

**“FAMILIES IN ASIA,  
SERVING AND BEING SERVED”**

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**FINAL STATEMENTS AND  
SURVEY ON FAMILY MINISTRY**

**Prepared by  
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*We need to see the family as a complex system which today is stressed by so many changes and challenges. We need to work together to care for the whole family with its multi-faceted needs. Our dioceses and parishes have excellent structures and gifted people, we do not need to invent anything new but we need to believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in the family and in the Laity as a whole.*

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**\* BILA - Bishops’ Institute for Lay Apostolate**

**I. BILA I ON THE FAMILY: AVENUES/APPROACHES TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES IN PASTORAL CARE TO FAMILIES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

*11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2007, Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand*

*“The future of humanity passes by way of the family”  
John Paul II*

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 In the final document of the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in Korea in 2004, the bishops expressed the need for clear guidelines to respond to the realities of changes in family values and interpersonal relationships. This Bishops’ Institute of Lay Apostolate (BILA) I on the family is a part of the different efforts made with the following specific objectives:

- To reflect together how the family is affected by the policies of globalization and present day work culture in Asia, materialism, consumerism, misuse of internet, etc.
- To focus on the different avenues/approaches to family ministry that can be used to respond to the challenges in pastoral care to families in the 21st century.
- To organize a BILA I on the family to promote networking for sharing resources and training personnel to assist the younger churches in Asia.

1.2 Seventy six delegates from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand gathered together at the Redemptorist Centre, Pattaya, Thailand from 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2007 for the first BILA on the Family. The delegates included 10 bishops, laity, sisters and priests from the Episcopal Commissions of Family in Asia.

## II. INSIGHTS - FAMILY SITUATION IN ASIA

### 2.1 *From the sharing from different countries:*

1. The family is a receptacle of all that is affecting society.
2. The growing divide between the rich and the poor makes basic needs like food, water, healthcare and education inaccessible to a growing number of people.
3. The large scale migration for employment leaves a spouse and children behind.
4. The new concept of marriage starting with 'live-in' relationships, postponing marriage commitment, lacking permanency, no children and no responsibility.
5. The new work culture with unlimited working hours & graveyard shifts which hamper couple and parent/child relationships.
6. The growing affluence in the middle class has affected traditional family values which are being eroded by consumerism, individualism and media onslaught.
7. The growing divorce rate due to poor spousal relationship often arising out of the socio-economic forces, non-transparency and shallow faith.
8. We learned from one another their approaches in responding to the challenges (especially India, Singapore and Hong Kong).
9. The challenges posed to us by the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand from us a more structured and systematic approach to family ministry, which should include research.

### 2.2 *From the sharing of personal experiences:*

1. Today the number of non-traditional families is on the increase.
2. Victims of broken marriages must be treated with the compassion of Jesus, remembering that we are dealing with feelings of persons and not a 'case'.
3. The need for healing, to enable victims to deal with the pain of a broken marriage.

4. Pastoral care to families has to be rooted in compassion and sensitivity, instead of being judgmental because love should guide all our actions.
5. Marriage is a life-long vocation with minimal preparation which is insufficient and should be addressed urgently.
6. Inter-religious marriage is a reality and on the rise. With respect, tolerance and understanding of both partners, it can be a good opportunity for inter-religious dialogue. Youth have to be made aware of the implications of an interfaith marriage.
7. Greater awareness and preparation for both partners in a mixed marriage is necessary for understanding the implications and values of creating harmonious and stable homes with children who grow up as moral and upright human beings.
8. The proliferation of lay family movements have contributed to support and strengthening of families and is indicative of the spirit working within the Church.
9. Though migration of parents for work causes much pain and brokenness in families, especially among children/youth, a vibrant youth ministry can help them rise above their pain to become 'hope givers' in their families. Love and concern of neighbours in such situations will alleviate the problems.
10. The daily sessions of Gospel sharing made us realize its importance to keep us in touch with the values of Jesus to build families and communities of love and care, and for responding to the present challenges faced by families.

### *2.3 From the inputs:*

1. Lowering of labour standards is causing extreme stress and hardships to families. The Church plays an important role as a moral and objective force to speak out against the injustices to workers and to minimize inequalities in society.

2. The social neglect of the needs of migrant workers.
3. Parents can act as consultants/active players in youth ministry.
4. The neighbourhood community (SCC/BEC) can act as an extended family to support families that are in difficult situations.
5. We need to look upon the family as a sanctuary, where the dignity and sacredness of each person is valued and upheld.
6. Families should stay in touch with Jesus through prayer for we become what we pray.
7. The Eucharist should be the source of strength of family life. Our deepest nature and calling is to be “One Bread, One Body, One People”.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To train a body of lay people and clergy who will collaborate with experts to accompany families through their difficult situations.
2. Ongoing formation programmes for families starting with youth, marriage preparation, parenting, catechesis and building strong relationships should be offered at the diocesan and parish levels.
3. Nurture mutual support groups – couple to couple – single parents – mixed marriages – estranged spouses – children/youth/families of migrant workers.
4. Foster a strong prayer-life to sustain families.
5. Outreach to Catholics married outside the Church.
6. Help men to accept their fatherhood and joint responsibility in the family.
7. Concrete programmes for post-annulment & post-divorce healing to cope with the pain of break up.
8. Structured form of accompanying mixed/interfaith marriages.
9. Recognizing that Family is the basic unit of the Church and society, our approach to Family Ministry has to be

holistic, by establishing connectivity with other ministries related to the family.

10. Seminary formation should include an orientation to family life and SCCs/BECs as well as an exposure to these areas.
  11. Individual countries to have a structure to network, implement the recommendations and support families.
  12. To have a Commission on Family and a full time staff in each diocese.
  13. FABC Office of Laity & Family to link with the Episcopal commission for family.
- *At the regional level*
1. Networking and collaboration to share expertise /resources among countries.
  2. Exchange information
  3. Form a pastoral core group

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Recognizing that the family is the basic unit of the church and society and that the problems faced by families are inter-related, our approach to Family Ministry has to be holistic and integrated by establishing connectivity with other ministries, government offices and NGOs.

The Small Christian Community (SCC) as a new way of being Church, should be made a pastoral priority to build families. SCCs are important to help families respond to the present challenges faced by them.

We thank the FABC Office of Laity & Family, AsIPA and Youth Desk for organizing this BILA I on the Family to help broaden our perspective on family ministry to make it more relevant in meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **II. BILA II ON FAMILY: FAMILIES IN ASIA, SERVING AND BEING SERVED**

*20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013, Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. We, the participants of the second Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate (BILA II) on Family, wish to thank Almighty God for the institution of marriage and Family and ask His continued blessings on our families. This BILA II on Family reflected on the realities and the challenges facing families in Asia today in the context of our very diverse countries.
2. Delegates and resource persons from 17 countries<sup>1</sup> including eleven bishops met at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre of Kuala Lumpur Archdiocese in West Malaysia from 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013. Co-organised by the FABC Office of Laity & Family and the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur, Family Life Commission, we enjoyed the gracious hospitality of our Malaysian hosts.
3. The first BILA on Family was held in Thailand from 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2007 following the FABC Plenary Assembly in 2006 in Korea which had as its focus, the Family. The first meeting discussed the urgently needed "Avenues/Approaches to Respond to Challenges in Pastoral Care to Families in the 21st Century".
4. In this second BILA on Family, we have focused our attention on the mission of the family as the Domestic Church; the mission within the family itself and towards the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam.

## II. LIGHTS

5. Sharing the realities of our families and situations, we were very encouraged by the many lights and graces we have received in these times. We are truly grateful to all those families who have courageously and faithfully lived their mission to be schools of faith and love, first educators of their children as well as being aware of their responsibility to transform society. Some areas of positive development are:
  - 1) A more widespread availability of the teachings of the Church on marriage as a Sacrament, and on human Sexuality.
  - 2) The presence of Family Commissions and Family Ministry groups at the national, diocesan and parish levels.
  - 3) A greater awareness of the importance of family and marriage and their impact on society.
  - 4) An increase in the number and quality of Small Christian Communities or Basic Ecclesial Communities which have provided a 'home for everyone' where families gather, share faith, joys and sorrows and receive much consolation.
  - 5) Ecclesial movements for families which are playing an effective role in the faith formation and transformation of families.
  - 6) An increased engagement in advocating for pro-family policies, as well as addressing gaps in family support and assistance.
  - 7) The initiatives taken by families to gather in communities to reach out to others in solidarity.
  - 8) Greater emphasis on a more systematic and professional training for those in Family ministry.



- 9) Many services and outreach programmes to assist and educate families in church and in society.
- 10) Increased use of social / mass media as a means of reaching out to families.
- 11) Increased awareness of the need for work-life balance across Governments and Civil Society.

### **III. SHADOWS**

6. However, many shadows and drawbacks remain. Some of those we discussed were:
  - 1) Family ministry at parish and diocesan levels remains under-developed and often isolated and fragmented into programmes, events and activities.
  - 2) A lack of integration among family ecclesial movements, small Christian communities, parish ministries in the light of a vision and Church teachings.
  - 3) Widespread ignorance of the Sacrament of Matrimony as a Sacrament at the service of communion and the grace and gift of the sacrament.
  - 4) The tendency to treat families as objects of care rather than agents of the new evangelization.
  - 5) Insufficient help to families to deepen their spirituality of communion and to live as witnesses to reconciliation.
  - 6) A rise of pornography as an entertainment industry and the increased objectification and commodification of sex which wrecks marriages and undermines human dignity.
  - 7) An increase in the number of young people delaying marriage and more people remaining unmarried due to poverty or an unwillingness to commit to a long term relationship.
  - 8) Insufficient positive use of mass media to counter their negative influences.
  - 9) Families where both parents work long hours face serious difficulties in the transmission of values especially in these very challenging times.

- 10) The growing number of divorces and legislation in favour of same-sex marriages.
- 11) The scourge of abortion, euthanasia and culture of death.
- 12) The emergence of a contraceptive mentality where life is perceived not as a blessing, but as a burden and danger against which we need to protect ourselves.
- 13) In the home countries of migrant workers or foreign domestic workers, families often lack the means necessary for survival, such as food, work, housing, medicine, education and other most elementary freedoms. This gives rise to migration of family members and splits up families resulting in: children growing up without parents and who have to depend on the extended family to transmit faith and values.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

7. In the light of all these challenges, we recognise that there is an urgent need to work more collaboratively and systematically to “support, illuminate & assist families” through our Family Apostolates and Ministries.
  - 1) We urge all those providing marriage and family programmes; youth, women, family and human development commissions / desks to work together with the Small Christian Communities and Ecclesial movements to share and strengthen their common pastoral faith vision and to understand the context and world view of families in order to animate and support whole families more effectively and more holistically.
  - 2) In today’s context of interrelatedness and interdependence we urge all those in family ministry to collaborate and network more effectively with government and civil society agencies, and faith based organizations which work for the family.
  - 3) We strongly encourage all those working for the family to be guided and inspired in their approaches and ministries by the Church’s teaching especially contained

in 'Familiaris Consortio'(1981) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).

- 4) We exhort that all those who work in Family ministry (clergy, religious and laity) to recognise the family as active and co-creative agents of love and service, with the potential to evangelize and nurture vocations.
- 5) As families are to play a greater role in the mission of New Evangelization which is a matter of urgency, we recommend that priority be given to preparing and empowering them to become "creative subjects of evangelization" (1980 JPII address to Synod of Bishops).
- 6) That those in Family ministry see themselves as defenders of life and where needed, advocate for life from conception to death.
- 7) That our family ministries take special care of those hurting families, the poor and marginalised families struggling with daily needs.
- 8) Countries employing migrant workers can do better to look after the needs and dignity of migrant communities, as well as to highlight conditions that exploit migrants. While providing pastoral care for migrants we should consider advocating for the rights of migrants to have a family and to remain with their families. Governments and churches need to acknowledge that the separation of families works against the good of the human person and society and negatively impacts job performance.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

8. We want to assure families and especially parents that they can be confident of the grace of their marriage and can play their irreplaceable role in developing loving disciples for Christ which no other institution or school or agency can achieve. We encourage parents to spend more time together as families in ways that will enable the whole family to grow to full human and Christian maturity founded on the Word of God. (FC2)

9. The Catholic Family in Asia is being called to a deeper Spirituality of Communion which is founded on the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. Hence, the Christian Family should live out their life of Communion in Jesus Christ in Union with the Holy Spirit, towards the Father.
10. The Catholic Family in Asia is also called to become agent of the New Evangelization for the transmission of faith.
11. We are inspired and energised to return to our ministries and organisations to work collaboratively and with more determination; to study our contexts and the needs of our families. We are challenged to go out to all families and not to serve only those who come to us. Our ministry should bring us closer to Christ and to the families we serve.
12. We would like to thank especially our host, Archbishop Murphy Pakiam of the Archdiocese of Kuala Lumpur and his team in the Family Life Commission. Thanks also to the FABC Office of Laity and Family and our benefactors. We are truly grateful for this experience of community and family during this BILA II on Family and ask Mary our Mother to continue to guide the churches in Asia to build up loving and serving families and communities.

### **III. SURVEY ON FAMILY MINISTRY IN 14 PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES/REGIONS/DIOCESES**

#### **Introduction**

“The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live

with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple. As the French bishops have taught, it is not born “of loving sentiment, ephemeral by definition, but from the depth of the obligation assumed by the spouses who accept to enter a total communion of life”. *Evangelii Gaudium* Para 66.

This survey was conducted in February 2013 in preparation for an Asian Conference on the Family – BILA II, in Kuala Lumpur, Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre. Its aims were two-fold:

1. To discover the basic reality of family ministry at national or diocesan level and
2. To try and raise awareness among the family ministry offices and commissions of their particular focus in order to nudge them towards more partnerships and collaboration across ministries.

The ministry to the family has to be an integrated and collaborative work as the field is so vast. There is an urgent need to work with BEC / SCC Groups, Youth commissions, laity in all spheres, movements, Women’s Desks or commissions and women’s rights groups, Catechetical Commissions and ministries as well as a whole host of other movements and offices at national and local levels. We need to see the family as a complex system which today is stressed by so many changes and challenges. We need to work together to care for the whole family with its multi-faceted needs. Our dioceses and parishes have excellent structures and gifted people, we do not need to invent anything new but we need to believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in the family and in the Laity as a whole.

Among the major findings of this survey is that the resources for family ministry are usually spent on those who are coming to our programmes or counselling services and often the poor are

not those who would take the initiative to attend such programmes. While some countries and ministries are focused on the poor and on those who are on the margins, our ministries are not set up to go out to the peripheries as Pope Francis is urging us to do. We have to explore more deeply what we mean by MINISTRY. As too often the family ministry consists of a series of programmes and or a slew of services operating out of a centre or workshops which are very useful, for example on parenting or natural family planning, but again, the question of going out to those in need may be missing.

**Respondents to the Survey came from Family Commissions and Ministries in:**

- |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Bangladesh                 | 8. Myanmar             |
| 2. East Timor                 | 9. Singapore           |
| 3. Hong Kong                  | 10. Sri Lanka (Jaffna) |
| 4. Indonesia                  | 11. Sri Lanka (Mannar) |
| 5. Malaysia(Kota<br>Kinabalu) | 12. Taiwan             |
| 6. Malaysia (Kuching)         | 13. Thailand           |
| 7. Malaysia (Penang)          | 14. Vietnam            |

In Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, we could say that representation is at diocesan level and not at national level. The sample size of this survey is not sufficient to draw any scientific conclusions. Those who have been in family ministry for some time however will recognize that the outcomes are quite close to our realities.

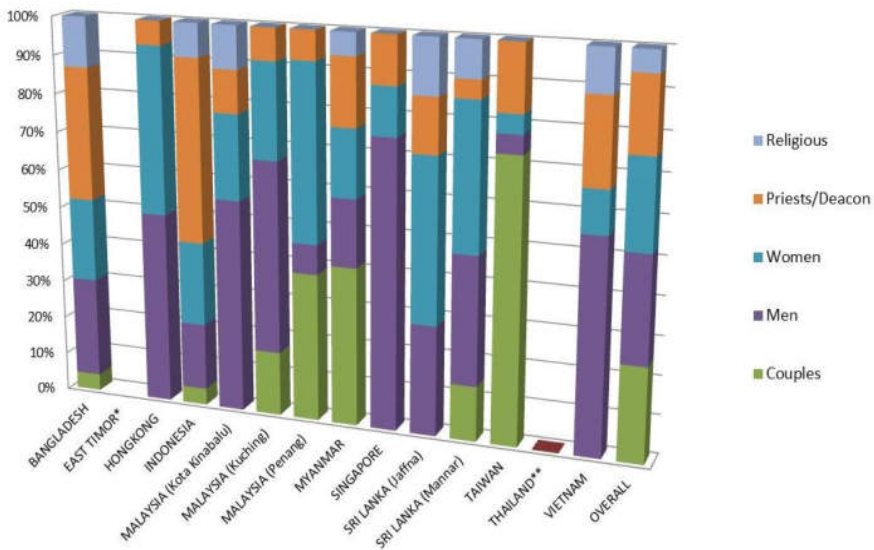
**The situation of family ministry**

It is worth noting that more and more couples are in charge of Family Commissions or ministries at national or diocesan level. This is also the case because a great number of our personnel are taken from among members of the Family movements and Programmes that emphasize the need to work together.

Judging from the participants at the various meetings for the Family organized regionally and by the FABC OLF, the active members of family ministry services are from the Family movements like Couples for Christ, Catholic Family and Social Movement, Marriage Encounter groups, Pro-Life groups as well as Counsellors.

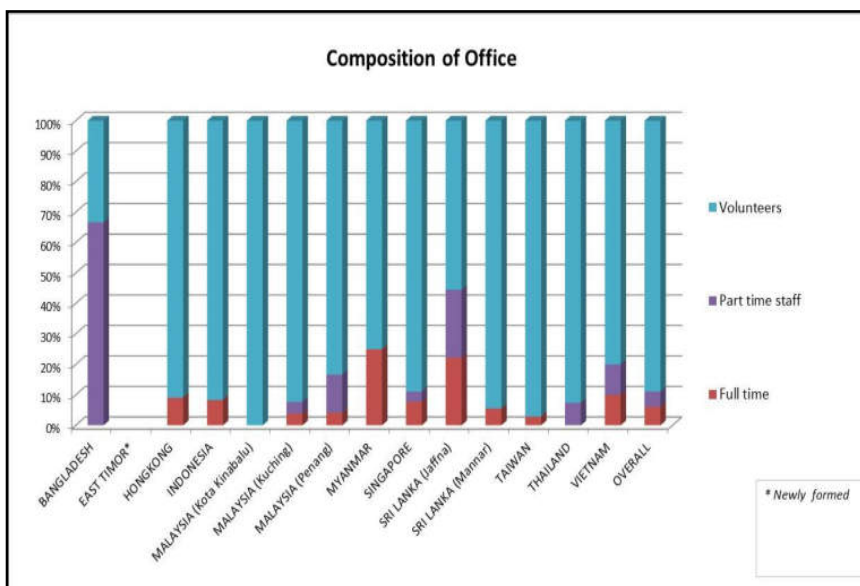
There is no pattern discernible on the distribution of men and women serving in family ministry in the different countries. It would seem that it depends on availability and qualifications. It would also seem that it is one ministry that has more lay persons serving than clergy or religious.

**Composition of Commission/Ministry**



East Timor was just setting out to establish a family ministry at the time of the survey and Thailand had not filled in the whole survey. They have a well-developed structure for family ministry in Thailand with regular meetings and programmes.

The very heavy dependence on volunteers could mean that family ministry is not considered a pastoral priority or it could mean that there are so many willing and qualified people who are giving their time with no need for remuneration.



The presence of personnel who are not likely to stay for more than a year or two could be one reason we found that many Family Commissions and Ministries just continue hosting programmes run by the same couples or individuals. Long term planning and outreach is difficult to sustain if personnel is not stable and Diocesan or National Church policies do not support a long term vision.

### Family Ministry Programmes

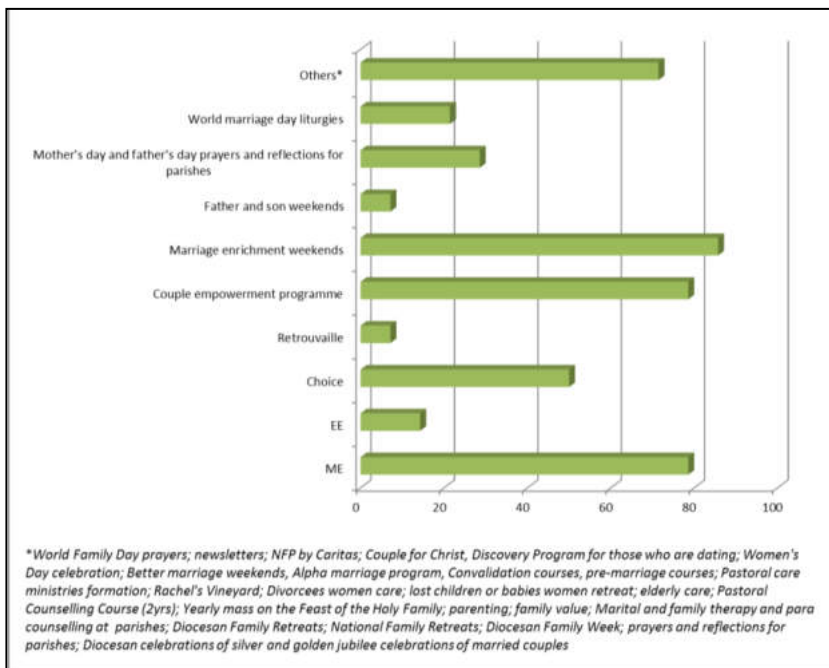
Programmes, like some of those which are copyright and come pre-packaged have a hard time to contextualize if we are trying to prepare couples for marriage and real life. For example, in this digital age, our marriage preparation or post marriage



programmes should include rigorous training in media literacy, enabling couples to control their use of digital devices which can block real communication.

Among the programmes provided by the Family Ministry services we have those that cater to special needs, for example, for those who are single once more through death or separation, those who are suffering after an abortion, those who have marriages that are very vulnerable and wounded.

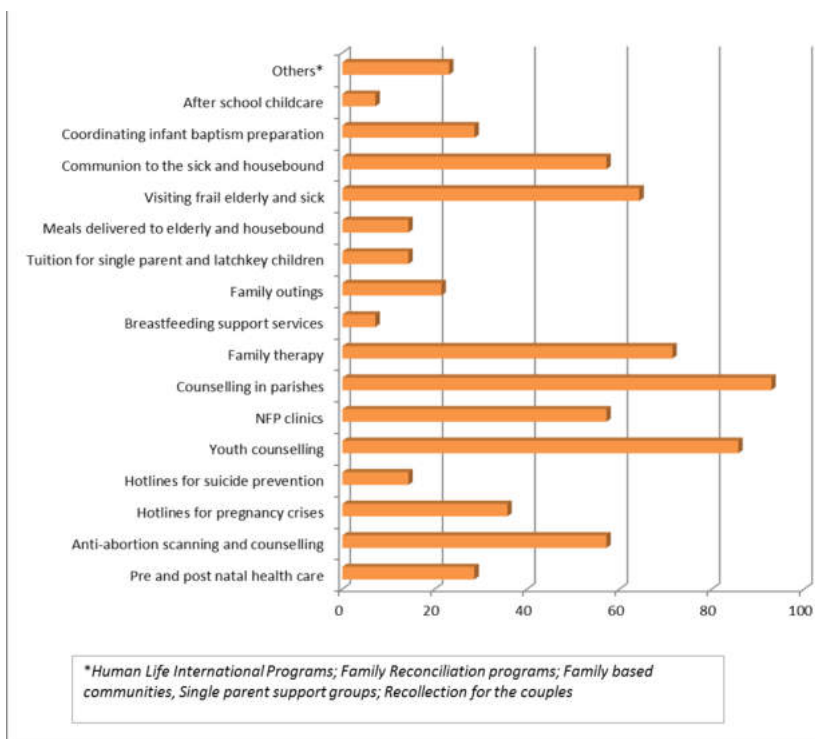
There is another category of programmes that looks into the Spirituality of family life – the retreats and weekends offered to families to pray, reflect and strengthen marriages.



The usual, successful and long standing programmes like Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, Choice, Retrouvaille and marriage enrichment programmes are the main stay of most

of those doing family ministry. One matter of concern is that the Catholic Family in many urban settings has been receiving this type of service and ministry for the past 30 years but the Catholic Family does not seem to do better than other families in the same culture and society. What can we do so that there is lasting, positive impact on the family and not only on a small number who may leave us rather complacent? The divorce, pre-marital sex, co-habitation statistics in some countries where they are available show a lack of translation of the many programmes into actual behavior in married couples. We need to address urgently the education of men and boys who are still the dominant members of most Asian societies.

### Services Provided by Family Ministries



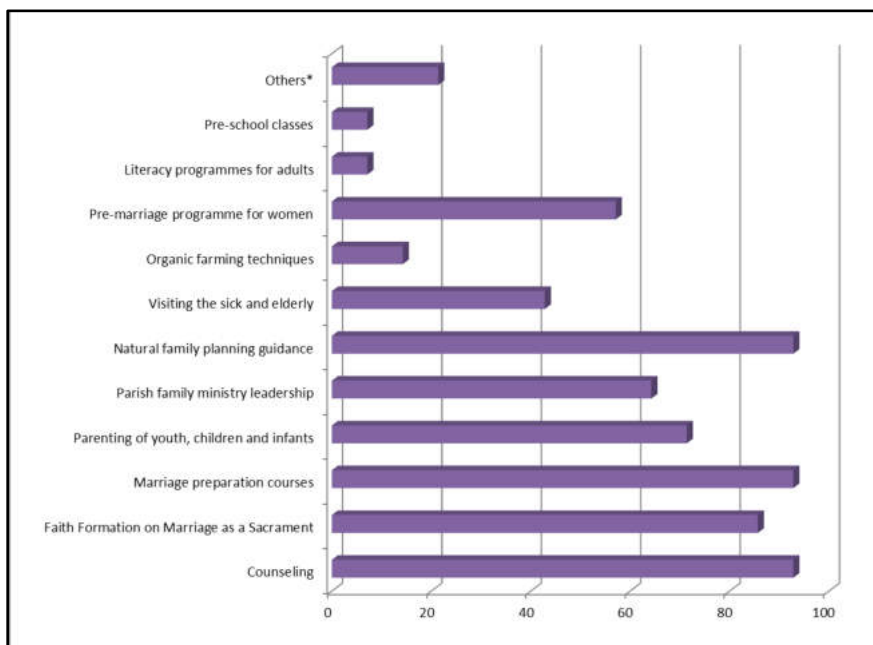
All of the services provided above are necessary and good. Many family ministries have counselling as their main service. It is true that there is a growing need for counselling especially as we grow in our understanding of the psychological impact of social and emotional problems. We also need to fight the onslaught against life, in particular the attack on the unborn child and the aged, elderly. These services give dignity to the unborn child and importance to the elderly among us. Having said that, we need to be concerned that the emphasis on pro-life aspects of marriage and family and the focus on counselling in family ministry are using up most of our budgets and personnel making it difficult to look more closely at the bigger picture of family distress and reasons for families breaking up. Preventive strategies need to be developed. For example, finances are a major cause of conflict between young couples but in our Asian context we may be too embarrassed to talk about it; poverty, suddenly losing a job or falling ill creates debt and puts impossible burdens on a families. We need a practical and firmly grounded spirituality with a multi-pronged approach to family ministry that can address the diversity of issues.

### **Programmes Offered in Family Ministries**

At the most recent extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Pastoral Challenges faced by families, participants agreed that the preparation for marriage has been inadequate in almost every way. It is the main work of many in family ministry as we can see from the chart above, coming level with counselling but it is still far from sufficient or effective. Once again, we need to look at all the possible moments for pre-marriage reflection and formation, in youth ministry, in high schools and tertiary institutes and among those who are unchurched in social action groups.

“The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds. Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our

relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds." *Evangelii Gaudium* Para 67



As Pope Francis has warned, we need to understand the culture within which people see the world and each other and the church needs to watch the language that she uses in family ministry which may communicate the highest theological ideals of family life but may not have the effect of inspiring a young couple to live up those ideals. Rather it might put them off even trying as they are so far from understanding the substance of such ideals. One such programme would be the teaching on Marriage as a Sacrament. The language used, the examples of living marriages where this takes flesh and couples from very ordinary economic circumstances can testify to it, is what young couples need. Couples who can share with young couples how to pray as a couple, how to see the other partner as mediating the Holy; these are difficult but necessary to be simplified into daily, lived experiences.

In some rural communities where whole families are involved in farming or market gardening and sales, the ministry to the family can best focus on improving farming techniques, transportation and creating opportunities for education in new technologies and farming methods. This may seem rather far-fetched but the migration away from the countryside to the cities is splitting up families and those left behind are usually elderly or uneducated. The pull of migration abroad would be less compelling also if all agencies, including the Church would work to improve the lives of people in rural settings. This will have to include, assisting with the education of boys and girls, different forms of banking, loans with insurance built in and media education.

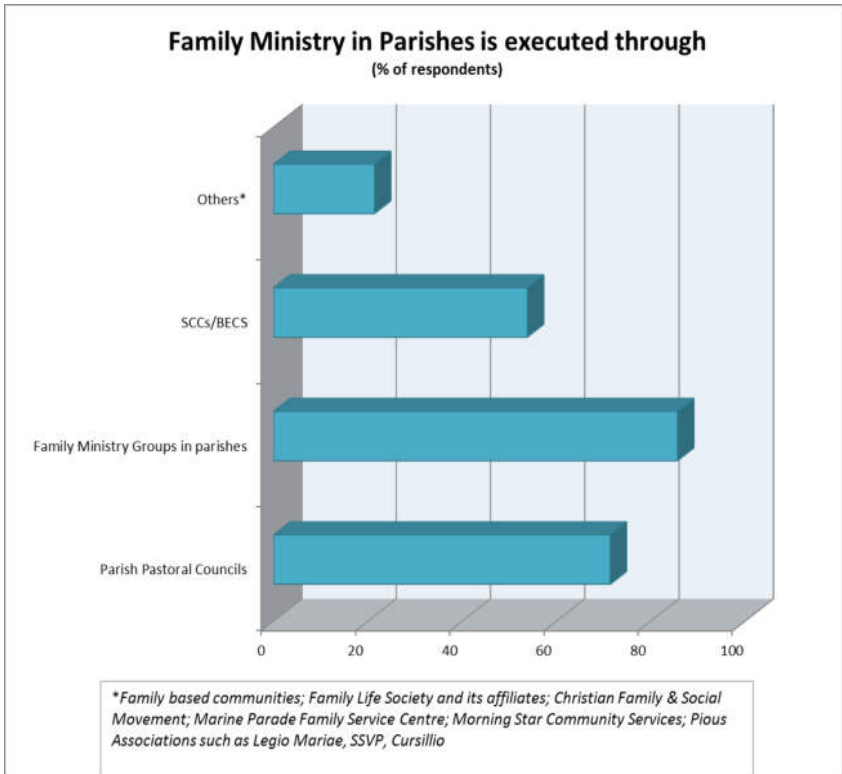
### **Integrating Family Ministry**

In hundreds of dioceses around Asia we have programmes and structures in our dioceses and parishes that try to build a participatory church by including the laity in a substantial way in the decision making and in the mission of the community. It is also true to say that these structures are constantly needing purification, renewal and strengthening as the church of the laity has not yet become a reality in most of our dioceses.

Diocesan pastoral councils, Parish Pastoral Councils, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Catechetical and Liturgical Ministries, Social Mission groups are each in their own zones and then you can add the layer of Family and Youth Movements and movements of the laity like Couples for Christ, Youth for Christ, Opus Dei, the Neo Catechumenate, Focolare, Fondacio, Marriage Encounter groups and many others.

Parish priests have a task to understand the pastoral needs of the people in the grassroots and while enabling their growth in faith to also work on meeting their needs. However, due to the numerous demands and needs, and with each group working in isolation, the parish priest often finds himself extremely busy coordinating activities and trying to make each group function

well. Each different need – for material help, spiritual formation, education, marriage & family assistance, psychological help – is



*\*Others was mainly provided by Singapore who has listed its affiliated organisations under the Family Life Society.*

met by a different specialist or group. What may be helpful for a parish or diocese is to develop pastoral teams which function as a multi-agency task force that can discern the way forward to involve people in finding their own solutions, in mentoring and journeying with them. We could imagine for example that this would be possible with an operational Parish Pastoral Council with wide representation, working in tandem with specialist agencies and the Basic Ecclesial Communities. We need an organic and systemic approach to family ministry. At present

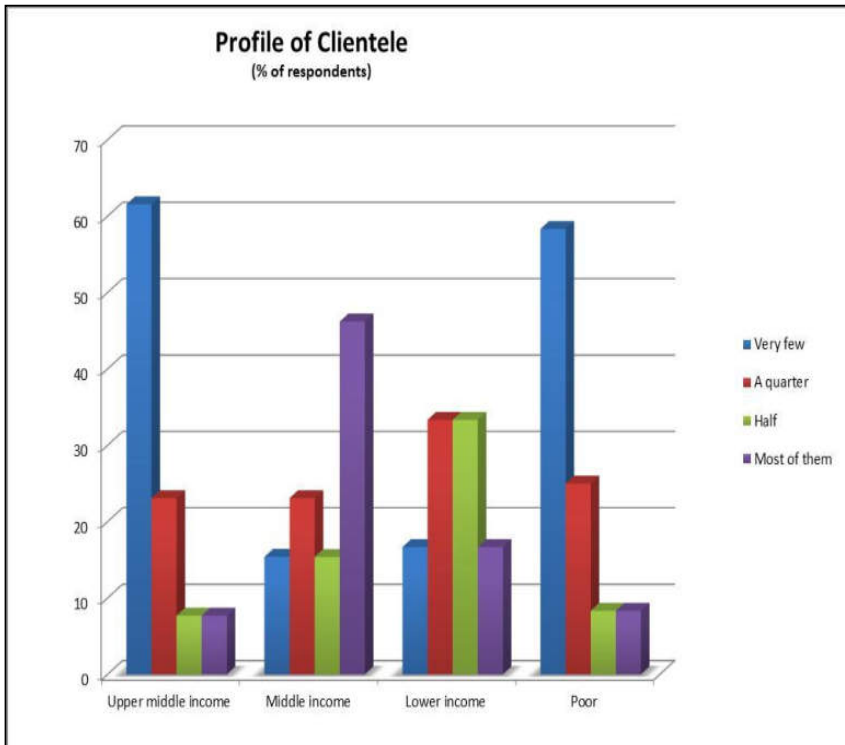
our approach is programmatic and sporadic. In fact, we need a constant companionship and formation model that will bring about the conversion we are so earnestly seeking. As Pope Francis exhorts in *Evangelii Gaudium*, we need to learn the 'art of accompaniment'.

Only 29% of our respondents said that they have family life ministry coordinators in their parishes. For the rest they were very sparse or non-existent. This indicates that we have not yet decided that family life ministries are a pastoral priority nor have we realized the need to collaboration if family ministry is to thrive.

69% of our respondents indicated that they collaborate very closely with the family movements. In fact, it has been our experience that many family commissions or ministries are made up of members from the movements so this collaboration is not difficult. As long as they are ministering and do not use these as platforms for recruiting for their movements.

However, when asked how many family ministry groups integrate and collaborate with other church ministries or commissions the percentage was a mere 8% for very often, 15% often and 62% sometimes. Here is an aspect of our pastoral strategy that requires careful re-thinking since those in ministry do recognize the importance of working better together. 67% said that close collaboration with other ministries is very important.

One other important partner in our formation and companionship of families is through our Education services, whether schools or Early Childhood institutions, Tertiary institutes or informal education services. Here we can meet families at close range and see the challenges they face. Here we have the young and their parents ready and open to learn and to see us as role models for the happy (blessed) life.



This response to the question of who we serve mainly, in our family ministry speaks for itself. Those we serve – seen from the purple pillar in the middle – are mostly from families from the middle and lower income groups but very few from the poor who probably feel embarrassed to attend our services or programmes and very few from the Upper middle income families who have little need for our services or programmes. This is not to say, however, that these two groups have no need of church based family ministry. In order to improve our record of inclusiveness we need to improve our outreach efforts to the poor and our understanding of the culture and challenges of the upper income groups. There are many studies done but access to them and time to understand their implications will need to be organized and made possible.



## **Research on the Family**

Good planning depends on proper understanding of needs and context. This is not possible only based on anecdotal evidence. Also, it is often the case that many pastors are no longer making regular pastoral visits that would put them in touch with the reality of family life. When asked about research done on the family we got the following response: 85% said that they have no research facility at all.

In the past five years, 75% do some quick surveys. 8% have good research facilities and the other 17% have nothing at all. The lack of scientific or pastoral research means that there is no evidence base to use for planning.

If we have not listened to families themselves through visiting, research and focus group discussions or any other methods and if we exclude families from our planning and research and we plan our family programmes in board rooms or during priest meetings, we will find that we are preaching to the converted and those who are regulars at all parish or diocesan programmes. Family ministry must first build on a complete picture as much as possible on the context of families and include the view of children, youth, single adults and others.

## **Long Term Planning**

We discovered that only 50% of those surveyed had a three or five year plan. The other 50% carried out their programmes or counselling and other services but for the rest of their ministry it could be reactive rather than pro-active.

Planning usually is built on a clear vision and understanding of the context of families within the sphere of responsibility of the family ministry. If nobody is walking the ground, listening to families and observing the trends, family ministry will be programme based and will rarely arrive at creative ways of reaching out.

So how would we articulate the short and long term mission or vision for our family ministry? Who is responsible for articulating this clearly and communicating it to those in the ministry? For example, perhaps for years we have been running counselling services, NFP clinics, before and after school care services, parenting courses, we find that these programmes are already more than our staff and budgets can afford. How can we make creative and necessary changes that will help us meet new challenges? While the mission, vision statement is dynamic in relating to the context of families, it must remain stable with reference to what the church teaches about the family and marriage. This is a point of reflection that we need to make and which the Synods on the Family in 2014 and 2015 will help us deepen.

The other factor that would make it difficult to do long term planning as mentioned earlier is if there are no permanent employees and mainly volunteers as is the case in more than 80% of the family ministry set ups.

In spite of not having any long term plans all family ministry people were able to identify many challenges facing the families and were able to provide a wide variety of responses. They are listed below by categories.

### **Challenges listed by survey respondents**

#### **Socio-economic reasons**

- poverty; migration in the country
- attack on family values, coercion and commitment, main culprits being materialism, media and technology
- globalization
- secularization
- after effects of war
- increasing number of widows

#### **Spousal / Parent / Child issues**

- parenting

- fathers being absent in their children's lives
- communication between parent and child
- overtime work from parents
- not sufficient preparation before and not enough follow up after marriage
- difficult marriages; divorces
- helping children with special needs to excel
- youth / people not wanting to get married
- marital discord
- care for the aged

### **Mental, Anti-life & Sexuality issues**

- stress
- mental sickness on the rise
- increasing drug addiction
- anti-life movements
- abortion becoming a norm among teenagers; not seeking help regarding their pregnancy

### **Formation and education**

- talking to children about sex and sexuality
- lack of faith formation; lack of faith transmission from parents to children
- lack of sex education, lack of value education, lack of ministry to the youth, lack of Natural Family Planning guidance, lack of anti-abortion awareness

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

When we look at the situation of Family Ministry in our dioceses or conferences, we realize that a great deal still has to be done to raise the standard of ministry and cover the areas of critical need for the flourishing of our families.

### ***What can we do?***

There are a number of excellent family ministry offices, commissions and organisations from whom we can learn what

to do and how. However, a fundamental paradigm shift is needed to care for the whole family. All our Pre and Post Marriage preparation, enrichment and formation; our counselling services and family services meet only a tiny percentage of those who are in real need of help. The threats facing the family urgently need a much more concerted, integrated and collaborative family ministry.

BILA II on the Family which was held in Kuala Lumpur in 2013 brought together people in ministry to the family but also those who work on women's issues and youth. Participants included those who work to promote Basic Ecclesial Communities and members of family movements. Workshops presented showed the connection between all the various commissions and the need to work together. For example, a family commission in a country that is sending or receiving thousands of migrant workers needs to have someone who connects family ministry and migration needs.

In the final declaration of this BILA II on the family there were some recommendations made in the hope that all those involved in ministering to families in Asia will take them into serious consideration. They can be found on pages 12-13.

Perhaps we could gather all interested stakeholders of Family Ministry and ask which of the above are strong, which are weak and which are not relevant. Those that are important but still weak would be the focus of development in the coming year or two.

Various subcultures exist side by side, and often practise segregation and violence. The Church is called to be at the service of a difficult dialogue. On the one hand, there are people who have the means needed to develop their personal and family lives, but there are also many "non-citizens", "half citizens" and "urban remnants". "Cities create a sort of permanent ambivalence because, while they offer their residents countless possibilities, they also present many people with any

number of obstacles to the full development of their lives. This contrast causes painful suffering.” *Evangelii Gaudium* Para 74.

Working collaboratively is not an optional luxury but an absolute necessity in our complex and interrelated world. Just as we need all the necessary information when constructing a triangle or quadrilateral, we need all dimensions of life to understand the actual situation and challenges faced by families today. If one aspect is missing or weak, we are unable to construct or sustain the triangle or quadrilateral matter. Also, to make good plans and good decisions we need all the voices of the diversity of families to be heard. As Pope Francis says in *Evangelii Gaudium* “Only through such respectful and compassionate listening can we enter on the paths of true growth and awaken a yearning for the Christian ideal: the desire to respond fully to God’s love and to bring to fruition what he has sown in our lives.” *Evangelii Gaudium* para171

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