

**FABC-OSC**  
**Bishops' Meet 2003**  
*24-29 November 2003*  
*Negombo, Sri Lanka*

**FINAL STATEMENT**

*We, 30 participants of the FABC-OSC Bishops Meet 2003, Bishops, Secretaries of our National Communication Commissions and married couples from 11 Asian countries, met in Negombo, near Colombo, Sri Lanka, from November 24 to 29, 2003, to study and discuss "Family in Communication, Communication in the Family."*

The family provides the first experience of love and communication. Today it feels powerless and endangered under the impact of global economic, social and political developments including the mass media. The bonds that have held our families together for centuries in the face of tremendous material hardship and poverty are loosening. This is de-stabilising marriage and family life and endangering the very foundation of our societies.

This meeting explored Asian experiences of family communication in today's context from three perspectives – theological, social and experiential, with couples from three Asian countries sharing deeply how their own families were coping with change.

**The Theological Perspective**

The Holy Trinity is reflected in the human family. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons. They communicate with each other in an eternal, interpersonal relationship of love (ad intra communication). The Trinitarian God through creation communicates His life and love to the world. Further, through Divine Revelation, God communicates His redeeming love to human kind (ad extra communication). So father and mother and offspring become a trinity. They relate in love among themselves and with the rest of the world.

**The Social Perspective**

The Asian Family, a unique microcosm of Asian reality, is now entering into a new media-culture influenced by emerging communication technologies. The new technologies enable family members to relate to each other even though separated by long distances. Many though are also bewildered by the disruption of traditional lifestyles. Older family members are unable to comprehend and cope with the new technologies, while young people seem to be swept along by them without any understanding or awareness of their impact. Opposing values beamed into the sacredness of the home also adversely affect family hierarchies and inter-personal communication.

**The Experiential Perspective**

The experiences of three couples from three different Asian societies highlighted certain similarities: the need for a clear and deep understanding and agreement between parents on family values; their willingness and ability to enter into a 'listening dialogue' with their children; the awareness that family communication evolves as the family grows in age and number and under the impact of social and economic developments sometimes forcing family members to work at odd hours or long distances from home. Prayer is an important aspect that enriches communication between spouse and spouse, parents and children. In a continent where huge masses of people are often struggling to make both ends meet, it cannot be forgotten that material poverty can also be a hindrance to communication.

The Church and Christian families cannot be oblivious to these changes. Fully conscious of the Church's responsibility for this, we present the following orientations:

### **Orientations**

The means of communication are gifts from God (*Communio et Progressio*, 2; *Aetatis Novae*, 22). They are powerful tools for good. Nevertheless, forces of commercialism or ideologies opposed to Christian and human values are vying for control of new media technologies through subtle, and sophisticated manipulative techniques. Hence, the importance of Communication Formation and Media Awareness for families. Parents need to be aware of media/electronic games that promote values other than spiritual and moral. Young people must understand the new media culture in order to better integrate it into their lives (cf. *BISCOM IV*). Media must remain instruments for knowledge, understanding, development and fulfilment.

True Christian family life is a "witness of life" and a spiritual exercise in itself (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 21, 41 & 76). Family members respect, listen to, dialogue with and heal each other. They grow in holiness through a spirituality that evolves over time. The family is a cradle of love, which enables each member to feel nurtured and find fulfilment in a life-giving environment.

In Asia, it is necessary for Christians to work with communities of other religions striving to protect age-old values of family and community, self-sacrifice, respect and caring.

We recognize that no single solution is valid for every family in every situation for all stages of growth and development. A family situation is always dynamic. It grows in age, maturity and even its economic situation changes with time. Keeping this in mind, we make the following recommendations:

### **Recommendations**

1. It should be the special concern of Bishops' Conferences to be involved in any way possible in the promotion of communication in families, and groups of families.
2. Parents should teach by example. Good communication between spouses creates and sustains a "culture of communication" in the home. Setting aside time for the spouse and children despite pressing economic needs, is key to good communication within the family.
3. Families are encouraged to share media like watching TV programs together. Parents and children discussing together the use of TV, with the children even participating in the decision about the use of TV, can be an enriching experience of communication and a means for growth and maturity for all.
4. Encourage Asian practices of sharing in the celebrations of family events with the extended family, neighbours, both Catholic and other communities. Catholic families must be made aware of the family apostolate. Look for what is unique to each culture and promote family togetherness through communication like story telling (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20). Outreach to the sick, elderly and those specially challenged helps to bring people together.
5. Preparation for marriage should include also the development of sufficient awareness for the need and ways of non-verbal communication, the ability to listen to each other, accepting each other's feelings, and putting oneself into the other's shoes (cf. *Mk. 1:31*).
6. Ensure a better dissemination of information that promotes Christian values and strengthens the quality of our faith. Publicise more Church-related rating of movies, where available. Review and assess TV serials and children's programmes on a regional and/or language basis to encourage wider viewership of good programmes.
7. It is important to honour communicators who develop good programs and stand for values in social communication. Such endorsement, especially when given in collaboration with other religious and cultural groups, can be powerful signals for other professionals.
8. Seminarians and priests are to be prepared early enough for pastoral services, not only for Catholic families but also inter-faith marriages. The first encounter of an inter-faith couple with a Catholic priest is often crucial. Inter-faith marriages also in their communication need special pastoral care.

9. Promote marriage-enrichment movements like Engaged Encounter and Marriage Encounter as well as youth movements preparing for life (cf. BISCOP IV). In a continent where Christians are a minority, we must work with other churches, religious organisations to improve the communication abilities of couples and families.
10. Work more closely with NGOs and existing bodies that are concerned about the media influence, especially the impact of media, on children.
11. The spirituality of the family is to be developed within the family itself, through its relationship with God, its interpersonal, and relations with others. Encourage families to pray, and attend liturgical services together.

*Negombo, Sri Lanka*  
*27-Nov-03*