



COMMUNIQUE
OF THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
MEETING IN ACCRA, FROM 4TH TO 15TH NOVEMBER, 2014 ON THE
THEME "THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY IN THE
CONTEXT OF EVANGELISATION"

Greetings

Dear Brothers and Sister in Christ and all people of goodwill who live in our land, grace and peace of God the *Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its true name* be with you! (Eph. 3:15).

We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishop's Conference, meeting in our 2014 Annual Plenary Assembly in Oshiuman, Accra, from 4th to 15th November, 2014, send you our greetings of peace and blessing

Gratitude

We give thanks to God for His Grace and mercies for guiding us through the events of the past year during which as a Church we successfully organized a Second National Pastoral Congress on Sunyani to chart a new path of evangelization for our Church's mission in Ghana. We also recall with gratitude to God our successful *Ad limina Visit* to Rome this year during which we met the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to give an account of our stewardship. These graces of God to the Church, coupled with the fact that our Country, Ghana, continues to enjoy peace and goodwill among the comity of nations, invite us to give praise to God. We encourage all citizens to continue to seek the face of God and offer fervent prayers for our dear National and the Church.

Theme of this year's Plenary

The theme for this year's Plenary Assembly is "***The Pastoral challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization***". This theme was inspired by the just-ended Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family held in Rome, from 5th to 19th October, 2014 to consider the Pastoral challenges that the family faces today. Our deliberations on this theme were preceded by four days of prayer and reflection, at the end of which we wish to present to you and the good people of Ghana and the world at large the following pertinent teachings on the family.

The Church's teaching on the Family

The Church's perennial and unchanging on the family is based on the nature of man but especially on Scripture and Sacred Tradition namely, that God ordained marriage to be

between man and woman, when “*God made man and female and blessed them.*” God also intended marriage to be open to life when, “*He blessed them and said increase and multiply*” (Gen. 1:27-28). Furthermore, God determined marriage to be indissoluble as Jesus affirmed, “*What therefore God has put together, let no man put asunder*” (Matt. 19:6).

The Church’s consistent teaching on the importance of marriage and family life as reveal in Sacred Scripture is also emphasized in the Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), for instance, speaks about the dignity of marriage and family life (cf. GS 47-52), defining marriages as a community of life and love and placing at the nucleus of the family (Eph. 5:32).

God the Creator, by forming the first man and woman and commanding them to be fruitful and to multiply (Gen. 1:28) definitively established the family to be a permanent union between one man and one woman. Consequently, the family becomes the sanctuary where life is born, nurtured and welcomed as a gift of God. By matrimonial covenant which the Lord Jesus raised to the dignity of a sacrament, a man and a woman come together to established between themselves a relationship of love which by its very nature is ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring. This covenant of love consequently takes the character and effect of unity, indissolubility, fidelity and openness to life. Marital love also requires the fidelity of the spouses flowing from the gift of oneself to one’s lawful spouse (cf. Eph. 5:32).

Church as Family of God

The Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa (The Church in Africa)* adopted a new image of the Church: Church-family of God (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 63). This image emphasizes our common origin and destiny as Children of God (Eph. 3:14). The African cherishes the family as the fundamental base of humanity and of society. As a family, respect, sense of belonging and care for one another are our values. Like the African family, the Church always aims at building up her members, to uphold her image and reinforce her values of care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 63). This explains why the Church is appreciated as a gift from God given to building the Kingdom of reconciliation, justice and peace here on earth and in Ghana (*Africae Munus* 7).

The Family as Subject of Evangelization

The Fathers of *Vatican II* rightly noted that evangelization first takes place in the family, as parents “*by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children*” (*Lumen Gentium* 11). It is in the family that children first learn about God, love of neighbour and the Church. As such, parents are indispensable in sharing the faith with their children. Parents are to assist children to make the appropriate choices at the different stages of their lives.

Challenges of the Family

Today, the family is undergoing significant challenges that rock the very foundation on which God has set the human society. These crises manifest themselves in very many ways.

Philosophy of Relativism and the family

We are witnessing today the emergence of a new reality that defines man as a free individual with the license to do whatever she/he pleases. Unfortunately, this reality has crept into the traditional Christians concept of the family, redefining marriage to be a free union between any two people who are attracted to each other whether they are of the same sex or not. The new reality exhorts humans to give free expression to their sexual feelings in all manner of ways. Some people suppress the words, “*husband*” and “*wife*”, “*father*” and “*mother*” in favour of words such as “*partner*”, “*companion*” etc. The attempted redefinition of these words distorts and clouds the true meaning of marriage.

Negative Media Portrait of Marriage

The media has become a major source of influence in the way young people conceive marriage. They amplify failing and failed relationships between males and females and further celebrate their separation. Ghanaian young people continually keep themselves updated on the marital mishaps of celebrities, get exposed to explicit immoral scenes in movies and the internet and come to associate human sexuality with a certain casualness and irresponsible experimentation. It therefore makes it easy to treat one’s partner merely as an object of self-gratification. Regrettably, the many good examples of faithful couples are either ignored or not reported by the media.

Infidelity of Couples

Some Christian men and women, especially those who indulge in casual and pre-marital sex, do not develop the critical awareness of their changed status once they get married. They continue to maintain sexual relations with other men and women outside their marriage. Such betrayal often leads to the break-up of many marriages.

Domestic Violence in Marriage

Domestic violence is a real issue in many Ghanaian homes and is suffered by both men and women. While some wives are battered into silence and therefore live in perpetual fear of their husbands, some husbands are also unable to come home after work for fear of their wives. This often leads some men and women into alcoholism and some enter into amorous relationships with other women and men. The work place, the market and even at times, the

Church, have become the refuge for some men and women escaping the hazards of domestic violence. In some cases, innocent children and house helps fall victim to this violence.

Pleasures on Marriage and Families

Many a couple has challenges with building their lives together in intimate relationships due to pressures of work. The phenomenon where couples are regularly absent from the marital home due to work and education does not help in the stability of the marriage. Children become the ultimate victims in the event of divorce. Furthermore, demands from either partner's family for assistance most often incur the displeasure of the other spouse. Some husbands and wives find it difficult relating well to the families of their spouses. This often creates resentment and may lead to divorce.

In addition, when marriage had been for some time without children, there is always pressure brought to bear on the man but most often on the woman. For many Ghanaian communities, it is only when a child is born to the couple that the marriage is seen as consolidated and no explanation to the contrary is good enough. In some extreme cases, some women, unable to bear the pressure are actually known to have allowed their husbands to marry another woman and get children by her. Such arrangements apart from being wrong and opposed to the teaching on Christian family often result in disaster and tragedy.

Inequality in Marriage

Ghanaian Christians have to be educated out of their belief in the inequality of husband and wife. Most of us in Ghana live in male-dominated societies which believe in the superiority of the man over the woman. As such, the Christian doctrine on the equality of husband and wife is a teaching that some find difficult to accept. The traditional Ghanaian male believes that the woman is inferior to the man in marriage. We observe the phenomenon of polygamy among our Christian faithful as some men prefer to marry more than one woman. This is due to the Ghanaian culture which seems to condone polygamy. These notions are wrong and ought to change.

Bridewealth in Marriage

The issue of bridewealth (also known in some societies as dowry) and its significance for marriages also needs to be addressed. Even though most Christians would not accept the complete abolition of the bridewealth because of its significance for the stability of the marriage, we must do away with the excesses that are making it difficult for poor people to marry. Furthermore, one cannot deny completely the fact that the payment of the bridewealth in some cultures is partially to blame for the low place we give the woman in her marital home and the society at large. An effective evangelization of our Christian families will base family life on the love that bonds the couple together and not on the bridewealth.

Cohabitation/Concubinage

We bemoan the practice of cohabitation or concubinage in which couples that have performed the customary marriage see no need to go ahead to regularize their marriages. We call for an end to this practice. Reasons such as the need to study each other, lack of funds to celebrate the marriage, among others, do not hold any significance. For in such a practice, not only do the couples fail to make God the center of their marriages but they also cut themselves off from the Eucharist as the source of their spiritual sustenance.

Socio-political Challenges to the Family

What compounds these challenges to the family are other serious socio-economic and political problems in our society. Our beloved country, Ghana as a family is beset with the nagging problem of polarization along political and tribal lines. We experience the politicization of almost every national issue, and a growing religious and political intolerance. We see also the lack of the fear of God and ostentation in our body politic and social fabric. There is deceit, commercialization of religion and the “hijacking” of some religious and opinion leaders to divide and rule the society. All of these are bad examples for our children and youth. That is why we strongly deplore this state of affairs in our nation and urge all Ghanaians to desist from them and come together to address these evils.

We also deplore in no uncertain terms a radical and faceless culture of death which promotes among other things the supply and use of the condom in our schools, the in vitro fertilization and the contraception agenda of some national and international institutions in Ghana. Painfully, some Ghanaian homosexual and pro-abortion groups, and even our *Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection* overtly and subtly support these international organizations. We wish to draw the attention of all Ghanaians to this dangerous “culture of death” being imposed on us and call on all Ghanaians to forcefully reject this so-called freedom which indeed is suicidal. Further, we urge those who represent Ghana at the United Nations and other such bodies to realize that these practices are culturally abominable and morally and spiritually reprehensible. We therefore urge them to refrain from endorsing such disastrous protocol on our behalf. Whenever they do sign such protocols, they betray the trust the good people of Ghana have vested in them. We are to remind ourselves of the well-known fact that a nation that kills its unborn babies has no future.

Ghana's Economy and the family

The current state of the Ghanaian economy is of concern to all of us and affects the family adversely. We are witnessing a consistent high cost of living, hyper-inflation, a depreciating cedi and high cost of goods and services. We bemoan the fact that Ghana's economy is fast becoming one of “*buying and selling*”. Unbearably high taxes are causing many nascent private businesses to fold up. At the same time, we are not seeing aggressive efforts to set up

more industries to take care of rising youth unemployment and low levels of development. We join our voices to those of the many Ghanaians who disapprove of the importation of furniture from China for our Parliament when made-in-Ghana furniture could have been patronized to boost the furniture industry and the economy as a whole. Economic practices such as these, impact negatively on most families, leading to despair, poverty, sense of abandonment and marginalization. They threaten the stability of families making it difficult for them to actually live out their expectations a Christian families.

We note the various efforts of government, aimed at improving the economy, including the ongoing discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the signing of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Senchi Consensus. We can only hope that these interventions will lead to economic transformation that will arrest the rising spate of youth unemployment and low levels of development. We pray that our own home-grown economic policies such as those implemented under the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Authority (GYEEDA) and the Youth Enterprise Support (YES) may be led by qualified and competent persons. These policies should be given the utmost priority over externally-funded support programmes. Our experience is that externally-funded economic interventions almost always lead to unbearable consequences on citizens.

Corruption and the Family

We have time and again spoken about the twin-evil of bribery and corruption in Ghana but we regret to note that these evils continue to ravage every fabric of the Ghanaian society. Present-day Ghana is openly and pervasively corrupt. People at all levels of society, including some Christians, are engaged in naked corruption with impunity. We commend the Government for the recent prosecution of some high level personalities in government and for setting up various Commissions of enquiry into alleged corrupt practices at high levels. We do think, however, that our Government could do more to nip this canker in the bud. Certainly, individuals and private businesses should do their part to end corruption in our country. Reports of corruption from the media and on-going national commissions of enquiry such as the Judgment Debts, GYEEDA and SADA, National Service Scheme and the 2014 FIFA World Cup as well as allegations of corruption in CHRAJ are worrying. We decry the mismanagement and apparent failure of these programmes and institutions and call on Government to do all it can to ensure that they deliver on their mandate. We also expect Government to act without fear or favour in dealing with those who will be found culpable in the reports of the on-going investigations.

We urge the financial institutions, especially the banks, to beware of money laundering and the reported cases of cheating unsuspecting clients by some unscrupulous workers in the banks and financial institutions. We appeal to the Bank of Ghana to come to the aid of all those who loose their monies through some failed microfinance institutions.

Greed breeds hard-heartedness, theft, blackmail, bribery and corruption and even murder. Corruption encourages and condones incompetence, mediocrity at work and disrespect for higher authority as well as unnecessary bureaucracy. It drives away investment and leads to unnecessary suffering and poverty. We therefore call on all Ghanaians to make a serious self-examination of conscience concerning bribery and corruption and repent. We must all resolve from today never to engage in acts of bribery and corruption or condone the same.

Road Accidents and the Family

We have observed with growing concern the increasing rate of preventable fatal accidents on our roads. Roads in many part of the country are deplorable and those in better shape are not properly marked or sign-posted. According to the national Roads Safety Commission in 2013, about two thousand people lost their lives in road and transport accidents. The trend for this year suggests that we may exceed this figure by the end of the year if we do not make immediate and radical changes in the way we use our roads. The lasting trauma and the other untold hardship to the bereaved families are obvious. The Country in turn loses its precious citizens and becomes poorer.

We therefore urge all Ghanaians, especially transport owners, all drivers and other road users, as a matter of urgency, to exercise maximum vigilance and abide by all road and transport regulations. Passengers and pedestrians should protest, and try to restrain and report all drivers who drive carelessly to the appropriate authorities. Further, we urge all our priests and ministers of other religions to use the pulpit to educate and remind their followers about the do's and don'ts on our roads. All in Ghana need to know that the fatal accidents on our roads are neither the will of God for us nor to our destiny. Rather, they are the result of our own carelessness and indiscipline. God has given us the responsibility to prevent these accidents from happening.

Strike Action and the Family

As Pastor of God's People, we cannot remain unconcerned about the spate of strike actions which have hit our county recently. We wish to call on the Government and Organized Labour to always use dialogue and negotiations in dealing with labour disputes and agitations. We are prepared to play a mediation role in the resolution of the ongoing impasse among the parties.

The Threat of Ebola, Cholera and the Family

We regret that the Ebola Viral Disease which has hit the West African region, especially Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, has so far claimed more than 5,000 lives. We pray for the families which have lost their beloved ones and ask that intensive prayers be offers for an end to this scourge, even as we urge all Ghanaians to continue to observe all health safety precautions and to refer to and abide by the instructions we issued on the Ebola disease just

last August. On cholera, we urge the continued observance of hygienic conditions to completely deal with it and prevent its recurrence. We appeal to all Ghanaians to take seriously the directives by the Ministry of Health on how to prevent these diseases.

New Policy Considerations in Education and the Family

We learn that the ministry of Education is in the process of proposing a new consolidated bill on Education which aims at effectively decentralizing education service delivery and management. We are not opposed to education reforms but feel the need for broad-based consultation on such reforms, especially with all major stakeholders including the Church. Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have the most natural and divine obligation to educate their children in schools and institutions of their choice. This inalienable right has been significantly usurped by the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS), a system we continue to decry for reasons many Ghanaians are beginning to understand. Parents must be acknowledge as the first and foremost educators of their children. We therefore call on Government to be transparent on any on-going policy considerations on education reforms. We urge the Government to expedite action on the formalization of the Partnership Agreement on Education submitted by Religious and Other Bodies whose schools are in the public systems.

Some Pastoral Recommendations for Marriage and Family Life

In the face of these and other formidable challenges to the family and our society, we, your Pastors exhort you our Faithful to be responsible citizens and to be loyal to what Scripture and the Church teach about the family and marriage.

Given the demands of married life, we exhort all who are called by God to this vocation to prepare themselves adequately. We call on the National Catechetical Commission to develop a structured and sustained programme of on-going formation of prospective and married couples.

We encourage the formation of *Christian Family Movements* to promote Christian marriage. Further, we propose a *Family Week* to be celebrated annually and we urge all Priests, Religious and Laity to observe this week as such. We equally call on our priests and religious to recognize that home visitation to families is part of their ordinary pastoral duties. We urge all Parishes and Dioceses to create occasions for the unmarried, especially the youth, to come together for retreats, workshops etc., to prepare for their life's vocations.

Formators in our major seminaries and other formation houses should continue to deepen candidates' knowledge in marriage and family, while priests and religious in the field should equip themselves with periodic on-going pastoral formation and study sessions to keep abreast of Church teaching on marriage. We ask the whole Church to show special love and attention to childless couples. The marriages of spouses to whom God has not granted children radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice.

Commendation of Faithful Couples and Families

We, your Shepherds, commend the good work of all faithful couples who witness to family values inspired by the Gospel in spite of the many challenges. We call on all pastoral agents to give special attention to the family in their ministry, especially to families in distress. Let all parents and guardians take their responsibility more seriously, mindful of the fact that they are the very first agents of the human and religious formation of their families and society at large. As your Pastors, we pledge to continue to work with our pastoral agents and the State to ensure that the fundamental human values, such as belief in God, the respect for life, the virtues of sincerity, honesty and hard work, are acquired first from the home.

Conclusion

The church will continue to proclaim the unwavering truth that monogamy is what God has ordained and that polygamy is contrary to conjugal love and incompatible with the unity of marriage. She will continue to teach that marriage is between a man and a woman and not people of the same sex. The church will also continue to teach that divorce from a living and lawful spouse is not permitted by the church because it separates what God has joined together. She suffers with those who are admitted to communion due to their marital status and will continue to journey with them in the faith to encourage them not to despair.

It is without doubt that the family of today faces formidable pastoral and socio-economic challenges which threaten its fundamental role as the basic unit of society and the Church. We your Pastors assure all families of our encouragement and prayers in the face of these challenges. We call on all Christian and people of goodwill to continue to be strong and committed to the family.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, continue to intercede for all families and for all of us. *May the God of all consolation and peace fill you with His grace and peace. (1 Cor. 1:3).*

**MOST REV. JOSEPH OSEI-BONSU
BISHOP OF KONONGO-MAMPONG &
PRESIDENT, GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE**