



Christian Conference of Asia
**Regional Consultation on 'Family Life and Family Values:
Transitions from Tradition to Modernity'**

Background Information Note

Introduction

Every society recognizes the family as an important institution. The importance of the family in every society proves that it fulfils very important functions for individuals and in social life. The influence of the family in shaping the life of a person is important. However, today even in the most industrialized or urbanized societies people seem to have lost their roots and they prefer to keep aloof from other members in the family. The natural practice flowing out of an inner calling of every human being which was nurtured and valued is no longer practiced among people and communities in many Asian societies.

In spite of the fact that the joint family system has been one of the salient features of all societies; such a system has been the hall mark of most Asian societies as part of their traditional values. But, the twenty-first century with enormous technological advancement and increased demands of life witnesses changes in the traditional family system and its long nurtured values in Asian societies. The magnitude of changes that the Asian families have been experiencing during the past two decades appears to be far greater than what was expected before. The existence of the postmodern family, what is being called or described as the permeable family—two parents working, single-parent families, adoptive families, remarried couples, etc. – is emerging as it is more fluid and flexible, which seems to be considered as more viable in today's situation. The model of the concept of an ideal family also is changing. A family may compose parents with or without children. A child is now even considered as a non-essential component of a family. Two married adults or even siblings living together may function as a family. The current trends mirror the complexity of contemporary lifestyles.

The virtual disappearance of the traditional joint family system, increase in the life expectancy of women, rise in the proportion of female headed households, decrease in the average age of household heads, increase in incidences of separation and divorce, greater tension and conflicts between wife and husband, parents and children as well as among siblings, increased freedom of marital choice or partnership of men and women for a union of emotions and wills, prevalence of child marriages, shrinking kinship ties, less consultation between children and parents on familial matters, greater involvement of females in decision making process, rise in the level of female education, decline in total

fertility rate, etc. are examples of changes in the family system— its structure, functions, core values and regulative norms. In the course of these changes, many new problems have surfaced while some of the old ones too remain in most Asian societies.

Another major disadvantage is the manner in which the older members of the family are losing their importance in the family, and also they feel that enough attention is not given to them, even if it is relevant. The parents feel lonely after children grow up and move out to make their own homes. Asian societies are finding it increasingly difficult to find a balance between the old and the new lifestyles in order to maintain the traditional family values. Instead of togetherness, Asian families experience a new focus on autonomy. The individual becomes more important than the family. A trend that becomes more pervasive now is based on a notion of independence and freedom that each person should be free to enjoy in his or her own trajectory in day to day lives. The traditional value of giving care for old elderly in the family, especially to parents or grandparents at home and be mindful to respect their feelings are no longer a concern.

An ideal family expresses and recognises the importance of mutually supporting and caring the members of the family throughout life. An ideal family's love among all family members sustains the spirit of harmony within the family as well as in their community. Special attention must be given to value the rights and dignity of every member, especially children, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and other dependents in the family. It is essential that the noble values of each one in the family be respected and provided loving care as well as given the opportunity to contribute to the family's and society's well-being. As Pope Francis wrote the Christian responsibility calls for our commitment to support the broken families, especially in sharing mercy and patience that are essential for building a strong family must be shown to those whose families are in trouble or have broken up. "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love... People grow in holiness, and the church must be there to give them a helping hand rather than turn them away because they have not attained some degree of perfection."

Churches in every society have been playing a vital role in providing pastoral care for their members. In many places, however, churches cannot cope with the mounting problems in their congregations or societies due to the notion that pastoral care as a professional skill is limited to a few qualified people. Thus, the concerns in relation to changing family values are not properly addressed by the churches. The local church must perform its tasks in order to be an outward facing community expressing in words and deeds the love of Christ who came to seek the needy and the lost. As society becomes more fragmented and the quality of social networks becomes more fragile, the local churches should have opportunities to build unconditional and faithful relationships with households in need. Churches today need to hold together the congregational and community focus of ministry and to be more engaged in addressing the concerns in the contexts of changing family values that are not often conducive or inclusive.

In this background that the Christian Conference of Asia is planning to hold a consultation to address the emerging concerns related to changing family values.

Objectives

The objectives of the consultation will aim at:

1. setting the goals of upholding the biblical-based family values of caring for each other in family and communities,
2. exploring new ministerial methodologies of being churches as God's instruments to socialize, support and strengthen family ties across generations, and
3. assisting the churches in Asia to be engaged in a systematic approach in equipping congregations to accompany the members of the churches and people at large in their communities with pastoral care of family counselling.

Date

The regional consultation will be conducted through Zoom platform on Tuesday-Thursday, 3-5 August 2021.