



2017

Guidelines for Family Ministry



**Federation of Asian Bishops'
Conferences, Office of Laity
and Family,**

Study days on the Family October 2017

12/31/2017



**Developed by participants¹ at the
STUDY DAYS ON THE FAMILY**

Theme: The Good News of the Family

**Based on: *Amoris Laetitia* – Love in the Family and
FABC XI – The Catholic Family in Asia, Domestic Church of the Poor
on a Mission of Mercy.**

Organised by : Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Office of Laity and Family,
October 8 – 12, 2017, Camillian Pastoral Centre, Latkrabang, Thailand.

The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church [AL1]

The Good News of the Family is the joy of grace and mission. Gathered from nine countries in Asia, we affirm the mission of pastoral care of families in Asia² :

(The) Love of God impels the family to imitate the Eucharistic Jesus, to live and share the meaning of the Eucharist, to “shepherd in mercy” each member of the family and to look beyond itself and reach out in communion with others to meet Asian challenges. Together with other families they help evangelize the Asian world and transform it to an ever-closer reflection of God’s reign. (FABC XI, 57)

To fulfill this mission, the Asian family needs an empowering formation, “that all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for “families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity”” (AL, 7). This opportunity is the Good News.

The foundation of each family is a relationship of love that is rooted in the communion found within the Triune God (itself). The communion of Selfless Love among the Persons of the Trinity grounds the deepest core of family life and inspires it towards its mission derived from the communion itself. Self-emptying (*kenosis*) is a value that sustains this relationship, present as a gift, not only in the spouses but in every member of the family as well.

¹ See the attached appendix for a list of participants. Consultation with the FABC Office of Laity and Family Bishop Members and all member Conferences of the FABC was also carried out by email during the months of November and December 2017. These guidelines can be ratified or revised at a later date as and when needed.

² Concern for the Family has been reflected in the many assemblies and papers of the FABC. The 6th Plenary Assembly in 1995 spoke of the ‘challenges to serve LIFE’ and the threats facing family life. . In the year 2004, the 8th Plenary Assembly of the FABC focused on Family with the theme “The Asian Family towards a Culture of Integral Life”; The Eleventh Plenary Assembly of FABC in 2016 was focused on the Family as having a mission of Mercy. FABC Papers 118 and 127 from the Office for Theological Concerns is regarding inter-faith marriages. The FABC Office of Laity & Family has held Bishops’ Institutes and Regional gatherings to reflect on Family in 2007, 2013, 2016 and 2017. Final statements and reports are available on www.fabc.org/offices/.

These gifts are not easily realized when members of the family fail to be aware of their giftedness because the challenges that Asian families face are far-reaching in proportion. The Bishops of Asia during their Plenary Assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 2016, enumerated these major pastoral challenges to the Asian Families as:

- (1) persecution—religious freedom under siege;
- (2) poverty, migration and dislocation;
- (3) political, ideological, cultural conflicts and divisions;
- (4) ideological colonialism and cultural values;
- (5) global warming and climate change;
- (6) tensions within the family; and,
- (7) deterioration of religious faith and spiritual values in the family.

These daunting pastoral challenges, however, do not dishearten us but instead ignite our desire and determination to journey as ministers with families.

Drawing on Church documents, particularly *Amoris Laetitia*, and the experience of past FABC gatherings on the family, we affirm the following guidelines in our work with families as co-journeymen in Christ towards God:

For Family Ministers

1. Family ministry is primarily a ministry of mercy. Hence, family ministers will need training in basic skills which include non-judgmental and empathetic listening and respect for those that they minister to, no matter what their current situation is. (AL318, 310, 322; FABCXI,24)
2. Family Ministers need to be guided by “The Law of Gradualness” and pastoral discernment. Meeting families where they are at and accompanying them to distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of marriage in its fullness. (AL122, 293, 295)
3. Family Ministers need to understand the theology of marriage and present practical ways couples can live the sacrament of marriage by reproducing in their lives the love and self-giving of Jesus. (AL71, 73, 120, 121)
4. Family Ministry should work to empower families to recognize destructive trends; work with families to counter challenges posed by these trends and promote a culture of life from conception to the end of life. (FABCVI,15.1; FABCXI 8-16, AL 32-51)
5. Family ministers need to recognize and affirm the capabilities that enhance the dignity of women. Promoting equal partnership in marriage, in the home, in decision-making, in parenting responsibilities, etc. This should also be witnessed in parish ministry. (AL54)
6. Family ministers need to be attentive to the very concrete concerns of families on the peripheries and work with other agencies to provide comprehensive care (e.g. healthcare, literacy, employment and housing). (AL44)
7. Inter-faith marriages are a reality. Support for these marriages needs to be a priority in family ministry. (AL247, 248)

- a. Our pastoral approach to families in ‘irregular situations’ should be proactive; reaching out to them, building on what is positive, and being welcoming to the inter-faith partners.³
 - b. Have strategies in place to welcome and include the couple in the BEC and parish life.
 - c. Recognize the potential of inter-faith marriages to be an opportunity for Inter-faith dialogue and evangelization.
 - d. Special attention must be paid to the faith formation of children in these marriages to support the family in their Christian upbringing.
8. Family ministers need to be aware of the opportunities provided by technology and social media for family ministry. (FABCXI, 37-38)
 9. Collaboration and networking in parishes and dioceses are strongly encouraged between family ministries, family movements and experts (such as social workers, doctors, therapists, etc.).
 10. There is a need to create structures for family ministry in parishes and dioceses where they do not exist.
 11. Family ministers need to underscore the importance of continuing formation and self-care for effective ministry.

For Families – to strengthen the Church in the home (the domestic church)

1. Spirituality is of utmost importance for all families. A family needs to live the Trinitarian model of communion and become a missionary family. In our formation programs, we need to encourage parents and children to pray, inspiring them to pray prayers rather than merely say them. (AL317)
2. Since families are called to realize their role as domestic Churches, formation programs need to animate families to live more deeply communion and mission. (AL86, 87, 314)
3. Families can be supported and nourished to live communion and mission with other families through participation in small communities, the church in the neighborhood, (BEC, SCC), as lived in diverse circumstances. (AL86-88, 202)
4. Family Ministry programs need to train parents to dialogue with their children; giving them skills to help them grow in freedom, maturity, and autonomy. (AL261) This will also include moral and ethical formation and education in sexuality, to form a strong foundation for their vocation. (AL271, 272 & 286)
5. Remote marriage preparation will need to be supported by parish, diocesan and Catholic school structures which can also offer proximate and immediate marriage preparation. (AL205-209)
6. Families must be accompanied throughout their life-cycle using strategies for encounter and enrichment.
7. Encourage and empower families to become ministers to other families. (AL200)

³Evangelii Gaudium 24 encourages all pastoral ministers to be ‘involved, supportive, bear fruit and rejoice.’

Conclusion

These guidelines can be helpful in the designing of formation programmes for family ministers and strategies for family ministry. They are broad and general, requiring a contextual application.

Pope Francis, while talking to Jesuits in Colombia, articulated the kind of position those in family ministry should take:

"He said a pastor has to continually shift between three positions: "in front to mark out the road, in the middle, to know it, and at the back to ensure nobody falls behind and to let the flock seek the road."

"The people of God have a good sense of smell," he said. "And sometimes our task as pastors is to be behind the people."

"The people of God have a good sense of smell," Francis repeated. "Perhaps the people struggle to communicate well, and sometimes people get it wrong. ... But can any of us say, 'Thank you, Lord, for I have never been wrong?'"⁴

Amoris Laetitia calls for pastoral conversion of all pastoral ministers, so they can be a beacon of hope and healing to families, enhancing wholeness of life.⁵ All our efforts should be rooted in love and in a deep trust that the Holy Spirit is at work within us.

Holy Family of Nazareth, we entrust all the families in Asia to your guidance and care.

Study Days on the Family

Latkrabang, Bangkok, Thailand

12 October 2017



⁴ National Catholic Reporter, 28 September 2017

⁵ Evangelii Gaudium 27

Appendix A

List of Participants at Study Days on the Family in Alphabetical order

Fr	Stephen Ip Ting Kwok	Tribunal work & Parish Priest	Hong Kong
Dr	Trudy Dantis	Theologian researcher. Research Consultant for Snehalaya Family Service Centre	India
Fr	Milton Gonsalvez	Executive Secretary, CCBI Commission for the Family, marriage prep and parenting	India
Mr	Alwyn Dantis	Snehalaya Family Service Centre Project Coordinator/ Consultant	India
Mrs	Virginia Saldhana	Theologian, Former Exec Sec FABC	India
Fr	Thomas Masaki Imada OSA	Augustinian Parish & early childhood activities	Japan
Ms	Fauzia Nazreen	Project Coordinator - Catholic Women's Organisation	Pakistan
Sr	Mariam Parveen	National Director - CWO & Family	Pakistan
Fr	James Wenceslao U. Gascon SJ	Pastoral Theologian - Director - RTM Centre for Family Ministries	Philippines
Fr	Francis Vincent Oliva Gustilo SDB	Theologian - Sector Head, Masters in Religious Studies with specialization on Family and Life Ministry	Philippines
Ms	Wendy M Louis	Pastoral Theologian - FABC OLF Executive Secretary	Singapore
Bishop	Norbert Andradi	Theologian - President, Family & Laity Commission	Sri Lanka
Fr	Paththinikuttige Claude Nishantha Nonis	Theologian - Director, Archdiocesan Family Apostolate; Coordinator, National Family Apostolate	Sri Lanka
Fr	Alexander Truong Q. Doan	Vicar General working for family ministry	Taiwan
Bishop	Silvio Siripong Charatsri	Theologian - National President for Commission on the Laity, Chantaburi Diocese	Thailand
Fr	Joseph Phuwanart Naenna	Director for Diocesan Commission on the Family	Thailand
Fr	Chalerm Kitmongkhol	National Director of the CC of the Family	Thailand
Mr	Jimmy Lozare	Couples for Christ Coordinator	Thailand
Fr	Joseph Hoang Ngoc Dung	Associate Director for the Family Life Office	Vietnam