

Message of the 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC, 17-23 August 2004 To the People of God in Asia and People of Good Will

Gathered in Daejeon, Korea for the 8th Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, we bishops, together with priests, religious and laypeople from various countries in Asia, reflected on the theme *The Asian Family toward a Culture of Life*, in the spirit of listening to God and to the voices of Asian families.¹ As this assembly comes to a close we are confirmed in the conviction that the family is truly God's gift and blessing to Asia!

We celebrate the signs of hope that abound in the Asian families. Inspired by religious and cultural values and traditions, many families strive to remain committed to the ideals of family life. They draw strength from Asian values like a profound reverence for life, closeness to and respect for nature, strong family ties, personal relationships, hospitality, the spirit of welcome, respect for elders, filial piety, caring for the young. The enduring spirituality and religiosity in the family and the sense of the sacredness of marriage, family and children are a cause for joy and have made many families the cradles of vocations. Faced with great odds, they manifest resilience and endurance. The Asian family is strengthened by and also transmits these values. We marvel at how the values of indigenous peoples and other religions enrich Asian families. Intercultural and inter-religious marriages also provide opportunities for spiritual enrichment, and become symbols of unconditional love in the midst of complex cultural and religious issues these marriages face. We thank you, families, for safeguarding genuine values and we encourage you to persevere.

We also share the anxieties of the Asian families. New realities impinge on the well-being of many families. An emerging global neo-liberal culture that propels individualism, selfishness and greed, with lifestyles and mindsets inspired by materialism and secularism, poses a threat to the family. Elite globalization has caused untold poverty and migration. Wars and conflicts also displace people from homes. Families face the impact of the means of social communication and coercive population programs on family values. The spread of HIV/AIDS, illegal drugs, and pornography has harmed families, especially the youth who are most vulnerable. The rise of marital divorce and break-up signals the dwindling cohesion of the family. Abortion and other attempts to manipulate human life present a severe problem. A contraceptive mentality is undermining genuine conjugal love. The continuing oppression of women and children is lamentable. Values that have served as foundations of the family are vanishing at an alarming rate, one result being the diminishing number of vocations in some countries. We cannot also ignore the complex situation of families with single, separated, or remarried parents and the effects on the children. We unite ourselves with you, Asian families as you courageously struggle with these difficult issues.

¹ The 181 participants from 22 Asian countries were made up of 6 Cardinals, 24 Archbishops, 56 Bishops and priests, religious men and women, and laypeople. We note with sadness the absence of delegates from China.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we envision all families living by Love that comes from God, for only Divine Love strengthens and nurtures Life. God is love (I Jn 4:8) and out of love God sent the Son to bring us life (I Jn 4:9). In God's plan of salvation, the Son became incarnate through the Holy Spirit and became part of the family of Mary and Joseph. We desire that the values of the Reign of God taught by Jesus (Mt 5-7) may take root in Asian families and bloom into a culture of life. A culture of life respects and protects God's gift of human life in all its dimensions from conception to death. A culture of life vigorously opposes the forces that destroy, exploit and oppress human life. A culture of life actively promotes responsible parenthood and the primacy of human life and dignity over efficiency, capital and profit. A culture of life promotes family values from indigenous people and other religions. We believe that families, steeped in the prayer and spirituality, are sanctuaries where love is faithfully shared and life responsibly generated, enriched and defended. By their shared love, communion and mutual service, Asian families can help foster communion and solidarity in faith communities and in society as we work towards forming one family of humankind.

As pastors of the Church convinced of God's unfailing love, we bishops will look for every opportunity to promote the good of families. We commit ourselves to strengthen Family Ministry so as to assist and accompany all families, especially those in dire need, on their journey towards fullness of life. In a particular way we would like express our affection and concern to the Catholic families in China and North Korea. We are one with our Catholic brothers and sisters in China as they meet the challenge of transforming the Church into one family of God.

As builders of communities, we appeal to our governments, groups concerned for the welfare of families, educational institutions, mass media producers and promoters, our brothers and sisters of other religious beliefs, and all people of good will to join us in strengthening the family as the focal point for the promotion of a civilization of love and a culture of life.

We entrust Asian families to God, the Fountain of Love and Life. We pray that you may "put on love, the perfect bond" (Col 3:14). Families of Asia, become what you are – God's gift of love and life for Asia!