

15 January 2014

Response to the Secretariat of the Extraordinary Synod

Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan
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Because time was limited, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan sought responses to the secretariat's preparatory document from the bishops and the major superiors of men and women. These responses were then sent to various lay and clerical experts for comment. Because the bishops and religious deal with various family situations, they have familiarity with the problems of families and so we believe their responses are an accurate reflection of the situation of families in Japan.

III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

Forward

Before responding directly to the questions posed by the Synod Secretariat, we propose to provide for reference an outline of the situation of the family in Japan and the efforts of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan in response to that situation.

Even though missionaries to Japan have been enthusiastic and dedicated, efforts at evangelization in the country have borne little fruit. The number of the baptized remains small. Sadly, today there are only about one million Catholics in Japan, including migrants. Even so, we believe that they are able to make a large contribution to the evangelization of Japan.

1. The current situation of the Catholic Church in Japan

The latest statistics (2012) show that there are approximately 440,000 Japanese Catholics, about 0.35% of the population. In addition, Catholic immigrants and temporary residents from many countries swell that figure.

In spite of dedicated missionary efforts, Catholics remain a minority in society and even in the home. Of those baptized each year, about 54% are adults; 76% of marriages of Catholics are with non-Catholic spouses.

Even though members of the Church have made great contributions in the fields of education, welfare and medical care that are much valued, there is no denying that opportunities to influence society with Gospel values and teachings are severely limited.

2. The Catholic Church and the current situation of the family in Japan

Following its defeat in the Asia-Pacific War (World War II), Japan focused its energies on economic recovery, with government and business dedicated to economic growth. As a result, the national standard of living and education improved. However, people had to pay a high price for this economic growth. Some of the cost was paid by the family, and many families are now facing crises because of that. The families of Catholics are not exempt from these circumstances.

The problems may be summarized under three general headings.

a) The weakening of family bonds

Between 1954 and 1970, a period of high economic growth, many people moved from

the countryside to big cities and their surrounding areas. This led to the prevalence of the “nuclear family” of two generations (parents and children) and the decline of the three-generation household (grandparents, parents and children) to the point of rarity.

Husbands’ time and energy were consumed by their work, and wives who were previously full-time homemakers began to work part-time outside the home. Children, when their school day ended, were absorbed in extra-curricular activities or “cram schools” until late at night. As a result, shared meals or other opportunities to be together as a family decreased significantly. It has become difficult for families to come together to talk with one another or share companionship.

In both urban and rural areas, living alone has become more common, resulting in increased loneliness and anxiety. The number of people who die alone or without any connections to others is increasing. Japanese society can be characterized as “unrelated.”

Thus, post-war Japanese society has become one in which family ties have generally been weakened and mutual support among family members has become difficult.

b) Few children, ageing society

The lifespan of Japanese has increased significantly, with women having the world’s longest while men rank number five as of 2013. That plus a decline in the birth rate has made Japan an ageing society. As a result, the burden upon the younger generation to care for the elderly is growing. For example, it is not unusual for a couple to have to care for their four parents. This trend is also noticeable in the Church, where there are many elderly Mass participants, but few children.

Though the Japanese government has taken steps to reduce the burden of health care and long-term care of the elderly, the economic burden on families and individuals is increasing. The question of how to spend one’s old age is a major issue for everyone. Caring for the elderly is not simply an economic burden; it is a psychological one as well. Merely extending the lifespan is not in itself good news. It is necessary to build a society that provides an appropriate space in society for its elderly in terms of support and facilities. The Church must be involved in making practical contributions to meeting this challenge.

On the other hand, the declining birth rate is a major problem. Increasingly, most couples do not desire to have many children. There are various causes for this, including the small size of homes, the difficulty of caring for small children, mothers’ employment outside the home and the high cost of educating children. Where the nuclear family has become the norm, there is no child care assistance available from an extended family. Though from time immemorial giving birth to and rearing children have been the norm, today we see a problematic tendency to avoid them as much as possible.

c) Aspects of marriage and increasing divorce

The declining birth rate is linked to the issue of marriage. The number of those who marry is in decline, while the number of those who marry but later divorce is increasing. Among those who wish to marry, the number who cannot because of financial reasons or because they cannot find a suitable spouse is increasing. The age of people when they marry is increasing, as is the number of people who do not wish to marry. These people do not wish to build a family. It is not unusual for people to live together without marrying. In the case of those who do marry, they often tend to break up when they encounter difficulties.

Abortion and contraception are common, and many fetuses are buried before they are born. At the same time, the number of people who undergo treatments for infertility is

increasing.

These phenomena and trends related to marriage apply to Catholics as well. The majority of Japanese Catholics are married to non-Christians, and they are not immune to the influence of the society around them when it comes to thinking about marriage.

The following two examples demonstrate efforts by the Catholic Church in Japan to respond pastorally and evangelically to the situation of the family in Japan.

NICE II (National Incentive Convention for Evangelization), 1993: This national convention took the situation of families as its starting point and examined how best to promote the Church's mission of evangelization. Lay representatives took part in enthusiastic discussions, the results of which were passed on to the bishops' conference. In response, the bishops issued a statement, *The Family and Evangelization* (enclosed).

Publication of *Reverence for Life - A Message for the Twenty-First Century from The Catholic Bishops of Japan*: In response to the urgent problems concerning the family and life, the bishops issued this statement in 2001. It consists of three chapters: "The message of Scripture," "The troubled family" and "Life and death."

Responses

1. The Diffusion of the Teachings on the Family in Sacred Scripture and the Church's Magisterium

a) *Describe how the Catholic Church's teachings on the value of the family contained in the Bible, Gaudium et spes, Familiaris consortio and other documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium is understood by people today. What formation is given to our people on the Church's teaching on family life?*

1. For the most part, people are unaware of those teachings and documents. What they know is fragmentary at best, and comes from comments that they hear from priests (who may not be well-informed themselves) and others.

2. The majority of people preparing for marriage merely learn the conclusions and summaries of those teachings.

3. It is widely known that the Catholic Church opposes abortion, but the media conveys that in a criticizing manner.

4. The teaching on family life has not been taken up with any real commitment in the Church.

5. The demands of daily life, including family life, limit the time that parishioners can devote to formation programs in parishes or dioceses. Furthermore, providing formation is difficult in Japan where many if not most Catholics live in families where one or more members are not Christians.

6. The large and growing presence of non-Japanese Catholics in the Church in Japan presents a new challenge. Language and cultural differences as well as the work schedules of migrants make the provision of educational opportunities a challenge that has not been met.

b) *In those cases where the Church's teaching is known, is it accepted fully or are there difficulties in putting it into practice? If so, what are they?*

1. Generally speaking, people are only aware of the bans on abortion, artificial birth control, divorce and remarriage. They are more influenced by societal mores than by those teachings, especially where birth control is concerned. As for birth control, people do not take the demands of the Church seriously, considering them irrelevant to their lives.

2. Even among Catholics, many people are critical of the Church's stance toward contraceptive methods such as condoms.

3. For migrant workers it is very difficult to live according to the Church's teachings. They have not been educated well enough and in many cases their insecure lives are not conducive to living according to the Church's moral teachings.

c) *How widespread is the Church's teaching in pastoral programs at the national, diocesan and parish levels? What catechesis is done on the family?*

1. In a situation such as that of Catholics in Japan where the surrounding culture is not Christian, it is very difficult to provide catechesis of any sort.

2. In terms of faith education, on the national, diocesan and parish levels we must admit that there are no pastoral programs. There are, of course, dedicated activities by dioceses, parishes, priests and parishioners, but they rely too much on individual efforts.

3. Much depends upon the training or professionalism of the pastor. The level of religious education varies according to the pastor. Training in this area for the clergy is needed.

4. It appears that religious education in the home is being neglected

5. In the case of migrants, where parents have little time at home because of their work and children who receive a Japanese education may be more culturally Japanese than their parents and mutual understanding between parents and children is difficult, the challenges of faith education in the home are increased.

d) *To what extent — and what aspects in particular — is this teaching actually known, accepted, rejected and/or criticized in areas outside the Church? What are the cultural factors which hinder the full reception of the Church's teaching on the family?*

1. In an age of equality for men and women in the family, many outside the Church criticize the Church as presenting out-of-date teachings, especially as regards pregnancy and childbirth.

2. Even many Catholics do not differ from the common opinion in matters of divorce and remarriage as allowed in civil law, prenatal diagnosis, abortion etc. and they criticize the Church for its teaching on pregnancy and childbirth.

3. Many Japanese Catholics, especially women, have non-Catholic spouses. This complicates following church teaching in the home. Even the baptism of children becomes a source of discord in many cases, unless the husband is indifferent to religion.

4. Many people feel that teachings on divorce and separation violate conventional wisdom. Male domination in the family, while beginning to give way to greater equality, is

still strong, making it difficult for women to follow the faith.

2. Marriage according to the Natural Law

a) *What place does the idea of the natural law have in the cultural areas of society: in institutions, education, academic circles and among the people at large? What anthropological ideas underlie the discussion on the natural basis of the family?*

1. The idea of natural law is not generally understood nor is it accepted.

2. Often when Church leaders cannot present convincing reasons for what they say, they call it “natural law” and demand obedience on their say-so. This has brought the whole concept of natural law into disrepute: “If it is natural, why do people need to be taught it?”

3. Japanese culture emphasizes societal expectations rather than abstract principles as guides to action. So, though in the West “natural law” may seem “natural,” in Japan it is perceived as abstract and out-of-touch.

b) *Is the idea of the natural law in the union between a man and a woman commonly accepted as such by the baptized in general?*

1. Same-sex relationships have not yet become an issue as in some Western countries, but are likely to become an issue because Japanese society at large is becoming more tolerant of homosexuality, both as an orientation and a lifestyle. Transgender surgery followed by marriage is already finding legal acceptance. This tolerance is increasingly true of Catholics as well as society at large.

c) *How is the theory and practice of natural law in the union between man and woman challenged in light of the formation of a family? How is it proposed and developed in civil and Church institutions?*

1. There is as yet no major movement toward recognition of same-sex marriage in civil society. Rather, there seems to be a trend away from any kind of marriage.

2. Among men and women the number who remain single is increasing. Others are marrying late. The birth rate is declining. The whole concept of family is changing gradually.

d) *In cases where non-practicing Catholics or declared non-believers request the celebration of marriage, describe how this pastoral challenge is dealt with.*

1. Marriage between non-baptized people and non-believers using the Church’s rites has been a normal part of the Church’s activity in Japan for many years with the approval of the Holy See. The usual practice is to require at least some pre-marital instruction that focuses on the Church’s vision of marriage. In addition, there must be no canonical impediments to marriage (such as divorce), though individual pastors generally tend to leniency.

2. In the case of non-practicing Catholics, an attempt is made to draw them back into the life of the community, often by involving members of the parish in the preparation and celebration.

3. The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization

a) *What experiences have emerged in recent decades regarding marriage preparation? What efforts are there to stimulate the task of evangelization of the couple and of the family? How can an awareness of the family as the "domestic Church" be promoted?*

1. Among the baptized as well as the unbaptized, marriage is nowadays frequently a response to pregnancy with a desire to legitimize the child. Often, the couple have been cohabiting for a long time, as is becoming more and more common in Japan, even among young Catholics.

2. In the case of those who come from Catholic families, their desire to marry in the church is often more due to family pressure than to a commitment to the faith.

3. This situation may be an indication of the difficulty of passing on the faith from generation to generation in a basically non-religious society like contemporary Japan. There is little sense of the family as a "domestic Church," largely because there are comparatively few examples of families in which all the members are Christian.

4. When children are small, they are actively involved in the parish, but as they grow up the influence of the general culture absorbs them. In many cases, their parents manage to get a promise out of them to go to church on Christmas and Easter.

5. The aging of the Catholic population at large and clergy in particular is making young Catholics less willing to be part of parish communities. As a result, they do not have opportunities to explore issues of sex and family life in a faith context.

6. Marriage preparation is generally haphazard, with regular programs in some places, but in most situations it relies upon the interest and ability of the pastor.

7. Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter were introduced in Japan, and were popular for a while, but seem to have been something of a fad that has faded.

8. When young people come to the Church for a wedding for whatever reason, it could be an opportunity to welcome them back to participation in the community, but effort must be given to developing welcoming programs, tools and attitudes.

b) *How successful have you been in proposing a manner of praying within the family which can withstand life's complexities and today's culture?*

1. Because homes where the whole family is Catholic are few, rather than praying as a family it is more common to pray as individuals.

c) *In the current generational crisis, how have Christian families been able to fulfil their vocation of transmitting the faith?*

1. Generally speaking, the transmission of faith to the next generation is difficult. Japanese society does not support expressions of faith commitment, and some young people increasingly perceive the Church as a club of the elderly.

2. School activities, cram schools, sports and other social events usually take precedence over Church involvement, even for Catholic families. As a result, Catholic children develop a sense that involvement in the Church is of secondary importance.

3. Conveying the faith to the next generation is at an extremely critical point and is a

major challenge.

d) *In what way have the local Churches and movements on family spirituality been able to create ways of acting which are exemplary?*

1. Various groups and movements continue to make efforts.

e) *What specific contribution can couples and families make to spreading a credible and holistic idea of the couple and the Christian family today?*

1. Some sort of radically new approach is needed.

2. Lifetime faith formation is needed for couples. Especially in the period between Confirmation and Matrimony a systematic, organic formation is needed, followed by immediate preparation for marriage and, after that, follow-up for three to five years. Then, at milestones (10, 25, 50 years) there should be some review.

f) *What pastoral care has the Church provided in supporting couples in formation and couples in crisis situations?*

1. Apart from ad hoc one-on-one (or one-on-two) encounters of priests with couples in need of support, there are no special programs. But, priests are seldom trained to deal with these situations effectively. Continuing education for the clergy is needed.

2. The problems of international marriages need special attention. Especially when a wife has come to Japan to become the bride of someone in a rural area, religious, cultural and linguistic differences lead to many problems. Such women are a growing presence in the Church in Japan. Priestly formation must include second-language acquisition in order to provide pastoral care to migrants.

4. Pastoral Care in Certain Difficult Marital Situations

Is cohabitation ad experimentum a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage?

1. Couples who marry after cohabitation are not rare. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2011), 17 percent of couples that marry had been living together during the year prior to the wedding,

2. One respondent said, “Nearly all the couples I have married in the last few years have begun living together several months before the wedding. None among them recognized that it goes against the teachings of the Church.”

3. Sometimes in the common situation of a Catholic partnering with a non-Catholic, the non-Catholic refuses to marry according to the law of the Church. In other cases, couples who have been away from the Church return after years of cohabitation or civil marriage.

4. In this, as in many other matters, the large number of migrant Catholics in Japan presents special pastoral needs.

5. There are many cases of Catholics who have come to Japan from overseas and have entered into civil marriages with non-Christians. In rare cases, the Japanese spouse later

becomes a Catholic, but in most situations they continue to live their married life without going through any Church process. In some rural parishes where a majority of Catholics are from overseas, this is just one more of the many pastoral problems they face. Yet, viewing how these Catholics live in culturally conservative environments and their active participation in their parishes and in evangelization, it is clear that a response to their situation is urgently needed

6. The pastoral practice of the Church must begin from the premise that cohabitation and civil marriage outside the church have become the norm. The Church must be a place where such couples can find a welcome that will enable them to think more deeply about such issues.

7. In developing a pastoral orientation, it is perhaps important to recall that the only time in the gospels that Jesus clearly encounters someone in a situation of cohabitation outside of marriage (the Samaritan woman at the well) he does not focus on it. Instead, he respectfully deals with the woman and turns her into a missionary.

b) *Do unions which are not recognized either religiously or civilly exist? Are reliable statistics available?*

1. We are unaware of reliable data on this.

2. There are cases of migrants who have a spouse and family in their home country and then start a second family in Japan. Once again, reliable statistics are not available

c) *Are separated couples and those divorced and remarried a pastoral reality in your particular Church? Can you approximate a percentage? How do you deal with this situation in appropriate pastoral programs?*

1. Such people are increasingly common among Catholics, though perhaps not so common as in largely-Catholic countries. However, the divorce rate among Catholics does not appear to differ greatly from that among non-Catholics. Providing sensitive pastoral care is a challenge.

2. It is important to note that being in a predominantly non-Christian country, most Christians in Japan end up marrying non-Christians. It is the same for the female migrant workers from Catholic countries (Brazil, Peru, Philippines etc.). More often than not they marry not only a non-Christian, but a divorced non-Christian who most likely will not choose to be baptized. Among migrants there are some who may have left a family in their home country and due to time, distance or loneliness they start a new family here. So it is rare for these people to receive the sacrament of marriage. We welcome them to the Church and invite their children to Sunday school classes, as they are innocent. The parish church is often an oasis for them, accepting them without judgment and trying to support them to live Christian lives in the midst of everyday challenging realities.

d) *In all the above cases, how do the baptized live in this irregular situation? Are they aware of it? Are they simply indifferent? Do they feel marginalized or suffer from the impossibility of receiving the sacraments?*

1. Most people in such situations are apparently indifferent. Some may cut their ties to the Church rather than face judgmental attitudes.

2. There are also many people in such situations who suffer because through no fault of their own they cannot receive the sacraments.

e) *What questions do divorced and remarried people pose to the Church concerning the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation? Among those persons who find themselves in these situations, how many ask for these sacraments?*

1. Few ask about the sacraments. They have made the decision to either receive the sacraments or not and follow through on their decision. Others simply stay away from the Church.

2. There are people who do not know that they cannot receive the Eucharist if they have remarried after divorce. Even among those who know, there are people who receive the Eucharist, and there are priests who do not say anything even if they know that fact. Among people who come to Church, almost all expect to receive the sacrament.

f) *Could a simplification of canonical practice in recognizing a declaration of nullity of the marriage bond provide a positive contribution to solving the problems of the persons involved? If yes, what form would it take?*

1. A simplified procedure for annulments is not only needed, it is essential. Especially in mission countries like Japan where Christians are few and where the civil code admits divorce it can be very difficult to gain the cooperation of a non-Christian party in Church proceedings. In some cases, the Church may even be accused of violating basic human rights, presenting more obstacles. While simplification is needed along with compliance with the legal provisions, a realistic response to the situation people actually face is essential.

2. Beginning with the bishops, many voices are calling for a simplification of procedures for a declaration of nullity in order to make dealing with divorced and remarried people more pastoral. There is much speculation that one reason for the upcoming Synod is that the Holy Father wishes to gather calls for such a simplification from around the world. One reason for calling for change is that 90% of marriages that take place in the Church in Japan are between a baptized and a non-baptized person, and this involves canon law and tribunals. Even if before the marriage takes place the Catholic party promises to protect her faith and to baptize and raise any children in the faith, once the wedding takes place it may be difficult for the Catholic to fulfill those promises. Even simply going to Mass, let alone suggesting the baptism of children, may be impossible. In such situations where promises are not fulfilled, and where even divorce might take place, the sort of tribunal appearances by the non-Catholic party that Rome requires for a declaration of nullity are almost always impossible. Of course, Rome takes as its starting point the marriage of two Catholics, and therefore these procedures make sense. However, these procedures and principles are not applicable in the case of marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. Of course, the cooperation of the non-Catholic party should be sought as much as possible. But in cases of mental illness or domestic abuse, for example, the authority to issue a declaration of nullity should remain with the local tribunal.

3. Simplification of the legal proceedings will be the salvation of those who are suffering.

g) *Does a ministry exist to attend to these cases? Describe this pastoral ministry? Do such programs exist on the national and diocesan levels? How is God's mercy proclaimed to*

separated couples and those divorced and remarried and how does the Church put into practice her support for them in their journey of faith?

1. There is no special ministry. Pastors respond as pastorally as possible, but the People of God seem to have moved beyond the need of such ministry. They make decisions and live according to those decisions.

On Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

a) *Is there a law in your country recognizing civil unions for people of the same-sex and equating it in some way to marriage?*

1. In Japan there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

b) *What is the attitude of the local and particular Churches towards both the State as the promoter of civil unions between persons of the same sex and the people involved in this type of union?*

1. The State does not promote such marriages and the Church has not developed a particular attitude toward the possibility of eventual change.

c) *What pastoral attention can be given to people who have chosen to live in these types of union?*

1. There is as yet no special pastoral attention.

d) *In the case of unions of persons of the same sex who have adopted children, what can be done pastorally in light of transmitting the faith?*

1. So far, there have been no cases of this in Japan.

6. The Education of Children in Irregular Marriages

a) *What is the estimated proportion of children and adolescents in these cases, as regards children who are born and raised in regularly constituted families?*

1. According to statistics from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2013), 2.2 percent of births take place outside of marriage.

b) *How do parents in these situations approach the Church? What do they ask? Do they request the sacraments only or do they also want catechesis and the general teaching of religion?*

1. If parents approach the Church, they expect to receive all that any other people who approach the Church expect. It can become an opportunity for catechesis regarding the Church's vision of family life.

2. Many cases of parents in irregular marriages (divorce and remarriage, bigamy) who bring their children to the Church are migrants from Catholic countries. They have a strong Catholic identity even though the Church may not approve of their situation.

c) *How do the particular Churches attempt to meet the needs of the parents of these children*

to provide them with a Christian education?

1. There is no discrimination based upon children's family situation. It is clear that parents who bring their children to Church are dedicated to the Christian education of their children.

d) *What is the sacramental practice in these cases: preparation, administration of the sacrament and the accompaniment?*

1. All children are treated the same. In the case of children from irregular family situations, sacramental preparation (Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation) can be opportunities to evangelize and catechize the entire family.

7. The Openness of the Married Couple to Life

a) *What knowledge do Christians have today of the teachings of *Humanae vitae* on responsible parenthood? Are they aware of how morally to evaluate the different methods of family planning? Could any insights be suggested in this regard pastorally?*

1. Contemporary Catholics are either indifferent to or unaware of the teaching of the Church.

2. Most Catholics in Japan have not heard of *Humanae vitae*. If they have, they probably do not make it an important part of their lives. Social and cultural values as well as financial considerations are more important.

3. While there may be some mention of the Church's teaching on artificial birth control in pre-marital instructions, most priests do not emphasize it. A Catholic married to a non-Christian might find the teaching impossible to follow.

4. There is a big gap between the Vatican and reality. Condom use is recommended in sex education classes in schools.

b) *Is this moral teaching accepted? What aspects pose the most difficulties in a large majority of couple's accepting this teaching?*

1. The moral teaching of *Humanae vitae* is generally unknown and untaught, and where known it is unfollowed.

c) *What natural methods are promoted by the particular Churches to help spouses put into practice the teachings of *Humanae vitae*?*

1. There are some attempts to introduce such practices as the Billings Method, but few people know about it. For the most part, the Church in Japan is not obsessed with sexual matters.

d) *What is your experience on this subject in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance and participation at the Eucharist?*

1. Apart from abortion, there seems to not be much of a sense of guilt regarding contraception.

e) *What differences are seen in this regard between the Church's teaching and civic*

education?

1. Generally, civic education presents such practices as abortion, condom use (especially to prevent HIV/AIDS), divorce and remarriage favorably and, overall, teaches a separation of sex and procreation.

f) How can a more open attitude towards having children be fostered? How can an increase in births be promoted?

1. Many women work outside the home, and this has an effect upon the number of births. The high cost of raising children to adulthood, especially the cost of education, discourages people from having many children. As more people live in apartments rather than single homes, tight living quarters limit the number of children a couple can have. One result of the high urbanization of Japanese society is that families do not have a readily-accessible network of relatives who can assist in child rearing. Uncertainty about Japan's long-term economic situation also makes people reluctant to have many children.

2. In addition to economic factors that lead to a decline in the birth rate, there are social factors as well. Women desire more options than just motherhood. A materially comfortable lifestyle is usually impossible for a large family.

3. In order that all children might be enabled to live with the dignity of the children of God, family planning to ensure that they have access to food, health care and education is a responsibility.

4. For the above reasons, in order to improve the present situation the Church must work in various ways with government and civic organizations. In addition, marriage preparation must include both family planning and an understanding that bearing and nurturing children is a part of marriage.

8. The Relationship between the Family and the Person

a) Jesus Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the human person. How can the family be a privileged place for this to happen?

1. Even in a family where only one member is a Catholic, each member is a unique gift of God.

2. The family can be a place where individuals recognize the dignity of each other and join in prayer. In union, they complement each other's strengths. In difficulties and crises that occur in the home, they hold to their belief in a loving plan for them and unite their difficulties with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Thus the family becomes a true school of love, a domestic Church. In addition, through solidarity with people, especially those who are in need, they share the spiritual and material blessings they have received and thus give the world a testimony of love.

3. Every child needs to live with the warm, protective care of parents. In a peace-filled home, the child's existence must be affirmed and loneliness banished. There must be song and play and joy-filled learning. When mistakes are made, there must be opportunity to

correct them, so that children may journey confidently toward their dreams. We must build families where all that may be really experienced.

4. Children need to feel that at all times Jesus is with them, and so they are never alone. He is the true hope of us all.

b) *What critical situations in the family today can obstruct a person's encounter with Christ?*

1. Information overload and the spread of consumerism, hedonism and individualism.

2. Parents who are busy with daily life and have little emotional leeway find it impossible to make time to encounter God in tranquility, silence and prayer.

3. Children are deluged with information. Even after school they are busy. They do not even have time to get enough sleep or to play. Thus, they lack the interior silence in which to encounter their true self. So of course, they do not pray.

4. In situations where both parents work, many children return to an empty house. Shared meals are rare. Consequently, there are no opportunities to share conversation. Each member of the family faces difficulties, but since there is no fellowship each is lonely and has little experience of loving or being loved.

5. At times, husbands and wives do not respect one another's unique personality. Sometimes they view their children as possessions rather than respecting them as gifts from God.

6. Though the home should be a refuge where people can restore trust after being buffeted by mistrust, stress and being treated as objects outside the home, healing opportunities have become scarce. Many children are unable to experience the selfless and enduring love of God through their parents.

7. There may be a weakening of a sense of vocation and responsibility on the part of parents. External factors like social expectations, individualism and relativism also have an impact.

8. Domestic violence, child abuse, social withdrawal and suicide have all become problems the Church faces. Such problems are not discussed openly in society nor in the Church. In places where Christians are few, there are many situations where there may be only one believer in the family, and so there is little opportunity to share domestic concerns.

9. With many young people moving to the cities, the ageing of the countryside is speeding up. Many elderly Catholics are cut off from involvement with the parish, and may endure lives of loneliness. There are few Church-connected facilities for the aged, and Catholics who enter other institutions become separated from the Church, even at the end of life. Few public or private institutions welcome visits by religious personnel. There are even some that forbid such visits. Considering that the number of Catholics who live in hospitals or institutions is growing, there is a need for the Church to stress in society the need for faith at the end of life.

c) *To what extent do the many crises of faith which people can experience affect family life?*

1. There is a great impact. In the past, when a couple's personalities or values did not match, or other situations that today are cause for divorce existed the couple relied upon God

and lived through the difficulties. Nowadays, even when a couple believes, conventional wisdom says they need not put up with such situations. Christian family life is being overwhelmed by society's values. In other words, it no longer reflects a Christian sense of faith and view of humanity. Therefore, though children may grow up in a Christian household, the values they acquire are those of society. Made to dance to the tune of a society that emphasizes study for the sake of fitting in economically, and desiring to not become social outcasts, young people have no leeway to nurture a vocation. This is the greatest crisis for faith that arises in homes.

2. There is a risk that due to the crisis of faith, God will disappear from the home, which then ends up becoming a self-centered place without love.

3. The crisis of faith is also a crisis of love. As it becomes impossible to lovingly accept one's own existence and that of others the basis of family life – peace of mind and a sense of trust and love – will be affected.

4. When mind and body are dedicated to the near term, concern with the spirit disappears.

5. A crisis of faith occurs when one's relationship with God weakens and awe in the face of God disappears, making oneself the focus. It follows that human relationships become difficult and family life is threatened. This accounts, for example, for cases of unaccompanied death, denial of care to the elderly, child neglect, abuse of either children or parents and social isolation among youth. In this way, modern society's problems become more than the family can face, leading to fracturing of the family, the community and Christian community. There is an urgent need for families to be interested and involved in their family life.

9. Other Challenges and Proposals

What other challenges or proposals related to the topics in the above questions do you consider urgent and useful to treat?

1. It is necessary to supplement the pastoral care of people facing difficulties in their family life with a vision of the Church's teachings about marriage and the family. Further, it is necessary to go beyond merely saying to men and women who do not follow Church norms that they are separated from the community and actively provide them with opportunities to encounter the Christian community. At present, it is difficult to claim that in our parishes the necessary attitudes are common, or that the understanding of marriage itself has not been watered down even among Catholics.

2. The questions and topics of this survey have been developed with the mindset of Christian countries in which the entire family is Christian. For example, religiously mixed marriages seem to be considered a problem. However, in Japan, the overwhelming majority of marriages involve mixed religions. In this context, we must ask what a Christian household and family mean. The increasing number of people who do not marry, the increase in single parent families, the situation of the elderly and the ageing of society, the problems facing the children of the elderly are all problems that face family life today that were unimagined in the past.

3. This period of the “Year of the Family” overlapping two years is an opportunity for the Church to re-examine and deepen its Gospel understanding of the family.

4. While it is important to continue to stress the importance of the family and life, the Church must also present a healing, supporting and encouraging face to those who cannot fulfill the ideal rather than being judgmental and critical.

5. For a Church such as that in Japan, ceremonies like weddings and funerals must be opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. More energy must be put into this. Of course, this is the premise underlying all Church activities such as the daily liturgy, but the majority of those who attend weddings, funerals, memorial Masses and anniversary Masses are not Christians. For many of them, it is their first encounter with the Catholic Church. Even if such encounters are not direct evangelization, they provide an opportunity for them to encounter the “scent” of Christianity.

Even while keeping in mind the various problems that face family life today, it is important to remember and emphasize the strengths of the traditional Japanese family. Without any need of encouragement, invitation or cajoling, Japanese still take part in funerals or weddings as a normal requirement. Such is the power of tradition that cannot be ignored. The Church must make use of this. The Church often falls short in this, presenting a high threshold for entry and lacking hospitality and practical kindness. As Hebrews 13:2 teaches us, “Do not neglect to show hospitality, for by that means some have entertained angels without knowing it.” The Church must be a refuge for those worn by the journey of life, and ceremonial occasions are places where they can experience that refuge.