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OF
GOA AND DAMAN**

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Pastoral Letter

**To the Priests, Religious, Lay Faithful and People of Good Will
in the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman**

(Approved English version of the Pastoral Letter No. CP-Past/107/2015

written originally in Konkani language)

"FAMILY, BECOME WHAT YOU ARE"

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Eph 1: 2*).

1. In the last few years, we have tried to deepen our Christian life. The Church is the temple of Christian life and the family a domestic Church, a stage where the mission of the Church is carried out. For this very reason, in these last two years, Pope Francis convoked two General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops, one after another, to deliberate on the role of the family. Last year, the Synod of Bishops put forth some proposals to the Pope. I write this letter with some of my reflections against this backdrop.

2. The Church, moving in the footsteps of the Lord, has always acknowledged, upheld and proclaimed the importance of the family. Jesus Our Lord was born and brought up in the family (*cf. Mt 1; Lk 1 - 2*) and recognized its importance in His ministry (*cf. Mt 19: 3-12; Jn 19: 25-27*). The culture of the family was the lifeline of the Church from her very inception (*cf. Acts 2: 44-45, 4: 32, 18: 8; Rom 16: 5; 1 Cor 16: 19; Filem 1:2*). For this reason, Vatican II and St. John Paul II called the family the “domestic Church” (*cf. LG 11; FC 17, 49; CCC 1655-1656*). This thrust has not diminished till today. Down the

centuries, the Popes, the local Ordinaries and Pastors have always highlighted and promoted the holiness of the family.

3. I am writing this Letter to proclaim the values of the family in faithfulness to this rich tradition and with my gaze fixed on the One who founded the family (God the Father), on the One who revealed its riches (Jesus) and on the One who is guiding it (Holy Spirit). The Most Holy Trinity then is the origin and the summit of the family. This same Trinity challenges man and woman to take up family life (*cf. FC 11*). How noble is the vocation to married life! How unfathomable its depth!

4. In this context, St. John Paul II proposes the following four tasks for the family: i. To build a community of persons; ii. To be at the service of life; iii. To participate in the development of society; iv. To share in the life and mission of the Church (*cf. FC 17*).

4.1. **To Build a Community of Persons**

The family begins with the marital vows. This covenant draws together two families. The family needs love in order to live, grow and achieve perfection as a community of persons. This love needs to be a replica of the Divine Love (*cf. 1 Jn 4*).

In this context I would like to call to our minds the teaching of Blessed Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae* (*cf. HV 9*):

a. This love is to be **fully human**, a compound of sense and spirit, not depending merely on feelings, but coming forth as an act of the free will. It is geared, not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but to help husband and wife become one in heart and mind, and together attain their human fulfillment.

b. This love needs to be **total**, arising from a deep personal friendship, wherein husband and wife share everything, not seeking their own convenience. Whoever loves his partner in this way does not look to his own good, but to his partner's.

c. This love is **faithful unto death**. This is the kind of love the bride and the groom vow to each other. The living out of this love is very difficult, but not impossible. Many couples are living examples of such a faithful married life and testify that faithfulness unto death is the source of profound and enduring happiness.

c. Finally, this love is **fecund**. It is not confined only to the married couple; it is naturally ordained toward the creation of new life and, therefore, it bears fruit in the procreation of children for the humanity and for the Church. Children are indeed the supreme gift of marriage.

On the wedding day, the priest, in the name of God, asks three questions of the bride and the groom. These questions refer to the above fourfold love. The responses of the bridal couple express their commitment to love each other totally. This is precisely the covenant of God's love.

4.2. At the Service of Life

As said earlier, family love blossoms from the marital vows of husband and wife. The service of life is a part of this covenant and it is translated into the responsibility of bringing forth children and raising them up according to the values of Christ.

Children are a gift of God (*cf. Gen 1: 28*). By bringing them to birth, the spouses become collaborators in God's work of creation. At the same time, we should not forget that the spouses participate in the salvific plan Christ began: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (*Mt 19: 14*). This is not exclusive to Christian thought. Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, had stated that every child comes with a message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity.

The formation of children is an important part of this task. In the words of St. John Paul II, parents beget children in love and for love and cultivate human values in the family (*cf. FC 36-37*). Thus they fulfill the creative plan of God.

In the last Pastoral Letter we had said: "today we see the number of children decreasing in our families let us, then, work to promote a culture of life in our families" (*PL 2014-15, 3*). To this end, the knowledge of human biology is important (*cf. Caritas in Veritate 48*). This is taught by our Diocesan Family Service Centre while promoting Natural Family Planning methods. The Centre further suggests that parents, having these teachings before them, should fulfill their responsibility, even by making place for one more child. Thus, they are called to uphold their integrity and health by turning away from abortion, the use of contraceptives and of other means of exclusive sexual pleasure.

At this juncture, our hearts turn to couples who do not have the joy of bearing a child. We express our solidarity with them as they sometimes experience humiliation and even despair. In such a situation, I appeal to them to respond to it with trust in God, by resorting to means consistent with the teachings of the Church. When possible, adoption of a child should be thought of.

4.3. Participating in the Development of Society

The mission of the family and the society complement each other (*cf. Gen 1:28*). The way the family acts has an impact on society, so also the society on the family. The Christian family has a responsibility in the educational, familial and other such activities of the society. They should leaven their workplace and other social institutions with Christian values. By imbibing such values, the members of the family should be messengers of Jesus in the society.

The family has a right that state authorities should plan their initiatives keeping in mind its welfare (*cf. FC 46*).

4.4. Sharing in the Life and Mission of the Church

The Church is a Family of Christian families. If the Church lives in the family, the family draws life from and is formed in the Church (*cf. FC 49*). This way of life is a boon for the family and for the Church.

Catechesis -- through the breaking of and reflection on the Word of God – and the knowledge of the teachings of the Magisterium are the backbone of Christian living. Families ought to deepen their faith and live it out through their sacramental life and with the help of prayers and blessings used in the different circumstances of daily life.

The Church has the responsibility and authority to care for the family at every stage of its life. Every parish should see that the values of marriage and family life are imparted in the remote and proximate preparation for marriage as well as during its celebration.

We have some meaningful family customs that express and deepen our faith, like the recitation of the morning and night prayers, of the Angelus and the Rosary, of prayers at meals, the blessing from the elders, the wearing of the scapular, the pious use of the holy water and other such practices. Our faith, deepened through such customs, serves to

fulfill the yearning of Jesus ‘that they all may be one’ (*cf. Jn 17: 21*). In this context, let Pastors take steps to establish Parish Family Service Cells and encourage parishioners to attend Training of Trainers seminars.

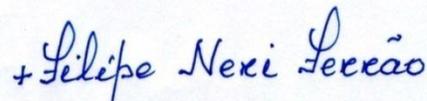
Conclusion

Before I end, I request our priests, religious men and women, family associations and small Christian communities to have a pastoral concern for the family. You are all in my prayer and I invoke God’s abundant blessings on you.

Prayer

*Heavenly Mother, Handmaid of the Lord and Mother of the family,
You accepted generously the plan of God.
Along with your Spouse, St. Joseph,
You took care of the Family of Nazareth.
Intercede for our families, so that, walking in your footsteps,
They may fulfill their responsibility .
St. Joseph Vaz, our Patron,
Having grown up in Christian family values, you became a Priest
And proclaimed Jesus -- your Lord and ours – far and wide.
Be now the light and guide of our families, as they strive to grow in Christian values. Amen.*

Archbishop’s House, Panjim, Goa, Solemnity of the Pentecost, May 24, 2015.



(+ Filipe Neri Ferrão)
Archbishop of Goa and Daman

DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO:

LG *Lumen Gentium*
FC *Familiaris Consortio*
CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church
HV *Humanae Vitae*
PL Pastoral Letter
CV *Caritas in Veritate*