

**The Catholic Commission  
For Social Justice  
and  
The Archdiocesan  
Communications Commission  
and  
The Archdiocesan  
Family Life Commission**



***“Strengthening T&T’s  
capacity to support families”***

*Panel discussion to mark*

***The 10th Anniversary Of The  
United Nations International Day Of Families***

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THE CENTENARY HALL, ST. MARY’S COLLEGE, PORT OF SPAIN  
FRIDAY 14th MAY, 2004 • 5.00 p.m. - 8.00 p.m.

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## PROGRAMME

- 5.00 p.m. National Anthem  
Prayer, Welcome & Remarks  
*His Grace, Archbishop Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss.R*
- 5.10 p.m. Moderator: *Leela Ramdeen, CCSJ Chair*  
Introduction of Feature Speaker
- 5.15 p.m. Feature Address: UNDP Resident Representative  
*Dr. Inyang Ebong-Harstrup*
- 5.30 p.m. Panellists:  
Rep. of Government - *Ms Eunice Gittens, Director of Family Services Division, Ministry of Social Services Delivery*  
  
Rep. of Network of NGOs for the advancement of women  
- *Ms Merle Hodge*  
  
Rep. of IRO - *Mr Acharaya Kermananda*  
  
Rep. of AFLC - *Fr Gerard Farfan, C.S.Sp*
- 6.15 p.m. Open discussion - General Audience
- 7.15 p.m. Refreshments
- 7.45 p.m. Summary of Proceedings  
Rapporteur  
Recommendations to Government, NGOs, Parishes etc.
- 8.00 p.m. Closing Remarks - *Leela Ramdeen, CCSJ Chair*  
Prayer by *His Grace, Archbishop Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss.R*

## FOREWORD

*By Leela Ramdeen, Episcopal Delegate for Social Justice/Chair of CCSJ*

We offer this booklet to you as a resource to inform and enhance your family life and the lives of other families. Please use it in discussions with your family, other families and groups, making it your own.

As you reflect on the contributions outlined in this booklet, it is worth reflecting on the following 4 goals established by the US Catholic Bishops at the 1990 meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Family Ministry "A Pastoral Plan and a Reaffirmation". At that meeting the US Bishops unanimously adopted a Resolution reaffirming "The Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry." The four goals are:

1. To raise the awareness of the Church to the sacramental nature and mission of Christian marriage as well as to the realities now facing families.
2. To help family members develop their potential for nurturing and healing each other, for reaching out in active concern to others.
3. To call families to authentic Christian service (i.e., a ministry that flows from a sense of Christian mission) and to see that this is adequately supported and formed.
4. To establish structures at all levels of Church life that will facilitate marriage and family ministry.

These goals highlight the need for a commitment by the entire Church to the pastoral care of marriage and family life at all its stages. Let us form a partnership to strengthen our families. In doing so, it is vital that the needs of our families are identified at different levels, particularly in our parishes. This will require an analysis also of the ways in which national and local policies, programmes, ministries and services impact upon family life.

His Grace made it clear at the opening Mass at Synod 2003, that we are the 'living stones'. Inter alia, this means that we have a responsibility to reach out to all our families – irrespective of their situation, religion, or ethnic background. We are all children of God, made in His image and likeness. If we believe in the dignity of each human individual, it is critical that we pledge a long-term commitment to promote the well-being of our families.

Family life ministry takes many forms. There are many organizations and groups within our Church and society that need support. Join a group. The time is ripe for you to bring your gifts to the table of the Lord and contribute your time, talent and treasure to support at least one group. Ring us at 622 6680 if you wish further information about ways in which you or your parish can assist in the process of strengthening families.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*Drawn from all contributions*

1. The Government, civil society and individuals should
  - keep working for policies and programmes that recognize and support the contributions each family makes to its members, its community and its society;
  - build an environment that sustains and supports families for the benefit of generations to come.
2. There must be a concerted effort within our communities, schools and churches to re-examine the role of family and what it means, given globalization, rapid technological change and changing economic circumstances that affect the way we work and play. This type of discussion must take place within all age groups. The Netherlands provides a good example of one way in which this could be tackled by including learning about family responsibility in its job training programs.
3. Public policy must address its impact on families and on the gendered differences within them. Both governmental and non governmental organizations, national and international, must strive to promote the adoption of family-sensitive policies and to encourage family-friendly societies as opposed to the current emphasis on meeting the needs of individuals.
4. Families must make their voices heard. They must ensure that planners and policy makers recognize them as society's cornerstone and treat them as such. They must advocate for policies that support them in fulfilling their economic and psychosocial functions and constantly seek out new ways to adapt to the fast paced changes that characterize modern society.
5. In accordance with suggested aims of the United Nations, a Policy on the Family should be developed. This should drive the operations of a Ministry of Family Services.

Priority areas include:

- the decentralization of social services, with the establishment of Social Services Centres island-wide
- Increased collaboration and networking inter and intra sectors, to reduce duplication and to encourage greater cost efficiencies
- Improvements in the Judicial and protective services, for renewed respect for the law
- Housing – exploration of the UK system of Council housing, to provide acceptable standards of living for all citizens. This would impact on the general health of the population, who would be provided with a wide range of affordable and accessible health services, operated in a user-friendly approach

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*Continued*

- Refocused educational services at all levels, to respect the different potentials of individuals; to also provide for the holistic needs of citizens - in this regard, there must be more emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education
- Provision of recreational spaces and organized programmes, to address optimal health practices and coping with stress
- Improved communication systems, to include transit systems, and also the interpersonal arena
- Provision of financial and other material assistance to additional groups of vulnerable populations

To meet these priorities, attention must be given to :

- Strengthening of Research and Planning units
- Training of and increases in human resource, with scholarships / in areas of need identified by research
- Systematic Training in and more effective use of Information technology, to guide policy and programme management
- Redesigning of the delivery of Income maintenance programmes, to reduce delays and final costs
- Review and restructuring of operational state systems
- The provision of individual and group counselling and other services to support families throughout the life cycle

These considerations would certainly promote and support the image of the family as the cornerstone of society, a key institution to assist in the achievement of developed country status.

6. Supporting our families begins with respecting them in word and in deed. We should allow our families their dignity, and work with who is in the family, rather than who we think should be in it.
7. We also need a nation-wide project in education for parenting, accessible to all those who have responsibility for the care of children, whether or not they are their biological parents. The informal 'adoption' of children - nieces, nephews, god-children or otherwise - is still a significant feature of Caribbean family life. Education for parenting would equip us with a knowledge of child development.
8. There also needs to be age-appropriate education about sexuality from the earliest levels of the primary school, to develop in the individual a greater responsibility for his or her sexuality.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*Continued*

9. With reference to sexuality and sexual responsibility, it is only in default of the parents that schools have to accept the responsibility of teaching children about sexual responsibility. The proper place for that is in the home. The proper opportunity is in a stable union - father and mother, both of whom are giving the example of what a stable sexual relationship means and the kind of responsibility it carries. It follows that only an education for love rooted in faith can lead to the capacity of interpreting "the signs of the times," which are the historical expression of this twofold love (\*see pg 7).
10. Our social services are overburdened, but we need a great deal more by way of State and community intervention in the lives of families and children at risk. The social services of Third World countries were drastically cut back in the era of World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment. It is now imperative that we restore and expand the systems that give support to families and increase the possibility of healthy family functioning.
11. Parents should give 'quality time' to their children.
12. The wider community needs to be aware of the issues that affect families in T&T.
13. Faith communities should play a greater role in supporting families.
14. God should be included in family life and in society. The neglect of God is very much at the heart of the problems.
15. There is a need for the development of interfamily relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the mission to society proper to the family and its responsibility for the building of a more just society. It is within the family that social virtues are learnt: First, responsibility (including sexual responsibility).
16. Greater emphasis needs to be given to such ideas as courses on parenting, modules for imparting skills and instilling values that will promote healthy families.
17. Greater research needs to be done at the university level, at various levels within the church and other organizations on family, focusing on the factors that can build healthy family life. Research can give us more precise knowledge of how our families actually function.
18. An institute should be established - whether it is government supported or funded or not. The institute should comprise well respected individuals from as wide a spectrum of the sectors of society as possible to assist efforts to support families.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*Continued*

19. A greater emphasis should be placed on those families that have been able to cope; that have been able to live exemplary lives. We should hold these families up as exemplars to the rest of society
20. More family life programmes should be established and we all need to open the doors of our hearts as there seems to be fewer persons willing to help persons in need. People need places where they can go and say "I am hurting".
21. There should be closer collaboration between NGOs and CBOs and easier access to government services. Such access is made difficult due to bureaucracy. Unless we collaborate it is pointless, and we have to do this with God, love, truth understanding, integrity and togetherness.
22. Programmes which act as support systems for single parents, marriage support, support for widowed, separated and divorced persons are in train. The problem is that the programmes are not readily available at community level. Such programmes should be run at parish level, probably through family life clinics.
23. Parenting courses should promote values of abstinence, self respect, self worth and chastity, before and after marriage. The steps taken by the government to start an Abstinence Education Programme in schools is fully endorsed by many.
24. Programmes referred to above should be implemented in schools to help influence the thinking of persons from an early age. There should be better communication between teachers and parents and support for children - no matter what the circumstances are our children should be shown LOVE.

### \* HUMAN SEXUALITY:

In light of sections of the foregoing recommendations which refer to sex education and sexual responsibility, the following information is offered to readers:

In Familiaris Consortio ( The Role of the Christian Family in The Modern World) 1981, Pope John Paul II comments on the issue of sex education. He describes sex education as " education in love as self-giving" which cannot be linked "solely with the body and with selfish pleasure", but which must be "education for chastity for it is a virtue which develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the nuptial meaning' of the body."

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*Continued*

When human sexuality "manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift self in love", it then becomes an enrichment of the person. The Pope also reaffirms the parental role in giving "their children a clear and delicate sex education:, and he opposes the "widespread form of imparting sex information disassociated from moral principle. That would merely be an introduction to the experience of pleasure and a stimulus leading to the loss of serenity- while still in the years of innocence- by opening the way to vice."

In this papal document, the Pope accepts the possibility of some form of school/classroom education but only if it is truly under the control of parents. The role of schools is qualified, limited and determined by parental decisions:

"Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering the same spirit that animates the parents."

In the Vatican 11 document: Gaudium et Spes # 49, we read:

"Especially in the heart of their own families, young people should be aptly and seasonably instructed about the dignity, duty and expression of married love. Trained thus in the cultivation of chastity, they will be able, at a suitable age, to enter a marriage of their own after an honorable courtship."

In 1978, the American bishops issued a major catechetical document, Sharing the Light of Faith, National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the US. In this document, the bishops drew attention to the primacy of the parental role in education in human sexuality and to the importance of "the role of self-control, self-discipline, conscience formation, prayer, the reception of the sacraments, and the devotion to the Blessed mother, model of chastity, in developing a Christian approach to sexuality."

## OPENING PRAYER AND ADDRESS

*By Most Rev. Edward J. Gilbert, C.Ss.R, Archbishop of P.O.S.*

### Opening Prayer

Let us acknowledge the presence of God's Spirit. Let us pray: Father we gather to discuss a major challenge in our society - family life and how to support it. We ask for your wisdom. We ask for the gift of careful listening. We ask that you help us leave this gathering with a firm commitment to work together to address our challenge.

We ask that you bless the strong families of T&T and motivate them to help families that are struggling, frequently without hope. Help us to become a source of hope, love and peace for the families of our Nation. We offer this prayer through the intercession of Mary the mother of God and in the name of Jesus her son. Amen.

### Speech:

I welcome everyone to what should be a very interesting evening. The theme of our evening's discussion is: "Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families". We all know that the theme is challenging. It requires interdisciplinary collaboration in both analysis and planning. This evening has the potential to be a very important moment for family life.

I am pleased that this evening's panel discussion to mark the UN International Day of Families is the result of a joint effort of 3 Commissions of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain: Social Justice, Communications and Family Life. I am also pleased that the programme reflects the ecumenical and inter-faith construct of Trinidad and Tobago. I am grateful that the programme includes, among others, representatives of the government, Ms Eunice Gittens, Director of Family Services Division and the resident representative of the United Nations Development Programme - Dr. Inyang Ebong-Harstrup.

My remarks while brief are, I believe, important.

Pastoral ministry involves not only communicating the truth, it involves walking with people as they do their best to understand the truth and, sometimes maybe even frequently, struggle to live the truth.

We are speaking of family at a time in world history when family life is truly challenged. The temptation is to concentrate on the second responsibility of pastoral ministry 'to walk with and support people in their family life.' I believe we have to rise above that understandable temptation. If we do not keep the agenda clear from the viewpoint of cause and effect, we doom ourselves to dealing with effects - and there are plenty of effects to deal with.

## OPENING PRAYER AND ADDRESS

*Continued*

Allow me to give just 3 examples on the truth about family from the Catholic perspective:

1. Marriage and family is a theological unit;
2. Marriage is between a man and a woman;
3. The partners in marriage are equals.

We all know there are families without marriage and there are young people on the streets who have no relationship whatsoever to families. Legislative and Judicial decisions are complicating pastoral ministry flowing from the concept of marriage being between a man and a woman because people erroneously believe that what is legal is also ethical. Cultural values and cultural patterns are trapping women throughout the world in predetermined roles that frequently undermine their dignity and their potential to develop their gifts and contribute to society. Even when legislation in countries is correct, women frequently lack the means to pursue their rights. The teaching of the Church that the partners are equal is rejected by many cultures at least on a practical level.

On the other hand, the various religious traditions must do more than preach and teach. They must be non-judgmentally present to people, walk with them and enable them to help themselves - always knowing that in some individual cases it may be already too late to facilitate substantial change. Care can take on a custodial aspect that will probably be permanent. The data from 'walking with people' has to be then factored into the programmes that help people to understand marriage and family and prepare for the responsibilities of marriage and family.

### **Conclusion:**

For the Catholic Church, marriage and family is a unit. However, the extensive pastoral experience of the Church understands quite well that the acceptance of that truth is being challenged. It is possible to have marriage without family; family without marriage and life without either marriage and family. Those options are a challenge to all of us especially governments because the trend is affecting the stability of society, it is affecting the health of society, it is affecting social budget of governments and it is already affecting the labour force of many countries. That is why we cannot just deal with effects of troubled, broken or non-existent families, we must also consider the causes - why are they in that condition and how can we reduce it in the future.

I am looking forward to listening for the rest of the evening.

## INTRODUCTION OF FEATURE SPEAKER

*Leela Ramdeen, Chair of CCSJ & Moderator for the event*

Thank you, Your Grace, for your warm welcome to our guests. Your Grace, Dr Ebong-Harstrup, members of the Panel, ladies, gentlemen and young people, members of the media. I would like to welcome you most cordially on behalf of the 3 Commissions that have planned this event: CCSJ, ACC, AFLC.

Tomorrow, 15th May, is the actual day when, around the world people will be marking the 10th Anniversary of the UN's International Day of Families. We are grateful that you could attend our event today. I wish to share with you 3 key objectives for our national celebration. They are taken from the 6 UN objectives:

### **The objectives for the national celebration are:**

1. To increase awareness of family issues in TT;
2. To stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families in TT;
3. To foster collaboration among government, faith communities, NGOs and CBOs in TT in support of families.

### **The UN objectives are:**

1. To increase awareness of family issues among Governments as well as in the private sector;
2. To strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;
3. To stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation in families;
4. To undertake at all levels reviews and assessments of the situation and needs of families, identifying specific and problems;
5. To enhance the effectiveness of local, national and regional efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families, generate new activities and strengthen existing ones;
6. To improve collaboration among national and international organisations in support of families.

## INTRODUCTION OF FEATURE SPEAKER

*Continued*

Collaboration is important for a variety of reasons, not least because it allows us to use our limited resources more effectively and to draw on the knowledge, skills and expertise of a wide range of individuals and organizations.

We must work together to create structures nationally and locally which will support families to do as Pope John Paul II says and "become what they are." If we invest in our families we will be investing in society as a whole.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our feature speaker, Dr Inyang Ebong Harstrup. Since 2002 Dr Ebong-Harstrup has been the UN Resident Coordinator in our region and the UNDP Representative for Suriname, Netherland Antilles, and Aruba.

Dr Ebong-Harstrup has had a long and distinguished career with the UNDP spanning many years. Today, not only will she share with us the Message from the UN Secretary-General, Dr Kofi Annan, to mark the 10th Anniversary of the International Day of Families, but she will also give us the benefit of her thoughts on our theme, drawing on her years of experience on various projects in different parts of the world.

The components of some of the projects for which Dr Ebong-Harstrup has had responsibility in the past include: Poverty, Governance, Gender, The Environment, Water, Sanitation, Afforestation, Food, Mineral Exploitation, HIV/AIDS, Drug Abuse Prevention and Control, Agriculture, Human Resources Development and so on.

We need to address these and other issues if we are to strengthen our capacity to support families in T&T.

Dr Ebong-Harstrup is eminently qualified to address us on our theme and we welcome her most sincerely. Let us warmly welcome Dr Ebong-Harstrup to address us.

## FEATURE ADDRESS

*by Dr. Inyang Ebong-Harstrup, Resident Representative, UNDP and Resident Co-coordinator UN System in Trinidad and Tobago.*

His Grace, the Archbishop of Port of Spain the Rev. Edward Gilbert, Ms. Leela Ramdeen, Chairperson, Catholic Commission for Social Justice, Ms. Eunice Ittens, Director, Family Services Division, Office of the Prime Minister (Social Services Delivery), other members of the Head Table; UN staff, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

This year's International Day of Families carries special significance, because 2004 so marks the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. We at the United Nations see the occasion to celebrate the most important social institution that lays the foundation for all development in societies. It is the institution in which our basic and higher level needs are initially met and where until the end of our lives most of us turn for emotional, psychosocial and economic needs. Without families there can be no communities, no nations and no global community of nation states.

Thus, the International Day of Families is an occasion for celebration of the achievements of families the world over, as well as to reflect on major trends and threats that affect the institution as we know it and to recall the importance of the original principles and objectives of the Year at the national, regional and global levels.

In his message to recognize and support the contribution of families, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan notes that "there has been progress during the past 10 years. Many Member States are instituting national programmes of action. Efforts are being made to integrate family perspectives in national legislation, policy formulation and programme development. Research on issues concerning the family is enriching and informing policies and programmes, while collaboration across the United Nations system is contributing to an emerging framework for global action. Civil society is mobilizing and coordinating programmes and actions in support of families. Indeed, the interest, commitment and resolve evident among all actors and at all levels indicate that the well-being of families has become a central focus of all concerned with national development and poverty eradication."

Perhaps with the many alarm bells being sounded across the globe on the weaknesses occasioned by the many threats that assail it, one might well ask what is there about families to celebrate.

I think that here in Trinidad and Tobago, in spite of the many reports in the media on:

- High levels of crime, particularly crimes committed by youth;
- Problems in our school system;



## FEATURE ADDRESS

*Continued*

- The significant numbers of homeless persons that we see when we walk through the streets of the cities;
- And the growing number of street children; all symptoms that family is under threat, I still think that there are still some things that we can, and must celebrate!

Let me invite you to think for a minute or two about the first reaction of our many youth who are successful at sporting and academic endeavours here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Every time that His Excellency Brian Lara breaks another world record he recalls the support roles of parents Bunty and Pearl and his siblings and his "adopted" second family the Carews. George Bovell II, following on the footsteps of his sporting parents, continues to make waves as it were, again always with the support of his family. In the world of music and entertainment we can think of the musical families that have emerged and continue to enjoy success both here and on the international scene - the Samaroo Jets, the Love Circle, and the Walters family all come immediately to mind.

Similarly, our youth continue to excel in the world of academics. Year after year we read of our Advanced Level students who rank in the world's top ten in various subjects. They all attribute their success to the unswerving support of their immediate families and their extended families in the school community.

I took note recently of the fact that the Youth from the Youth Training Centre placed second in the RBTT Young Leaders Debating Competition and recognized the success of the institutional family of which these young men form a part. This is truly worthy of commendation and celebration.

Let us however use this occasion also, to reflect on the major trends that impact families worldwide and share some thoughts and how these can be manipulated to ensure that the family responds to change by adaptation and without significant dysfunction or total breakdown.

The first issue that I would like to address is one that is central to the mandate of my organization, UNDP, - Poverty. Poverty perhaps has one of the most devastating impacts on the family. One of the characteristics of poverty in contemporary society is its occurrence in the midst of widely disseminated images of opulence and conspicuous consumption. This I believe has serious potential for creating severe tensions within the family unit particularly among poor households. It affects the formation, structure and functions of families.

## FEATURE ADDRESS

*Continued*  
*Continued*

More than families in any other socio-economic strata, family relations, and by extension stability, tend to be put under severe strain amongst the poor in the face of what is in fact poverty in the midst of plenty.

The role of families as socializing agents is both directly and indirectly affected by their socio-economic situation. Scarcity of resources, the focus on the problems of daily subsistence, inadequate housing and overcrowding, lack of access to basic necessities such as water and sanitation directly impact on nutrition, health, and emotional and cognitive development of children. It also impacts on the family's capacity to complement what is imparted in the school system or even on the ability of some families to keep children in school or even in the home. Have we for example examined whether the growing numbers of street children are in fact parentless?

There are varying estimates of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago, since over time different approaches have been used to measure the phenomenon. All of the estimates though come up with figures which are unacceptably high given the country's wealth and economic status. I have mentioned some of the possible impacts of poverty on the family but there are many other dimensions that can be explored by the researchers and policy makers.

The other interesting aspect of modern life that has impacted the family, both negatively and positively, is the rapid pace of technological change. On the positive side, technology has contributed significantly to improvements in living standards, through improved health care, enhanced educational opportunities, and improved access to information and knowledge and in providing greater security to family units by allowing more time for recreational activities.

On the other hand, the link between technological change and the family must take account of some important basic characteristics of modern technology. It must for example take account of the "borderlessness" of technology and its capacity to erode values and norms. Often these are replaced by the values of the societies where the technology is manufactured.

Technology affects family members in different ways and may tend to exacerbate the generation gap in households. Admittedly, it is at times very difficult for parents to be always in a position to monitor what children are exposed to as a result of modern technology. In the final analysis though the onus of the responsibility remains with them and public policy makers must assist them in discharging this responsibility.

## FEATURE ADDRESS

*Continued*

One other area on which I feel I must say a few words is on the issue of HIV/AIDS and its impact on family life. In Trinidad and Tobago, according to the official statistics there are some 17,000 persons living with HIV/AIDS. These of course represent only those persons who have been tested and confirmed as positive cases. These are by no means a reflection of what the true figures are for the population. In any event, the current estimate could be well below the actual figure. Given the estimates though, with an average household size of 3.76 then there is one person living with HIV/AIDS in approximately 4,800 households here in Trinidad and Tobago.

The data show that the highest number of cases is among those in their productive years. What this means for families is that income earning capacity is seriously compromised. In poor households serious choices have to be made between treatment and care for those infected and the needs of other affected members of the household. The pandemic also seriously affects the roles that persons play in the family unit. Its existence in a household may well mean the choice between attending school and assuming the role of care giver for the young girl; or between attending school and becoming the family's bread winner for a young male.

How we deal with this modern day threat to societies, I believe, depends to a great extent on the strength of the family to inculcate sound moral and spiritual values that would guide behaviour in ways that will prevent the spread. Values that would also contain if not eliminate the stigma and discrimination that fuels the epidemic, and so contribute to the efforts at halting the march of the disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on this International Day of Families the United Nations Secretary- General reminds us that there is still a lot to be done to ensure the survival of the family as an important social institution. Again to quote from his message he says:

"I urge Governments, civil society and individuals to keep working for policies and programmes that recognize and support the contributions each family makes to its members, its community and its society. Let us recommit ourselves to ensuring an environment that sustains and supports families for the benefit of generations to come."

I would not want to close my remarks without providing some suggestions for ways in which families, policy makers and development partners can assist in preserving the family unit as a primary unit of socialization, as the provider of the economic and psychosocial needs of its members.

## FEATURE ADDRESS

*Continued*

Firstly, there needs to be a concerted effort within our communities, schools and churches to re-examine the role of family and what it means given globalization, rapid technological change and changing economic circumstances that affect the way we work and play. This type of discussion must take place within all age groups. The Netherlands provides a good example of one way in which this could be tackled by including learning about family responsibility in its job training programs.

Future socio-economic policies will affect how families function and their potential for survival and how well they function as nurturers and providers. Public policy must therefore address its impact on families and on the gendered differences within them. Both governmental and non governmental organizations, national and international must strive to promote the adoption of family-sensitive policies and to encourage family-friendly societies as opposed to the current emphasis on meeting the needs of individuals.

We at the United Nations Development Programme have committed some limited resources to the efforts at improving family life. Working with the Office of the Prime Minister we have established a project to address issues relating to governance, poverty, HIV/AIDS and the environment as they impact on the lives of families.

Families too must make their voices heard. They must ensure that planners and policy makers recognize them as society's cornerstone and treat them as such. They must advocate for policies that support them in fulfilling their economic and psychosocial functions and constantly seek out new ways to adapt to the fast paced changes that characterize modern society.

The achievement of our medium and long term goals as a nation demand that we address the slide in family life now rather than later!

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention.

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

*Ms Eunice Gittens, Director, Family Services Division,  
Office of the Prime Minister, Social Services Delivery*

A review of literature and research findings undisputedly confirm recognition for the family as the most important foundational unit of any society. There are many concepts of family, including the perspective of:

- Functionalists, who describe the family as a universal institution which performs certain specific functions essential to society's survival
- Murdock, who sees the family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction
- Another view understands the family as a group of persons with a communal past, present and future, the members of which are formally linked to one another by blood relationships, marital or non-marital relationships, fostering or adoption – directly or via relatives. The extent of the bonds of its members determines the level of the social interaction and emotional relationships
- St. Bernard, in a study on Trinidad families commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development in 1998, saw family as a group of two or more persons who are related to one another through blood, adoption or marriage (including consensual unions), living together and making common provisions for food and other necessities of living
- Diana Gittens suggests that the notion of family inherently includes a number of quite distinct ideas and phenomena, viz: co-residence, marriage, power relations between men and women; power relations between adults and children; domestic labour, sexuality and sexual relations; procreation, motherhood and mothering, fatherhood, sibling relationships, definitions of kinship, gender, authority, dependence, service and economic relations
- Soliende de Gonzalez (1965) described "dispersed families" in which the father, although absent for long periods of time, retains ultimate authority over a household for which he provides the only support and where affective bonds continue to be important between him and his wife and children; drawing the obvious conclusion that people can consider themselves family without actually co-residing and conversely can co-reside without considering themselves family.

### FAMILY TYPES

In Trinidad and Tobago, perhaps all these concepts are represented in the different operational family types;

- Nuclear families, consisting of both married and common-law unions
- Single parent families, with a predominance of single mothers over single fathers

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*Continued*

- Extended families, with many variants
- Sibling families (barrel children syndrome).

To this another type of family appears to be emerging – same sex families, (which many of us have difficulty accepting, due to moral and/or religious principles).

Whatever its form or composition, the family influences and shapes the norms, beliefs, traditions and values of its current members and the generations that follow. This role is usually assigned to parents / caregivers. In a Singapore publication on "Essential Parenting Tips", five (5) commonly shared family values were identified:

- 1) Love, care and concern – family love provides a sense of comfort and security. It makes a person feel appreciated and encourages family members to be supportive of each other, to be affectionate with each other
- 2) Mutual respect – In recognizing, accepting and tolerating the differences of each member and which allows for forgiveness. Learning respect from our parents helps us to respect other cultures and races
- 3) Filial responsibility – honouring and support for all generations creates a "sense of oneness". This tells us that family responsibility is more than a duty or obligation: it is a natural fruit of the close bonds among family members
- 4) Commitment – The glue which makes family stick together as a team and reinforces the importance of fulfilling duties and obligations. Commitment often involves sacrifice
- 5) Communication – an essential ingredient in the family. It enables members to understand each other's feelings, ideas and views. Family bonds are strengthened as trust is built and close relationships are fostered.

If families are nurtured by the primary agents of socialization – parents/caregivers, it follows that a good foundation will support the child as he/she travels along life's path, with additional nurturance from the wider agents of socialization. Thus these values have to be encouraged, promoted, as they play a fundamental role in the well-being of families and consequently the progress of any nation.

Globalization and rapidly changing technology have influenced changes in lifestyles, migration and urbanization, which in turn have effected changing expectations and roles, impacting on family functioning and forms.

Research informs that many families in developing countries worldwide, where "the foreign debt crisis of the 80's led to retrenchment, depression of salaries, reduction of expenditure on public sector, privatisation of public enterprises and

promotion of free market concept policy contributed to an increase in unemployment, lack of steady income, making it increasingly difficult for families to cope" (Lomnitz, 1997).

Other factors quoted as negative impact on the family unit include the demise of extended family systems, the erosion of traditional supportive networks, inadequate or poor parenting practices, migration, increasing gender issues, with a marked relationship to the advances of women, unemployment and underemployment, deeply entrenched cultural traditions resistant to change, as well as the spread of HIV/Aids.

Some families have managed to adequately deal with life's difficulties as described above: many of these cases reveal that supportive personal networks have been a key factor, confirming the family not only as the basic block of an individual's social network, but also the only group to rely on in times of crisis. Conversely, there is recognition that the rapid rate of change is beyond the coping capacity of many others, constraining their functioning at optimal level, which has a ripple effect on their families, to the extent of complete disintegration, in some instances.

If we examine the families of Trinidad and Tobago today, we conclude that many of the values mentioned above appear to be absent or severely lacking. We look around us and see the disappearing values and traditions, marked by pervasive disrespect, lack of caring, commitment and irresponsibility. Family life today has unfortunately become characterized by increasing levels of dysfunction, as the unit has sought to respond to environmental changes.

This dysfunction is manifested by

- Rising rates of homelessness and poverty
- General and alarming rise in crime
- family violence including physical, verbal and sexual abuse and abandonment, both of children and the elderly
- homicides, often related to family violence
- expanding drug culture
- violence among children, evidenced especially in the school arena, related to increasing autonomy of youth
- poor interpersonal relationships
- diminished fathering role due to increasing
- divorce rates, decreasing marriage rates and unwed motherhood.

## NFSD EXPERIENCE

Examination of data from the National Family Services Division from January to June 2003 offers this micro view of the family situation: while preliminary data from the 2000 census reports of almost equal number of males and females for all areas of Trinidad and Tobago, of the 1078 cases serviced, 31.1% were male; 42.95% female, while 10.8% of the total number were families. 19.09% were from extended family systems, 46.69% - Nuclear families, 17.77% single parent families, while other were 16.45%. Over 40% of all referrals were from the Courts, while 24.36% represented self-referrals. Referrals were for counselling, financial assistance. Major diagnoses by NFSD staff were family dysfunction, communication problems, physical and verbal abuse and financial issues.

## The Delivery of Social Services to the Family

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago delivers social services through a network of Government Ministries and Departments, which can either be provided directly through the relevant Ministry or in collaboration with Non-Governmental organizations and Community based organizations.

## Support to Persons living with HIV/AIDS

- In recognition of the threat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which results in economic devastation and has the potential to reverse this country's development gains, the Government's response to this threat to nation and family has now progressed beyond the initial efforts by the Ministry of Health and a number of non-governmental organizations. The multi-sectoral Trinidad and Tobago National AIDS Co-ordinating Committee (NACC) has been established under the aegis of the Office of the Prime Minister to execute the five-year National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan for Trinidad and Tobago. The overarching goals of this plan are
  - 1) To reduce the incidence of HIV infections in the country and
  - 2) To mitigate the negative impact of HIV/AIDS on persons infected and affected in Trinidad and Tobago.

The plan, founded on the principles of inclusion, sustainability, accountability and respect for human rights of persons with HIV/AIDS, is estimated to cost US\$90.33 MILLION over the five-year period January 2004 – December 2008.

In furtherance of maximum support for the health of the family, the Family Court pilot project was formally launched earlier in May 2004. The Court will have jurisdiction over all family matters, and seek to promote the resolution of family disputes in an expeditious, comprehensive and less adversarial manner than the traditional Courts. Mediation and Counselling services will be an integral part of the operations.

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The last decade has also produced significant improvements in legislation aimed at greater protection and care of the family – including the Maternity Act; the new Domestic Violence Act, the various pieces of Children's legislation (yet to be proclaimed), inter alia.

The bulk of government's expenditure on programmes to support families is provided through the Office of the Prime Minister, Social Services Delivery. These include:

**Financial Support**, where benefits are intended to ameliorate the material needs of vulnerable families:

Through the Social Welfare Division,

- Old Age Pension grants (OAP) are available to persons 65 years and over who satisfy the criteria to obtain a grant of \$900 to \$1,000.00 per month. This grant has been substantially increased over the last 5 years. Over 63,212 persons are in receipt of this benefit.
- Public Assistance Grants (PA) continue to be available to individuals and their dependents between the ages of 18 – 65 years, when these persons are certified by a Government Medical Officer as unable to earn through illness, or when the breadwinner (father) has died or is incarcerated. Over 24,678 households are currently in receipt of Public Assistance Grants.
- Additional benefits are available to Social Welfare recipients in the area of Burial grants, Bus passes, House Rents and Home Help; Clothing for the victims of disaster, as well as Dietary Grants in specific cases where such is deemed necessary.
- Welfare recipients can also access a total of \$5,000.00 to purchase medical aids such as wheel chairs, prosthesis, spectacles, hearing aids, colostomy bags etc.

### **Food Hamper Distribution**

- Through the Social Help And Rehabilitative Efforts (S.H.A.R.E.) Secretariat, close to 15,000 households are now assisted every month with food hampers. There has been some 76.8 % increase in coverage within the last three years.

### **Micro- Enterprise and Training grant**

This programme was instituted in 1993, to wean persons from the dependency of Social Welfare. It was later extended to other clients of the various Divisions of the Ministry, as rehabilitative measures in treating with family problems. The grant, at a maximum of \$5,000.00 has benefited over 500 families since its inception.

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### **Psycho – Social Support to Families**

- Through the National Family Services Division, families can access counselling and other psychosocial interventions. Trained social workers are available at community level, to help families rebuild their lives through individual and group therapies, training through workshops, parent support groups, public sensitization workshops, lectures, networking as well as collaboration with other agencies - to ensure that families are afforded access to all available services.

### **Support to The Disabled**

Support for individuals and families living with a disability is given by means of

- The Disability Assistance Grant in the amount of \$650.00 for persons with a disability that inhibits their ability to work. Recent improvements have resulted in lowering the qualifying age criteria from 45 to 18 years.
- The Special Child Grant has been significantly increased, from a sum of \$85.00 per month to \$300.00 per month. This is available to a parent with a child who is physically or mentally handicapped, under eighteen years of age and living under needy circumstances.
- Persons with disabilities have also been able to access services from non-governmental organizations assisted by the government through financial grants or subventions.

### **SUBVENTIONS.**

In the partnership approach to the development process, The Government has increased both the number and the quantity of subventions to organizations involved in the area of family support.

Other Programmes that directly support families are provided through

- The Ministry of Health, through its expanding Health Clinics and the availability of free medication for chronic illness to citizens of this country.
- The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs which continues to provide an arsenal of skills training programmes to enhance the employability of the less fortunate, as a means of improving the socio-economic capacity of families, through the Community Development and other funds.
- Likewise The Ministries of Public Utilities and the Environment and that of Sport and Youth Affairs and National Security and Rehabilitation also offer employment through their promotion of self-help endeavours and life skills programmes.

- The Ministry of Labour, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises which specifically targets issues pertaining to the availability and access to sources of funding for families engaged in entrepreneurial endeavours through the MEL programme.
- The Ministry of Education - has expanded its portfolio in several areas, to promote the well-being of the school population as
  1. the provision of meals through the School Nutrition programme, which enhances the readiness of children to receive learning. 90,000 lunches and 25,000 breakfasts are delivered five times weekly to needy children. This programme has also indirectly contributed to employment generation.
  2. the expansion of its guidance facilities to the School Support Unit, to treat with the problems impacting on the performance of the students. Yet while there appears to be many resources available, there is undeniably much more to be done. In the Government sector, bureaucratic structures and inadequate human resource continue to plague effective service delivery; generally there is too much duplication and overlap by operating agencies, contributing to poor use of available resources, unequal distribution of and access to resources, and a continuing trend toward dependency by individuals and families.

### **IS THE FAMILY A DYING INSTITUTION IN THE 21ST CENTURY?**

Research to date informs that despite the rapid pace of migration in the global village, all indications remain that family will survive, though its form may continue to change. Solly Dreman posits that the issues of "early retirement, more leisure time, and unemployment deserve critical mention in planning for the future of families, as these may increase as society becomes more increasingly technocratic and relies on machines and computers more than on human resources". He continues that the family should be viewed as the unit to continue providing the stability, belonging, and sense of community necessary to a society characterized by flux, alienation, and individualism.

He argues that family life will remain a vibrant and integral dimension to contemporary societal development. The family then must be understood in a multidimensional, contextual and dynamic systems framework, to maximize the quality of family life and well-being. The role of the State and other partnering sectors are then to provide the support for family to meet their tasks.

The Vision 2020 source document underscores the importance of the family as the base unit in the development process. The vision for the family is a strong independent and interdependent unit, where individual goals are recognized and celebrated and contribute to the attainment of achieving wider family goals;

where psycho-social needs are met in a nurturing environment as the family works harmoniously with other families, regardless of creed, colour, race or social standing, in promoting the principles of self respect, self reliance, interdependence, equity and integrity as paramount in the development process.

To achieve this, there needs to be a review and increase of existing policies, including legislative changes; development of systems more responsive to changing needs, and the wider provision of a range of services to maintain and support positive healthy functioning in families in pursuit of the millennium goals of poverty reduction and improving the quality of life.

### **WHAT IS NEEDED?**

In accordance with suggested aims of the United Nations, there is need for the development of a Policy on the Family, which policies will drive the operations of a Ministry of Family Services. A national Family Planning policy is also recommended for consideration, to complement policies and programmes aimed at improving the quality of life. It is expected that timely legal and even constitutional reform will be necessary to implement the programmes and services of this Ministry.

Priority areas include:

- the decentralization of social services, with the establishment of Social Services Centres island-wide
- Increased collaboration and networking inter and intra sectors, to reduce duplication and to encourage greater cost efficiencies
- Improvements in the Judicial and protective services, for renewed respect for the law
- Housing - exploration of the UK system of Council housing, to provide acceptable standards of living for all citizens. This would impact on the general health of the population, who would be provided with
- a wide range of affordable and accessible health services, operated in a user - friendly approach
- Refocused educational services at all levels, to respect the different potentials of individuals; to also provide for the holistic needs of citizens - in this regard, there must be more emphasis on Early Childhood Care and Education
- HFLE is to be mandatory for all levels of the population
- Provision of recreational spaces and organized programmes, to address optimal health practices and coping with stress

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

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- Improved communication systems, to include transit systems, as also the interpersonal arena
- Provision of financial and other material assistance to additional groups of vulnerable populations

To meet these priorities, attention must be given to :

- Strengthening of Research and Planning units
- Training of and increases in human resource, with scholarships in areas of need identified by research
- Systematic Training in and more effective use of Information technology, to guide policy and programme management
- Redesigning of the delivery of Income maintenance programmes, to reduce delays and final costs
- Review and restructuring of operational state systems
- The provision of individual and group counselling and other services to support families throughout the life cycle

These considerations would certainly promote and support the image of the family as the cornerstone of society, a key institution to assist in the achievement of developed country status.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Merle Hodge, Women Working for Social Progress (Workingwomen),  
Representing the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women*

It is a step in the right direction that this United Nations observance is now called "The Day of Families" rather than "The Day of The Family", for I see this as an acknowledgement of diversity in family forms. 1994 was designated the Year of The Family by the UN, with May 15 declared "The International Day of the Family". The shift to "Families" suggests a recognition that across the world families come in different shapes.

Of course we in the Caribbean do not need to look across the world to see diversity in family forms; yet we are a long way from fully appreciating this feature of our society, and, more importantly, acting upon it. We might give lip service to the idea of accepting differences in family structure, but in the next minute our language indicates otherwise.

I believe that one of the factors working against good family life in our society is our refusal to truly take on board families that are not in the mould of the patriarchal nuclear family. We have simply not made the mental shift.

We hold on to the idea that there is only one structure really worthy of the name "family", and see all others as aberrations. People speak of the nuclear family as the "traditional" family, when nothing could be further from the truth. The Western nuclear family is of fairly recent vintage, if you look at the big picture of human history. The first human families were large cooperative groupings of people, not little cells based on a sexual union.

In our pontifications about family, we need to develop more sensitivity towards the circumstances of different people. When we speak, for example, of a "broken home", what do we mean? We mean a home that is not constituted along the pattern of man as head, woman as junior partner, and their child or children. To speak of "broken homes", therefore, is to insult the families of thousands of people who do not live in this approved structure. And how do they live with the prevailing notion that their family is not really a family – that there is something wrong with it? What are the children in such families supposed to feel?

When we brush aside families that do not fit our idea of the model family, we predispose such families to dysfunction. We undermine their self-respect. If my family is not really a family, then what is the use of my striving to achieve good family life? If my family is "wrong" from the start, then advice and pep talks on good family life don't apply to me.

Children growing up in families that do not meet our approval must surely be affected by the stigma we put on them. Think, for example, of young boys who

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

hear all around them, every day, that if your father does not live with you, then you are earmarked for criminality, because only men can provide moral guidance - your mother and the other caregivers who are actually performing the functions of family in your home cannot really do the job. What effect does that have on such boys and their families?

Is it possible that just hearing everybody bad-talk your family - from Prime Minister down to callers on radio and TV - is it possible that this, in itself, sets you up for failure, trapping you and your family in the self-fulfilling prophecy? Children who might have been growing up quite contented, loved and well looked after in whatever form of family they find themselves in, can become dissatisfied, and even angry with their family when they discover that they are living in an "incorrect" family structure.

"Family" in our social reality means different combinations of people, and to truly appreciate this means, on the one hand, changing the way we speak about families other than the type we might see as the model family. What is a "good" family unit? It is the family which fulfils its members' need for love, acceptance and support, as well as providing for their material needs. A good family is not any particular structure.

Of course everyone is perfectly entitled to see one structure as more desirable than another. The religious bodies will also continue to prescribe to their devotees what they see as acceptable. Whatever our personal belief, however, we live in an environment of diversity, and there is no need to disrespect other people's families.

Accepting diversity should also lead us to look more closely into the different types of family, so as to identify their strengths and the particular stresses that they undergo. This will help us to determine exactly what kinds of support are needed by the different family types.

The challenges facing a nuclear family are not all the same as those faced, for example, by the members of three-generation household, or a home comprised of adult siblings and their children. But "family counselling" still means mostly advice to husbands and wives. We see other structures as makeshift and transitory, not really worthy of serious attention. Indeed, when there is dysfunction in families not comprised of husband, wife and children, we tend to see the composition of the family as the problem to be remedied.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

The diversity of family forms is here to stay. In our society it has survived generations of official disapproval, and attempts by missionaries, social workers and governors' wives to get us all neatly boxed into little nuclear families. This is even less likely to happen today, when the societies to which we look for models and validation have begun to accept the notion that families can take different forms.

Supporting our families begins with respecting them in word and in deed. My first recommendation would therefore be to allow our families their dignity, and work with who is in the family, rather than who we think should be in it. One of the actions that will strengthen our capacity to support families is research, to give us more precise knowledge of how our families actually function. We might discover, for example, that the much-maligned "single-parent" family - a woman or a man with children - is, more often than not, part of a larger family network, rather than an isolated unit, so that the children are not, in fact, parented by one person alone.

We also need a nation-wide project in education for parenting, accessible to all those who have responsibility for the care of children, whether or not they are their biological parents. The informal adoption of children - nieces, nephews, god-children or otherwise - is still a significant feature of Caribbean family life. Education for parenting would equip us with a knowledge of child development - what to expect at the different ages, so that, for example, we do not punish toddlers for doing what toddlers must do: explore their environment by touching everything.

This education would also teach us how to instill self-discipline in our children without using violence against them. One of the negative features of our family life is the acceptance of violence as a normal part of the socialization of children. How is child-beating different from assault and battery, or wife-beating? There also needs to be age-appropriate education about sexuality from the earliest levels of the primary school, to develop in the individual a greater responsibility for his or her sexuality. An important outcome of this would be a reduction in unplanned pregnancies and neglected children, a more likely source of criminality than family structure.

Finally, our social services are overburdened, but we need a great deal more by way of State and community intervention in the lives of families and children at risk. The social services of Third World countries were drastically cut back in the era of World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment. It is now imperative that we restore and expand the systems that give support to families and increase the possibility of healthy family functioning.



## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Acharaya Kermananda a Representative of the IRO,  
from the Divine Light Society*

This evening as we discuss the theme "Strengthening T&T's capacity to support families" let us firstly try to understand and analyse the family unit. The family unit is a well-knit unit which comprises the father, mother and children. We also have the extended family which comprises grandfather, grandmother uncles and aunts etc.

However when we look at the trend worldwide what we are seeing is a breakdown in family life. We can see that the extended family is no longer there. In some instances we may find that grandmother is there to look after her grandchildren. Nowadays when we look at the environment what we are seeing is that the behaviour of some children is such that they do not want to respect anyone. Let us take it from the very initial stage - the mother. What role does the mother have to play in this family unit? The mother is the one who bears the child. From the perspective of Hinduism I am going to inform you of how a Hindu mother should behave.

Even before the time of conception the mother should prepare herself religiously to bear her child. The atmosphere of both parents, especially the mother, should be such that they are holistically prepared to receive that divine child which is to come within the womb.

When this happens, and the child is nurtured within the womb of the mother, it is imperative that she surrounds herself with a religious atmosphere - reading religious books etc. So that as the child grows within the mother's womb he/she will internalise things that will make him/her exemplary after birth.

Therefore this planning aspect is a very important one in the formation of the family. Hinduism teaches that if you desire children there are certain times when the seed should be sown and at these times mother and father should be prepared.

Now let us look at the family. We see the prevalence of alcoholism especially among fathers. When the seed is sown in this type of environment the child will undoubtedly be affected. So when we look at family life we should first look at how we prepare to start a family. When this is done we can then support that family and help them to become a great family.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

Long ago there was the extended family in which there was a grandfather and grandmother etc. this is no longer the case. Mother, child and father see themselves as independent thereby creating an environment which is unlike the family environment in previous years. This independency negatively affects the family unit as it erodes the mutual relationships that are naturally fostered in the family unit.

To exert their independence through jobs, and to find their separate personalities, both mother and father seek economic independence through their jobs, thereby leaving no quality time for their children. What then is the purpose of the family unit? Certainly there will be a breakdown in family life.

There is a saying that the family that prays together, stays together. How many families do this any more? How many even sit and have a meal together? It is in fact very rare. Increasingly, there are children who spend no daily time with either parent. Some interact more with 'minders' than they do with their parents.

We are seeing more and more children becoming parents. All this is due to the breakdown in the family unit. We must support family life, indeed it is every individual's duty.

There are problems that exist when the father leaves the family unit to better provide economically for the family. You find the father sending barrels and the like back home to the family. But does this foster unity in the family?

Education plays an important role. Why is it that we have 'servants' teaching our children about sex? The parent should be the one to impart the knowledge of self worth and the value of one's body to children.

In today's society you also have the abandoning of families by fathers and stepfathers - leaving mothers to fend for themselves and for their children. In such a situation mothers can at times be preyed upon and tempted into doing bad things to make ends meet.

Although some may say that compared to a marriage in which there is quarrelling and violence, a single parent family is preferable.

So as we look at the independence of the individual, it is necessary to keep in mind that independence of the person can be to the detriment of the family. The family unit is the responsibility of both mother and father.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

If we have a good family unit we can make a good village. The ideal atmosphere of that family unit will influence other families in that community. That community will be an example to the nation and that nation to the world. Mother and father must first set this example. If we do not, then family life will definitely breakdown

Alcoholism plays a detrimental role in family life. The father gets paid his wage and comes home with his pockets empty. He has no money to sustain the family as he has spent it on alcohol. The mother now has to see where she will get a meal for the child for the next day. She has to go out and look for money and she may be led to do wrong things. The children may then follow their parents' footsteps. So we have to take stock and look at family behaviour in such a manner that we will be able to do something to hold the family together.

The family is very important and so too is the institution of marriage. Sometimes a young man may see a young girl and he falls in love. He may say that the best thing to do is to get married. After he becomes married then he realises that he has made a mistake, that both of them cannot see eye to eye on many things. So we have marriage counselling.

This is something we should take advantage of before marriage so that we can understand each other. Get knowledge from the wise person, the counsellor, and be able to follow the advice given so that when we get married we will be able to bring up a good family.

Nowadays we see children begetting children. We also have street children. This is a problem not only for the government but also for the entire nation. We have to look at these things to know and understand fully how to bring up a family; how to support a family. If we do not give quality time to our children then it means our children are going to do the same thing - they will not give any quality time to the next generation.

Family life is a great thing for us to maintain. Life is a voyage, a voyage we have to traverse like an infinite ocean with all types of problems that we have to overcome. We journey from impurity to purity and mothers and fathers should be living pure lives so that they can bring forth pure children into this world. It is important for us all to support family life and the greatest joy of family life is a life in devotion to God. How many parents take their children with them to church, mosque or temple? We have to give our children religious education and demonstrate its importance. What do we see now? The mother will go to the church, the father will say at home and the children will stay home, probably

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

watching TV. What we have on TV is what they are going to internalise - those types of negative things. Family life is very important as an institution.

We must be aware of the issues that affect families in T&T, for example, the migration of parents who leave their children behind. We have to look at the role of faith communities and the effects of alcoholism and drug abuse. If there is a drug addict in a home that home can be a home of hell. That drug addict can take everything and sell it just to appease this thirst and the home will be destroyed.

So children, I urge you not to take the first try. When you abuse drugs you destroy your family - you destroy the good name of your family. There are also such problems as hatred, jealousy anger and lust.

We need to deal with them responsibly. Let us look and see how families deal with anger. Uncontrolled anger can destroy family life. In a state of anger a person can do anything and afterwards regret it.

So let us work for our families to pray together and stay together. Let us try at least once a day to eat together. That food will sustain us and the type of loving environment in which it is eaten will influence both parents and children positively.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

Fr Gerard E. Farfan, C.S.Sp.

Basically, what I have to say is summed up in an anecdote about the Columbine massacre in the USA a few years ago, when two boys shot and killed 16 students and a teacher, then shot themselves. It goes like this:

'A teenage girl student at Columbine High School writes a letter to God asking Him: "Where were You when those terrible things were happening at our school?" "My child", replied God, "don't you remember that I am not allowed in your school?"

### **The World confronts God**

I see that the neglect of God is very much at the heart of the problems. If we are to find a cure for the ills in our family life, it is necessary to expose the sore. The major sore is the exclusion of God from society, by society. Society seeks to eliminate God from its equations. It thus throws away the "Users' Guide" to our lives and institutions, including the family. Look at what is happening in the United States where there is a campaign against having God mentioned in schools when the very motto of the United States is: "In God We Trust".

We try to exclude God. We do not recognize that God is the ultimately authority. We have been given freedom by God but a freedom that is primarily meant to be used worshipping and serving Him. The minute we abandon that course we will go astray.

Marriage is meant to be in the service of the Truth, which objectively is found in God. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life", says Jesus. So marriage and the family it produces cannot be contemplated apart from recognition of God. Yet we exclude God in the search for remedies for our ills.

The truth, which we say we wish to serve, is not always the same as the majority opinion – it is not a democratic opinion. The majority opinion is not necessarily the truth. We cannot simply take a vote as to which family is best. Not if we have instruction from the Maker. And that is the sore that needs to be exposed; our neglect, our denial of the authority that God has over His creation. I am not saying that this is a Catholic position, but that this is the only reasonable position we should adopt. There is a God. He has a say. We have ears to listen. The situation in which the family finds itself today presents positive and negative aspects: the first is a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world; the second, a sign of the refusal that man gives to the love of God.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

Among the more troubling signs of the latter: the spread of divorce and recourse to a new union, even where Christians are concerned. They should know better; the acceptance of purely civil marriage in contradiction to the vocation of the baptized to "be married in the Lord". Those who know it to be wrong still accept that approach to marriage. I am speaking of "marriage" not directly "family" yet because in my mind they go together. There is no marriage without a desire for children.

Other troubling signs are the exclusion of God in the celebration of marriage for unworthy motives; the rejection of the moral norms that guide and promote the human; and the lack of proper exercise of sexuality in marriage, in an atmosphere of faith in a Creator who establishes the rules.

We exercise a freedom that has come to mean "licence", due to the fact that we have succeeded in separating the concept of "freedom" from the concept of "service to God". God gave us our freedom to serve Him and this involves the ability to say no.

It becomes necessary, therefore, on the part of all, to recover an awareness of the primacy of moral values, which are the values of the human person as such; objective standards to which we are expected to conform.

The discoveries of modern humans are all too often an inebriating wine, besotting the human intellect and will in the search for a truly human way of life. What can be done technologically has now become what can be done ethically. As Archbishop Gilbert said, what is possible is often confused with what is ethical or permissible.

### **Human law has to conform to Divine law.**

In valuing marriage today greater attention should be paid: to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation, to the education of children.

There is also an awareness of the need for the development of interfamily relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the mission of society proper to the family and its responsibility for the building of a more just society. It is within the family that social virtues are learnt: First, responsibility (including sexual responsibility).

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

*Continued*

With reference to sexuality and sexual responsibility, it is only in default of the parents that schools have to accept the responsibility of teaching children about sexual responsibility. The proper place for that is in the home. The proper opportunity is in a stable union - father and mother, both of whom are giving the example of what a stable sexual relationship means and the kind of responsibility it carries.

You cannot have that in a family which has no mother or no father. If I suppose one is dead, other provisions will have to be made, but the norm is precisely that stable relationship between a man and a woman. It is in that norm that the children are meant to grow up best. I am not saying it happens all the time. Every perfection has its imperfections and we continue to be rebellious to God and his commands. There will continually be faults and defaults in the family, according to the structure clearly established by God in creation.

It is in the family that children, from their earliest years, experience the powerful example of the parents in the nuclear family - clearly intended by God to be the norm. In the act of creation God "made them in his own image: male and female He created them, and a man must leave his father and mother and cling to his wife" And He commanded them to increase and multiply. Then there is Love, Forgiveness, Working together, Respect for authority, Conflict resolution, and the like, all visibly perceived in both parents and siblings.

This is not to say that all nuclear families are in working order. Sadly, some families no longer speak to each other. I agree there is something dreadfully wrong there. But maybe the core of the problem comes from their refusal to accept the kind of marriage they should have had from the beginning. I am not condemning families who now live in an extended situation. In fact there are tremendous lessons which can be learnt from these families. We can look at their strengths and learn from them. But we know what the working model is.

On the other hand, signs are not lacking of the disturbing degradation of some fundamental values, for example, mistaken theoretical concepts of the independence of spouses in relation to each other. The more that that is pushed by technology, inventions and by society as a whole, the more families tend to break up.

## Strengthening T&T's Capacity to Support Families

*Continued*

There are the concrete difficulties which families themselves face in the transmission of values; how to educate your children today when you are competing with the television out of which comes programmes from a foreign country; how to educate your children at home in what you would consider the proper way of treating each other. These are some of the problems.

At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being.

In fact, our modern world can be seen as an experiment in freedom gone to seed. God's authority is mocked. Euthanasia and same-sex marriages are but the latest examples.

The historical situation in which the family lives therefore appears as an interplay of light and darkness.

This shows that history is not simply a fixed progression towards what is better, but rather an event of freedom, and even a struggle between freedoms that are in mutual conflict, that is, a conflict between two loves: the love of God to the point of disregarding self, and the love of self to the point of disregarding God.

It follows that only an education for love rooted in faith can lead to the capacity of interpreting "the signs of the times," which are the historical expression of this twofold love.

You cannot leave God out of the situation and come up with any workable solution.

(Based on "Familiaris Consortio" of Pope John Paul II, 1981)

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

### 1. Gregory Au Young, Our Lady of Lourdes, Maraval Parish

There is an urgent need to improve and support family life. Perhaps it is something that members of society have taken too much for granted. Many feel that family and learning to operate in a family environment is something that is learnt automatically. This is not true. We should start taking a different approach in terms of trying to see that families and parents engage in some type of structured process by which we acquire familiarity with the values, concept and processes that would make for healthy family life. Therefore, I suggest that greater emphasis needs to be given to such ideas as courses on parenting, modules for imparting skills and instilling values that will promote healthy families.

It should be noted that such programmes have been formally embarked upon in some parts of the USA to support parents and families because of the alarming incidences of breakdown of the family structure which cause a number of societal maladies.

Secondly, judging from the presentations made this evening there is a great need for research. Greater research needs to be done at the university level, at various levels within the church and other organizations on family focusing on the factors that can build healthy family life.

Thirdly, it has become necessary to establish an institute - whether it is government supported or funded or not. It is critical now that the family should be supported from all quarters and the establishment of a dedicated institute, with well respected individuals from as wide a spectrum of the sectors of society as possible, will assist us in our efforts to support families.

Lastly, a greater emphasis should be placed on those families that have been able to cope; that have been able to live exemplary lives. We should hold these families up as exemplars to the rest of society

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

*Continued*

### 2. Ivis Gibson, Families in Action

It is necessary to have family life programmes. At Families in Action we have programmes for parenting and peer counselling. Young adults tell us that there is nowhere for them to 'discharge'. There seems to be no end to the number of problems, families seem to have. My organization hears about some of these problems daily.

The doors of our Churches seem to be closed - for obvious reasons. But it seems that the doors of our hearts are also closed. There seems to be fewer persons willing to help persons in need. People need places where they can go and say: "I am hurting".

We have about 100 NGO's in T&T. What we lack is collaboration and accessing government services. Such access is made difficult due to bureaucracy. Unless we collaborate it is pointless, and we have to do this with God, love, truth understanding, integrity and togetherness.

Presently we are trying to open a child development centre for children 0-6 years old in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Dr. Bratt. The prohibitive cost of child psychological assessment means too many children are not being tested. The time is now and we can do it.

### 3. Louis Blake, Archdiocesan Family Life Commission

I would like to highlight the fact that the AFLC has programmes which act as support systems for single parents, marriage support, support for widowed, separated and divorced persons. The problem is that the programmes are not readily available at community level.

The task of the AFLC, therefore is to bring such programmes to the parish level, probably through family life clinics.

I think the government should be aware of problems related to mixing up 'family life' with same sex unions and same Sex Attraction Disorder.

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

*Continued*

### **4. Matthew Martinez, Youth for Life**

I would like to reinforce the need for parenting from a parental point of view and teaching of values of abstinence, self respect, self worth and chastity, before and after marriage. I would also like to endorse the steps taken by the government to start an Abstinence Education Programme in schools.

### **5. Sandra Theodore, Parenting Committee, AFLC**

From where I stand there are many parenting groups in T&T, but I don't know if their success has been noted.

The AFLC sees parents not just in biological terms but rather societal terms; a parent includes every person who takes on the responsibility of children or youths.

There are varying degrees of parents and the good as well as the bad have problems. It is time we stop talking and start acting. We have recognised that we are in crisis and it is time to start actively collaborating with everyone and begin to work on the crisis.

### **6. Margaret Bugros, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

The programmes that we are talking about should be implemented in schools to help influence the thinking of persons from an early age. There should be better communication between teachers and parents and support for children - no matter what the circumstances are our children should be shown LOVE.

## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

Combination of Articles in the Catholic News on the topic: "Celebrating Family Life" and one in The Guardian on the topic: "Focus on Families" By Leela Ramdeen, Chair of The Catholic Commission for Social Justice (17.5.04)

"The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is....Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored and that specifies both its dignity and responsibility: family, become what you are... I wish to call on all Christians to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family in accordance with their responsibilities. " (Familiaris Consortio – The Christian Family in the Modern World – Pope John Paul II: 1980).

How can we in T&T respond to His Holiness' call to families? How does each of us demonstrate our love for our family? The challenge for us is to create structures nationally and locally which will support families to become what they are and to believe in what they are. Investing in our families is investing in society as a whole.

In T&T today, and in many parts of the world, the family and the institution of marriage are in crisis. There are some who believe that this is one of the causes of the crime, violence, and the growing anti-life mentality that we are experiencing. The AEC's recent Pastoral Letter on Crime and Violence provides useful information on some of the causes of criminal violence and the risk factors that impact on family life.

Over the last few decades the TT family has been undergoing a profound and far-reaching transformation. Both family structure and family values have been changing and as a result of these changes, the TT family is a much-altered institution. Some of the changes relate to the breakdown of marriages, the near disappearance of the extended family, internal and external migration and so on. Many families are considered to be at risk.

All around us human life and human dignity are being compromised. Family life and values are often debased. As J. Michael Miller, who serves at the Secretariat of State for the Holy See states, Pope John Paul II's teaching on the family can guide us in overcoming the individualism, sensuality and materialism of these times and provide the social blueprint for the new millennium.

## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

Many would agree with those who state that as a Church we have often failed to communicate the rich teachings of our faith concerning marriage and family life. Many Catholics have a general idea of what our faith is 'against' in the area of marriage and family, but few seem to know what we're 'for'. We need to appreciate more fully the challenging teachings of Pope John Paul II about the family. He constantly affirms the dignity of every human person. Everyone is created by God to love and be loved.

In *Familiaris Consortio*, he highlights the importance of family love. "Looking at [the family] in such a way as to reach its very roots, we must say that the essence and the role of the family are in the final analysis specified by love. Hence the family has as its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love..."

It is parents who are charged with communicating this love of God and of neighbour to their children. Hopefully, this message will remain with them forever. It is only through love that that community of persons called 'the family' can promote the full development of personhood in each member.

During the International Year of the Family (1994) Pope John Paul II wrote: "The family is indeed more than any other social reality, the place where an individual can exist 'for himself/herself' through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution that neither can nor should be replaced: it is the 'sanctuary of life'" (Letter to Families).

There are contrasting definitions of 'Family' and movements worldwide to redefine the meaning of 'Family'. The Catholic Church's definition and basic teaching on Family are found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church e.g.:

"2207: The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

2209: ... where families cannot fulfill their responsibilities, other social bodies have the duty of helping them and of supporting the institution of the family...

2210: The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the

## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

family. Civil authority should consider it a grave duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and promote domestic prosperity.

2211: The political community has a duty to honour the family, to assist it, and to ensure especially:

the freedom to establish a family, have children and bring them up in keeping with the family's own moral and religious convictions;  
the protection of the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family;  
the freedom to profess one's faith, to hand it on and raise one's children in it, with the necessary means and institutions..."

While we recognize the lived situation of individuals/families e.g. single parent families and so on, reach out to assist them and seek to empower them, it is important that we develop our awareness of what our Church teaches about the family. Creating a family where mutual love and care find daily expression is difficult. We need that framework which our Church offers so that we will constantly strive to build families as God intended thus rejecting an 'anything goes' mentality.

Both individuals and the state have duties/responsibilities towards our families – many of whom are pushed to the wall and are in crisis - facing myriad challenges e.g. domestic violence, divorce, alcoholism, drugs, crime, unemployment, homelessness, lack of proper local and national infrastructure that would enable them to realize their potential and to live in dignity.

Since the encyclical, *The Gospel of Life* (Pope John Paul II: 1995), urges us to build a culture of life, we must not despair. We should view this situation as an opportunity for us to work diligently to build the kind of Family that God intended. We can do much more at parish level to strengthen family life and to show the family special love during this time of trial and of grace. Indeed, in *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II talks about the need for structures of family pastoral care: "Family pastoral care ...has as its operative principle and responsible agent the Church herself, through her structures and workers."

He highlights the need for mutual help among family members for human and Christian growth together. "The apostolate of the family", he says, "will also become wider through works of spiritual and material charity towards other families, especially those most in need of help and support, towards the poor, the sick, the old, the disabled, orphans, widows(ers), spouses that have been

## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

abandoned, unmarried mothers and mothers-to-be in difficult situations who are tempted to have recourse to abortion etc.”

Help CCSJ to affirm/strengthen the role of the family. Act on the wise words of Mother Teresa:

“What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family.”

Inter alia, a strong family is one in which:

- There are good communication/interaction skills and members know how to talk and listen to each other.
- There is mutual love, care and respect for each other.
- Parents set an example of ethical and moral behaviour and consistency of values. The “do as I say, not as I do” brigade will always fail to build a strong family.
- There is mutual help among family members for human growth and growth in faith, values and morals. A strong family puts God at the centre of their lives.
- Parents spend quality time with their children; take an interest in their children's lives; and seek to guide and counsel them - always remembering to praise and reward good behaviour and to reprimand bad behaviour in a manner that does not break a child's spirit or spawn violent behaviour in the child.

I recall sitting on a London bus and listening to a young child constantly asking questions. His mother ignored him for a while but suddenly gave him a clout in his head saying: “Sit still and shut up!” When he bawled he got another clout to shut up. Of course, when I intervened I got some good cuss.

Some time ago I was in a supermarket and my attention was drawn to loud noises in my aisle. Ahead of me there was a child pleading with her mother to get her a pack of biscuits. Her mother responded loudly: “I'll give yuh two good wood in yuh tail! Put it back!”

Perhaps mother was at her wit's end with a million things on her mind. Who am I to judge her? However, parents should really learn how to speak to their children in a manner that will build a culture of peace. Otherwise, children like that will soon grow up and actually “buss two good wood” on somebody. Children learn what they live and vice-versa.

## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

Our task as a society is to facilitate the parenting process by developing parenting skills. I believe the time has come for parenting classes to be a compulsory part of the curriculum. Although the curriculum is overloaded we will continue to reap the whirlwind of our inaction if we do not see lack of parenting skills as one of the contributory factors to the spiralling crime situation in our country.

Admittedly, parents are not the only teachers of children, but their role in inculcating in children the right attitudes, morals and values is vital. The role of teachers/educators is also crucial. Allocation of blame is not constructive. We cannot abrogate our responsibilities. Each of us must raise our awareness of the part that we must play to strengthen family life and take action.

Our Government, in particular, must act with more urgency. According to the social teachings of our Church the role of the Government is to ensure that the resources of our country are used for the benefit of those who live here. Yet, in spite of all the wealth we have from our natural resources, about 300,000 of the 1.3 million people in T&T are living in poverty.

Many of our families do not have the basic necessities required to live with some modicum of dignity – water, electricity, shelter, transportation and so on. What has happened with the millions of dollars loaned to us by the European Union for poverty reduction?

Pope Paul VI is right. In his encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, On the Development of Peoples, he states that we need to adopt a holistic approach to the concept of human development. Have we truly examined the constraints that hinder human development in our country and in our world?

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON THE THEME OF 'FAMILY'

Our parishes need to encourage, support, and sustain lay people in living their faith in the family, neighborhood, marketplace, and public arena...The most challenging work for justice is not done in church committees, but in the secular world of work, family life, and citizenship.  
(Communities of Salt & Light – US Bishops)

To overcome today's individualistic mentality, a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity is needed, beginning in the family.  
(The Hundredth Year #49)



## ARTICLES ON THE THEME

*Continued*

The first and fundamental structure for a "human ecology" is the family, founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self as husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and grow up.  
(The Hundredth Year #39)

Economic and social policies as well as organization of the work world should be continually evaluated in light of their impact on the strength and stability of family life. The long-range future of this nation is intimately linked with the well-being of families, for the family is the most basic form of human community. Efficiency and competition in the marketplace must be moderated by greater concern for the way work schedules and compensation support or threaten the bonds between spouses and between parents and children.  
(Economic Justice for All #93) US Bishops

But man/woman finds his/her true identity only in his/her social milieu, where the family plays a fundamental role.  
(On the Development of Peoples – Pope Paul VI #36)

The family, grounded in marriage freely contracted, monogamous and indissoluble, is and must be considered the first and essential cell of human society. From this it follows that most careful provision must be made for the family both in economic and social matters as well as in those which are of a cultural and moral nature, all of which look to the strengthening of the family and helping it carry out its function.  
(Peace on Earth – Pope John XXIII #16)

All, therefore, who have influence in the community and in social groups should devote themselves effectively to the welfare of marriage and the family. Civil authority should consider it a sacred duty to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and support them, to safeguard public morality and promote domestic prosperity...The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of the community of marriage and the family.  
(The Church in the Modern World #47&52)

## Excerpts - Celebrating Family Life

*Excerpts from addresses made by His Grace, Archbishop Edward J. Gilbert C.Ss. R. at CCSJ's first Annual Fundraising Dinner/Show held at Hilton Hotel on June 8th, 2004 on the theme: "Celebrating Family Life".*

"There is so much challenging news about family life and so many challenges to family life in our Nation and in the international community that we tend to forget that there is also much good news about family life. There are many people in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the world who are members of excellent families. Based on their own family experience, they have formed families that are truly examples of loving communities that give serious attention to the holistic needs of the family members. I affirm these families and thank them for the important contributions they make to both Church and State.

"Consider this question. How is good to excellent family life possible when the statistics on troubled to non-existent family life is so devastating? One way to explain the success of some and the struggles of others is values. Theoretically, values come from faith or reason. The Catholic Tradition accepts the premise that both faith and reason provide access to the Wisdom of God. However, in my 40 years as a priest and Bishop, I have concluded that in most cases values come through experience. If people do not come in contact with other people who have values and if they do not experience how those values contribute to a good quality of life, value formation rarely happen. Their behaviour will reflect the lack of value formation.

"I noted above that one reason why there are so many good families in challenging times is that "based on their experience" people form their own families. Without that experience, their efforts at forming a family, if successful at all, would have been much more difficult. What is my point? My point is that pastoral ministry to families involves more than communicating the truth. It involves walking with people, providing them with an experience of the joy that comes from living the truth, yet appreciating the struggles of people who have neither heard the truth about family and/or have not experienced that truth personally.

Allow me to share 3 examples of what the Catholic Tradition understands as the truth about marriage and family:

1. Marriage and family is a theological unit;
2. Marriage is between a man and a woman;
3. The partners in marriage are equals.

## Excerpts - Celebrating Family Life

*Continued*

Many people listen to that teaching and say to the Church, 'you must be joking!' Why do people react in that way? Because the 3 points just mentioned are not their experience. They do not accept marriage and family is a theological unit because they see many families without marriage and they know that there are young people on the streets who have no relationship whatsoever to a family.

They do not accept that marriage is between one man and one woman because of what they see going on and what they see on TV and what they hear about legislative and judicial decisions that are equating homosexual unions with marriage. They do not accept that the partners in marriage are equal because they see cultural values and patterns trapping women in predetermined roles that undermine their dignity and limit the development of their potential.

The reason why the experience and the values of the young are so important is that they are the next generation of families. If though no fault or little fault of their own they have never learned or never experienced family or family values then the stability of family life in society and society itself will be affected. What will the signs look like? The physical and psychological health of society will be undermined, the demands on governmental social budgets will grow, the quality of the labour force will lessen and the vulnerability of society to various addictions and dependencies will grow. There are countries in the world where these signs are already into a second generation.

The specific context of this evening's gathering is to support the efforts of the CCSJ to raise funds for its ministry to families. It is a highly skilled and committed Commission. I thank you for your willingness to help the Commission help others."

## Excerpts - Celebrating Family Life

*Excerpts from addresses made by His Excellency, Prof. George Maxwell Richards T.C., C.M.T., Ph.D, President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at CCSJ's first Annual Fundraising Dinner/Show held at Hilton Hotel on June 8th, 2004 on the theme: "Celebrating Family Life".*

"Poverty is one of the worst offences against the dignity of the human being. It is dehumanizing and evokes contempt rather than sympathy on the part of many of those who have never known lack or who, at least, have always been able to make a living for themselves...the victims of poverty are not always responsible for their condition, although there is no gainsaying that there are those who have created their own distress either by waste of assets, neglect of opportunity, or for some other reason. But basically, motivation for progress usually has its genesis in family background. That is not to deny that some successful people have pulled themselves out of the most difficult circumstances, not having any support whatsoever from family.

"There is no question that family life is important and has a major influence on the well-being of all members of a unit. The "unit" has changed over time and continues to change, so in speaking about family, I am sure that we are aware that the term does not only refer to what is described as the nuclear family consisting of parents and children...

"...relationships between the sexes seem to be entered into without a long-term vision for endurance, so that by deliberate choice or future expectation, single parenting is the reality. And single parenting has its own dimensions, including that of multiple partners. In the context of poverty, the difficulties are legion. It is, in fact, a chicken and egg situation and ways must be found to break the cycle..."

"...education is the key, within the school system and outside of it. Parents and children must be persuaded that while the government has a responsibility to provide shelter, health care, education and employment, among other things, they have equal responsibility to make use of the opportunities provided for schooling at the basic levels in the first instance, as a means of changing their circumstances.

"I am aware that some parents find it difficult, if not impossible, to send their children to school because of poverty, so these children do not have the opportunity to be taught and the cycle of degradation is kept alive. Somehow the message of responsible parenting must be conveyed...the appeal must be to

Continued

parents or guardians, children and youth at the same time. I believe that the approach must needs be varied, bearing in mind the characteristics of diverse families and it may well be that one may have to court and attract, by dynamic and innovative means, the support of the young. They, in turn, may demonstrate the truth of the proverb 'a little child shall lead them.'

"It is a trite observation, but true, that the family is the basis of society. It follows that if the family is dysfunctional, society will be in a state of upheaval. It is acknowledged that among the socially disadvantaged there are problems of survival that seriously affect family life, but we must not fool ourselves that crisis in family life is confined to the victims of poverty. Throughout our society, in fact, all over the world, family life is under siege because of a number of factors, not least, the lifestyles that are being promoted vigorously by soap operas and other agents of modern values.

"I am always encouraged by the knowledge that organizations such as your Commission are willing to play a part in the welfare of the country by their focus on human development. You recognize that the stability of society is threatened by the erosion of the family and you are doing whatever you can, on a voluntary basis, to turn things around and set young people, in particular, on a proper course in so far as this very critical area of our lives is concerned... I am sure that you are well aware that you are engaged in a process that will hardly yield immediate results, because your task is to change a culture that has developed over a considerable period of time. We need to celebrate family life and I applaud your effort in this direction. I hope that you will obtain every resource that you need to continue your work for the immediate future and for the long-term development of our people at all levels of the society."

Source: Social Sector Investment Programme 2004

SOCIAL PROGRAMME AND SERVICES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO 2004

PROGRAMME TYPE	OPM/SSD	MOE	MSD&GA	MCD&C	MNS&R	MOH	MS&YA	MST&TE	MOHZ	MLA	MAL&MR	THA
DEVELOPMENTAL Training	TRAINING & DEV. GRANT:- A grant of \$5,000.00 for needy persons to access tr. Telecentre computer training & Access to the worldwide web. Parenting training for care givers		WOMEN IN HARMONY :- Provision of training in Agriculture and elderly care. TRAINING IN NON-TRADITIONAL SKILLS FOR WOMEN		M.L.L.A.T. Military led academic training  M.Y.P.A.R.T. Military led youth program apprenticeship re-orientation training		SPORT PLUS: Tr. in various sporting skills with focus on life choices/ self esteem etc.  IMAT Centres (Info. Made Available Through Tech)	RYPE: A Programme of training to prepare youths for the world of work  OJT: On the job training gives young persons 6 months of work experience  DOLLAR FOR DOLLAR PROG.			(YAPPA) Youth Appr. Prog. in Agriculture	academic training
	Conscious Parenting: Radio prog. It's Family Time, Lets Talk		ADOLESCENT MOTHERS:- A Programme of support to pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers and their children  COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME educational and training opportunities for people in the local communities.  G.A.P. geriatric care training and job placement  E.A.P.P. Retirees Adolescent Part. Prog.		ADOLESCENT MOTHERS:- A Programme of support to pregnant adolescents and teenage mothers and their children  COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME educational and training opportunities for people in the local communities.  G.A.P. geriatric care training and job placement  E.A.P.P. Retirees Adolescent Part. Prog.		STEP: Talent id/ sport training and enhancement  Youth Dev. & Apprent. Centres	YTEPP: Provision of skills & business training for youth and adults				
							EXCEL					

# APPENDIX

Source: Social Sector Investment Programme 2004

PROGRAMME TYPE	OPM/SSD	MOE	MSD&GA	MCD&C	MNS&R	MOH	MS&YA	MST&TE	MOH2	MLA	MAL&MR	THA
Employment/ Enterprise Dev. And other social support Programmes	FOSTER CARE PROG.	Project Peace against violence and discipline		CARE: A small grants project accessible by CBOs		Cura Substance Abuse Rehab. Facility						REACH PROG: small business grants prog.
	REHAB. OF SOCIALLY DISPLACED	School guidance and counselling Prog.		Domestic Violence Counselling.		Medical and Psychiatric Counselling						SPINE: Sub. Abuse & prison integrated network
	ADOPT A COMM.					HIV/AIDS counselling						PRIDE: prod. & Res. Institute for the dev. & empowerment of PWDs
	CHOICES					RAPROIT (Anti-HIV/AIDS education)						Family First Foundation Nuringung & Care
	REMEDIATION THERAPY PROG. For Juveniles and their parents					HIV/AIDS Anti-viral treatment programme						SAFE: Spirituality in action for family empowerment
	Micro-Ent. & Training & Dev. Grants					HIV/AIDS: Prevention of mother to child trans.						Creative Living: Com Nutritional Element prog
	(MEL) Micro Ent. Loan Facility					Health Centre exercise prog.						TEAM: Togo elders/adol. Mentorship programme
	Scholarship Prog. Persons With Disabilities	Id. of learning disabilities				School health prog. Id of auditory & visual problems.						

# APPENDIX

Source: Social Sector Investment Programme 2004

PROGRAMME TYPE	OPM/SSD	MOE	MSD&GA	MCD&C	MNS&R	MOH	MS&YA	MST&TE	MOH2	MLA	MAL&MR	THA
WELFARE BENEFITS Financial Ass. Grants	Public Ass. Old Age Pen. Urgent Temp. Assis. Emerg. Cases Fund Disability Ass. Grant SHARE	Book Grants School Nutrition Prog. School Transport Prog.			Remedial Ass. in times of natural disasters	Medical Aids Committee: Financial Ass. with purchase of medical aids CDAP: Chronic disease assistance programme			Housing repair grant of \$10,000 for registered births			
	COMM SERVICE ORDERS					Capacity bldg. youth prog. in HIV/AIDS						
	Subventions to NGOs NEDCO (MIL&ED)		Grants to NGOs									
Infrastructure Support Programmes				National Commission for Self Help								TSIF: Tobacco Social Inv. Fund
				National Social Dev. Prog. (MPL&E) CEPEP (MPL&E)								

KEY

- OPM/SSD: Office of the Prime Minister, Social Services Delivery
- MOE: Ministry of Education
- MSD&GA: Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs
- MCD&C: Ministry of Community Development and Culture
- MNS&R: Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation
- MOH: Ministry of Health
- MS&YA: Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs
- MST&TE: Ministry of Science, Technology & Tertiary Education
- MOH2: Ministry of Housing
- MLA: Ministry of Legal Affairs
- MAL&MR: Ministry of Agriculture Land and Marine Resources
- THA: Tobacco House of Assembly
- ML&ED: Ministry of Labour and Enterprise Development
- MPU&E: Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment