainment for countless families, shaping their attitudes and opinions, their values and patterns of behavior.

Television can enrich family life. It can draw family members closer together and foster their solidarity with other families and with the community at large. It can increase not only their general knowledge but also their religious knowledge, making it possible for them to hear God's word, to strengthen their religious identity, and to nurture their moral and spiritual life.

Television can also harm family life; by propagating degrading values and models of behavior, by broadcasting pornography and graphic depictions of brutal violence; by inculcating moral relativism and religious skepticism; by spreading distorted, manipulative accounts of news events and current issues; by carrying exploitative advertising that appeal to base instincts, and by glorifying false visions of life that obstruct the realization of mutual respect, of justice and of peace.

Even when television programmes themselves are not morally objectionable, television can still have negative effects on the family.

It can isolate family members in their private worlds, cutting them off from authentic interpersonal relations; it can also divide the family by alienating parents from children and children from parents.

Because the moral and spiritual renewal of the human family as a whole must be rooted in the authentic renewal of individual families, the theme for the 1994 World Communication Day – "Television and the Family: Guidelines for Good Viewing" – is especially timely, particularly during this International Year of the Family, when the world community is seeking ways to strengthen family life.

In this message, I wish especially to highlight the responsibility of parents, of the men and women of the television industry, of public authorities, and of those with pastoral and educational duties in the Church. In their hands lies the power to make television an ever more effective medium in helping families to fulfill their role as a force for moral and social renewal.

God has entrusted parents with the grave responsibility of helping their children "to seek the truth from their earlier years and to live in conformity with the truth, to seek the good and promote it" (*Message for the 1991 World Day of Peace, No. 3*). It is therefore their duty to lead their children to appreciate "whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious" (*Phil. 4:8*).

Thus, besides being discriminating viewers themselves, parents should actively help to form in their children viewing habits conducive to the sound development, human, moral and religious. Parents should inform themselves in advance about programme content and make a conscious choice on that basis for the good of the family – to watch or not to watch. Review and evaluations provided by religious agencies and other responsible groups – together with sound media education programmes – can be helpful in this regard. Parents should also discuss television in their children, guiding them to regulate the amount and quality of their viewing, and to perceive and judge the ethical values underlying particular programmes, because the family is the "privileged means for transmitting the religious and cultural values which help the person to acquire his or her own identity" (*Message for the 1994 World Day of Peace, No. 2*).

Forming children's viewing will sometimes mean simple turning off the television set: because there better things to do, because consideration for other family members requires it, or because indiscriminate television viewing can be harmful. Parents who make regular, prolonged use of television as a kind of baby-sitter surrender their role as the primary educators of their children. Such dependence on television can deprive family members of opportunities to interact with one another through conversation, shared activities and common prayer. Wise parents are also aware that even good programmes should be supplemented by other sources of news, entertainment, education and culture.

To guarantee that the television industry will safeguard the rights of the family, parents should express their legitimate concerns to media managers and producers. Sometimes they will find it useful to join with others in associations which represent their interest in relation to the media, to sponsors and advertisers, and to public authorities.

Television personnel — executives and managers, producers and directors, writers and researchers, journalists, on-camera performers and technical workers — all have serious moral responsibilities to the families that make up such a large part of their audience. In their professional and personal lives, those who work in television should be committed to the family as society's basic community of life, love, and solidarity. Recognizing the influence of the medium in which they work, they should promote sound moral and spiritual values, and avoid "anything that could harm the family in its existence, its stability, its balance and its happiness," including "eroticism or violence, the defense of divorce or of antisocial attitudes among young people" (*Paul VI, Message for the 1969 World Communication Day, No. 2*).

Television is often required to deal with serious themes: with human weakness and sin, and their consequences for individuals and society; with the failings of social institutions, including government and religious: with weighty questions about the meaning of life. It should treat these subjects responsibly- without sensationalism and with a sincere concern for the good of society; as well as with scrupulous regard for the truth. "The truth shall make you free" (*Jn 8:32*),

Jesus said, and ultimately all truth has its foundation in God, who is also the source of our freedom and creativity.

In fulfilling its public responsibilities, the television industry should develop and observe a code of ethics which includes a commitment to serving the needs of families and to promoting values supportive of family life. Media councils, with members from the industry and the general public, are also a highly desirable way of making television more responsive to the needs and values of his audiences.

Whether television channels are under public or private management, they represent a public trust for the service of the common good; they are not the mere private preserve of commercial interest or an instrument of power or propaganda for social, economic or political elites; they exist to serve the well-being of society as a whole.

Thus, as fundamental "cell" of society, the family deserves to be assisted and defended by appropriate measures of the State and other institutions (cf. *Message for the 1994 World Day of Peace, No. 5*). This points to certain responsibilities on the part of public authorities where television is concerned.

Recognizing the importance of a free exchange of ideas and information, the Church supports freedom of speech and to the press (cf. *Gaudium et Spes, 59*). At the same time, she insists that "the rights of individuals, families and society itself to privacy, public decency and the protection of basic values" demand to be respected (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pornography and Violence in the Media: A Pastoral, No. 21*). Public authorities are invited to set and enforce reasonable ethical standards for programming which will foster the human and religious values on which family life is built, and will discourage whatever is harmful. They should also encourage dialogue between the television industry and the public, providing structures and forums to make this possible.

Church-related agencies, for their part, render an excellent service to families by offering them media education and film and programme evaluation. Where resources permit, Church communications agencies can also help families by producing and

disseminating family-oriented programming, or by promoting such programming. Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses should consistently make the "family dimension" of television part of their pastoral planning for communications (cf. *Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Aetatis Novae, 21-23*).

Since television professionals are engaged in presenting a vision of life to a vast audience, which includes children and young people, they can profit from pastoral ministry of the Church, which can help them appreciate those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human and family life. "Typically, pastoral programmes of this sort should include ongoing formation which will help these men and women – of many of whom sincerely wish to know and to do what is ethically and moral right – to integrate moral norms ever more fully into their professional works as well as their private lives" (ibid., 19).

The family, founded on marriage, is a unique communication of persons which God has made the "natural and fundamental group unit of society" (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 16, 3*). Television and other communications media have immense power to sustain and strengthen such communion within the family, as well as solidarity with other families which television as a communications media has made and can make, the Church – herself a communion in the truth and love of Jesus Christ, the World of God – takes the occasion of World Communications Day 1994 to encourage families themselves, media personnel and public authorities to realize to the full their noble calling to strengthen and promote society's first and most vital community, the family.

Pope John Paul II

**e. 38TH WCD 2004: THE MEDIA AND THE FAMILY:
A RISK AND A RICHNESS**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The extraordinary growth of the communications media and their increased availability has brought exceptional opportunities for enriching the lives not only of individuals, but also of families. At the same time, families today face new challenges

arising from the varied and often contradictory messages presented by the mass media. The theme chosen for the 2004 World Communications Day – "The Media and the Family: A Risk and a Richness" – is a timely one, for it invites sober reflection on the use which families make of the media and, in turn, on the way that families and family concerns are treated by the media.

This year's theme is also a reminder to everyone, both communicators and those whom they address, that all communication has a moral dimension. As the Lord himself has said, it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (*cf. Mt 12:34-35*). People grow or diminish in moral stature by the words which they speak and the messages which they choose to hear. Consequently, wisdom and discernment in the use of the media are particularly called for on the part of communications professionals, parents and educators, for their decisions greatly affect children and young people for whom they are responsible, and who are ultimately the future of society.

Thanks to the unprecedented expansion of the communications market in recent decades, many families throughout the world, even those of quite modest means, now have access in their own homes to immense and varied media resources. As a result, they enjoy virtually unlimited opportunities for information, education, cultural expansion, and even spiritual growth – opportunities that far exceed those available to most families in earlier times.

Yet these same media also have the capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality. This power either to reinforce or override traditional values like religion, culture, and family was clearly seen by the Second Vatican Council, which taught that "if the media are to be correctly employed, it is essential that all who use them know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully" (*Inter Mirifica*, 4). Communication in any form must always be inspired by the ethical criterion of respect for the truth and for the dignity of the human person.

These considerations apply in particular to the treatment of the family in the media. On the one hand, marriage and family life are frequently depicted in a sensitive manner, realistic but also

sympathetic, that celebrates virtues like love, fidelity, forgiveness, and generous self-giving for others. This is true also of media presentations which recognize the failures and disappointments inevitably experienced by married couples and families — tensions, conflicts, setbacks, evil choices and hurtful deeds — yet at the same time make an effort to separate right from wrong, to distinguish true love from its counterfeits, and to show the irreplaceable importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society.

On the other hand, the family and family life are all too often inadequately portrayed in the media. Infidelity, sexual activity outside of marriage, and the absence of a moral and spiritual vision of the marriage covenant are depicted uncritically, while positive support is at times given to divorce, contraception, abortion and homosexuality. Such portrayals, by promoting causes inimical to marriage and the family, are detrimental to the common good of society.

Conscientious reflection on the ethical dimension of communications should issue in practical initiatives aimed at eliminating the risks to the well-being of the family posed by the media and ensuring that these powerful instruments of communication will remain genuine sources of enrichment. A special responsibility in this regard lies with communicators themselves, with public authorities, and with parents.

Pope Paul VI pointed out that professional communicators should "know and respect the needs of the family, and this sometimes presupposes in them true courage, and always a high sense of responsibility" (*Message for the 1969 World Communications Day*). It is not so easy to resist commercial pressures or the demands of conformity to secular ideologies, but that is what responsible communicators must do. The stakes are high, since every attack on the fundamental value of the family is an attack on the true good of humanity.

Public authorities themselves have a serious duty to uphold marriage and the family for the sake of society itself. Instead, many now accept and act upon the unsound libertarian arguments of groups which advocate practices which contribute to the grave phenomenon of family crisis and the weakening of the very concept of the family.

Without resorting to censorship, it is imperative that public authorities set in place regulatory policies and procedures to ensure that the media do not act against the good of the family. Family representatives should be part of this policy-making.

Policy-makers in the media and in the public sector also must work for an equitable distribution of media resources on the national and international levels, while respecting the integrity of traditional cultures. The media should not appear to have an agenda hostile to the sound family values of traditional cultures or the goal of replacing those values, as part of a process of globalization, with the secularized values of consumer society.

Parents, as the primary and most important educators of their children, are also the first to teach them about the media. They are called to train their offspring in the "moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media" in the home (*Familiaris Consortio*, 76). When parents do that consistently and well, family life is greatly enriched. Even very young children can be taught important lessons about the media: that they are produced by people anxious to communicate messages; that these are often messages to do something - to buy a product, to engage in dubious behaviour - that is not in the child's best interests or in accord with moral truth; that children should not uncritically accept or imitate what they find in the media.

Parents also need to regulate the use of media in the home. This would include planning and scheduling media use, strictly limiting the time children devote to media, making entertainment a family experience, putting some media entirely off limits and periodically excluding all of them for the sake of other family activities. Above all, parents should give good example to children by their own thoughtful and selective use of media. Often they will find it helpful to join with other families to study and discuss the problems and opportunities presented by the use of the media. Families should be outspoken in telling producers, advertisers, and public authorities what they like and dislike.

The media of social communications have an enormous positive potential for promoting sound human and family values and thus contributing to the renewal of society. In view of their great

power to shape ideas and influence behaviour, professional communicators should recognize that they have a moral responsibility not only to give families all possible encouragement, assistance, and support to that end, but also to exercise wisdom, good judgment and fairness in their presentation of issues involving sexuality, marriage and family life.

The media are welcomed daily as a familiar guest in many homes and families. On this World Communications Day I encourage professional communicators and families alike to acknowledge this unique privilege and the accountability which it entails. May all engaged in the field of communications recognize that they are truly "stewards and administrators of an immense spiritual power that belongs to the patrimony of mankind and is meant to enrich the whole of the human community" (*Address to Communications Specialists, Los Angeles, 15 September 1987, 8*). And may families always be able to find in the media a source of support, encouragement and inspiration as they strive to live as a community of life and love, to train young people in sound moral values, and to advance a culture of solidarity, freedom and peace.

Pope John Paul II

III. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION: THE HOLY SEE

FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO: APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION OF POPE JOHN PAUL II: THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD FROM NOVEMBER 22, 1981¹

Introduction

This exhortation is based on the Synod of bishops from September 26 to October 25, 1980 in Rome on the role of the Christian family. This Synod followed the ones on Evangelization and the one on Catechesis both of which had also a section on social

¹ cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, (Ed.) *Church and Social Communication. Basic Documents.* (Logos Publications, Inc. Manila).1997. pp.323-324.

communication. In a special paragraph (No. 76), the present document speaks about the "Recipients and agents of social communications" in relation to the family. The text refers to the effects of social communications media on family and education and calls for a proper media-education, i.e., how to critically use and value the communications media and family oriented programs. The text quotes extensively from the Pontifical messages for the World Communication Days of 1969, 1980 and 1981.

Within the Apostolic Exhortation the paragraph on social communication is under the pastoral care section on the "Agents of pastoral care of the Family" where communications follow the bishops, the religious and lay specialists as agents of pastoral care... The communication text is followed by the concluding chapter of the document on the pastoral care of the family in difficult cases.

"(76). This very important category in modern life deserves a word of its own. It is well known that the means of social communication 'affect, and often profoundly, the minds of those who use them, under the effective and intellectual aspect and also under the moral and religious aspect', especially in the case of young people. (Paul VI, Message for the Third Social Communication Day, [7 April 1969]): AAS 61 [1969], 455) They can thus exercise a beneficial influence on the life and habits of the family and on the education of children, but at the same time they also conceal 'snares and dangers that cannot be ignored'. (John Paul II, Message for the 1980 World Communication Day [1 May 1980], *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, II, I*, [1980], 1042) They could also unfortunately happens in various countries of the world-for divisive ideologies and distorted ways of looking at life, the family, religion and morality, attitudes that lack respect for man's true dignity and destiny.

"This danger is all the more real in as much as 'the modern life style-especially in the more industrialized nations- all too often causes families to abandon their responsibility to educate their children. Evasion of this duty is made easy for them by the presence of television and certain publications in the home, and in this way they keep their children's time and energies preoccupied'. (John Paul II, Message for the 1981 World Communications Day [10 May 1981], 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22 May

1981) Hence 'the duty ... to protect the young from the forms of aggression they are subjected to by the mass media', and to ensure that the use of the media in the family is carefully regulated. Families should also take care to seek for their children other forms of entertainment that more wholesome, useful and physically, morally and spiritually formative, 'to develop and use to advantage' the free time of the young and direct their energies'.(Ibid.)

"Furthermore, because the means of social communication, like the school and the environment, often have notable influence on the formation of children, parents as recipients must actively ensure the moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media, by discovering what effect they have on their children and by controlling the use of the media in such a way as to 'train the conscience of their children to express calm and objective judgments, which will then guide them in the choice or rejection of programmes available'.(Paul VI, *Message for the Third Communications Day: ASS 61 [1969], 456*)

'With equal commitment parents will endeavor to influence the selection and the preparation of the programmes themselves, by keeping in contact – through suitable initiatives – with those in charge of the various phases of production and transmission. In this way, they will ensure that the fundamental human values that form part of the true good society are not ignored or deliberately attacked. Rather they will ensure the broadcasting of programmes that present in the right light family problems and their proper solution. In this regard my venerated predecessor Paul VI wrote: "Producers must know and respect the needs of the family, and this sometimes presupposes in them true courage, and always a high sense of responsibility. In fact they are expected to avoid anything that could harm the family in its existence, its stability, its balance and its happiness. Every attack on the fundamental value of the family-meaning eroticism or violence, the defense of divorce or of antisocial attitudes among young people- is an attack on the true good of man'. (Ibid)

"I myself, on the a similar occasion, pointed out that families 'to a considerable extent need to be able to count the good will, integrity and sense of responsibility of the media professionals-publishers, writers, producers, directors, playwrights, newsmen,

commentators and actors'(John Paul II, Message for the 1980 World Communication Day [1 May 1980], *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, I, [1980], 1044) It is therefore also the duty if the Church to continue to devote every care to these categories, at the same time encouraging and supporting Catholics who feel the call and have the necessary talents, to take up this sensitive type of work."

WORLD COMMUNICATION DAYS ON FAMILY

World Communication Day is the only special day proposed by the second Vatican Council through its decree *Inter Mirifica* on Social Communication (1963). Since 1967, this day is celebrated every year and a special theme is always given. Since 1969, the third celebration, "Family and Communication" has been five times the theme of such communication days. A study of all these Pontifical messages from Paul VI to John Paul II shows this subject to be a special concern of the Church. While three messages are on general themes (1969, 1980, 2004), two are more specialized. The message for 1979 talks about the protection of children, and in 1994 guidelines for TV viewing in the family became the main focus.

The first message of Pope Paul VI in 1969 already set the tone by stating that the media are more and more penetrating families up to their center. They increasingly determine time tables, establish habits and become subject of discussion and conversation of families. They have an impact on the intellect and emotions of family members. This way, they can contribute to the intellectual and emotional development of young people, contribute to the cultural heritage of families but also make them aware of burning issues like justice and peace.

On the other side, the media can also become a negative influence and it is also up to the communicators' presentations how they are used. Educational institutions should also see their responsibility for proper and sometimes critical use of the media. Dialogue between families and producers will help. Families themselves should also encourage members to become themselves good communicators.

Similar ideas were expressed in 1980 where the communication of the family was treated in view of the Synod of Family which took place that year. Here, the mass media are seen as part of the extended family and because of this, a critical and discerning use is needed especially when the vision of the media differs from the one of the family. The apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of that synod (1981), repeats some of the points raised in the annual pontifical messages.

The protection of children as a theme in 1979 was triggered by the United Nations' declaration of that year as the Year of the Child. The theme was announced by Pope Paul VI before his death, but the message came from his successor, Pope John Paul II, which was his first World Communication Day message in his pontificate. Children have the right to be respected and promoted by and through the media. After all, the childhood of today determines the society of today. Since children are "like soft wax," they are especially open to stimuli coming from outside.

The guidelines for TV use in and for the families (1994) especially point to the responsibility of parents. TV production and use must be built on the code of ethics. They are a public trust and therefore also, in the responsibility of public authorities. There are also calls for a special pastoral ministry for professionals and proper media education.

The 2004 address of Pope John Paul II focuses on the "risk and richness" of the means of communication, which are reflected in the moral dimension needing wisdom and discernment. The Pope feels that the family very often is not portrayed adequately in media productions. It is especially the responsibility of communicators themselves to determine such a situation, and this concern should be challenged but at the same time supported.

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