

APOSTOLAT MILITAIRE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
NAIROBI, KENYA
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“THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER AND THE FAMILY”

(Presented by the Kenyan Delegation)

INTRODUCTION

The 2004 AMI Conference held in Bratislava-Slovakia from 19th to 29th September 2004 on the theme “*The soldier and his/her family today*” focused on the general challenges in Society for marriage and family and the emerging situations as a result of foreign deployment of the soldier. The challenge was and still is “Is the soldier empowered to carry out his work as a servant of the military and at the same time exercise responsible parenthood?” How can we the Church, Militaries of the world and AMI, address the challenges of the soldier and his family at this time of globalization and asymmetric threats so that he/she doesn’t lose the Christian values? Very moving experiences were shared from different delegates of the militaries present during this conference. Common issues were identified as:- matrimonial problems, economic problems, crime, sickness and death, threats to family bonds, relationships and breakpoints in family life.

It therefore remained a challenge for the AMI, the Church and the Militaries of the world to think about the new special military environments in which the soldier finds himself/herself. The concern of the soldier and his/her family needs a new approach and intervention at all levels in order to strengthen the family unit. It is against this background that we present the paper “The Soldier and the Family” as a contribution to the theme of this year’s conference - **“Strengthening of Christian values in the Armed Forces world wide”**

AIM

The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges of the soldier with a view to providing possible solutions and interventions to strengthen the soldier’s Christian values in the family.

SCOPE

The scope of this paper will cover the following:

- The family
- Christian family values
- Challenges to a christian soldier's family
- Interventions
- Conclusion

THE FAMILY

The institution of the family is God's idea. He created Adam and Eve, joined them in marriage, commanded them to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:27-28). The christian concept of marriage is a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman as husband and wife. This constitutes a family with or without children. (CCC1654)

Roles of the family can vary but normally includes procreation, affection, socialization, provision for physical and spiritual needs as well as nurturing. The man and the woman have different roles in the family. The man is able to assume loving authority and headship of his family. Given this role he is able to avail himself at home to provide for those needs.

On the other hand the woman feels secure in the home and is able to assume her maternal obligations under the loving leadership of her husband as she will be able to provide tender loving care to her family through her duties. A loved wife will find it easy to reciprocate her husband's love. Where a christian couple loves one another, the love for God follows naturally. It is in this kind of loving atmosphere that christian family values will thrive (Eph 5:21-24).

Parenthood involves begetting of children and assuming responsibility of their eternal destiny. This responsibility must be carried out faithfully in an atmosphere of love for God, for one another and the neighbours. "The Church declares that sanctity of the conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation" (CCC 2221). The parents are the first educators of their children and indeed nobody can claim the right and duty to the children other than them.

The first responsibility for the parents is the provision of a home to the family. The home should be a place of sanity where love, tenderness, forgiveness, respect and fidelity are the norms. All the parents should find time to be at home with their children to instill proper virtues.

Parents have an obligation to assess the needs of all the members of the family and manage the available resources to effectively satisfy those needs such as:- education, health, financial support, security, effective discipline, spiritual and moral care.

Parents are the first Catechists and Evangelizers to their family. “Train a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not swerve from it” (Proverbs 22:6.) The children are baptized in the faith of their parents and of the church. Parents are by word and examples the first herald of the faith with regard to their children. Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage they receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. The children learn from words and example of their parents the apostolic task that they must exercise in their own family, community, Church and in society. They will learn to share faith, hope, love, gratitude and fraternity. (LG 11)

CHRISTIAN FAMILY VALUES:

It is imperative that we underline the christian family values necessary in empowering the soldier and the family to withstand challenges to the family institution.

By virtue of baptism the soldier is called to witness to the *christian faith*. The life of a soldier will be endowed with Christ’s values if the individual develops a lifestyle of prayer, scripture reading, meditation and spiritual exercises consistently.

Responsible and formed couples grow and experience natural *love*. In this way they are able to express affection, appreciation and admiration of each other. A couple is called upon to *co-operate* by consulting with each other on all matters affecting their relationship. *Friendship* is a vital ingredient in marriage in which spouses maintain a companionship where they enjoy each other’s company. This companionship enhances *Sexual Intimacy* and mutual love that seeks to deepen their communion. “By its very nature,

conjugal love requires the inviolable *Fidelity* of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other” (CCC 1646).

By being open to each other spouses lend quality to *Communication* in their marital relationship. The couple grows in maturity and humility such that they readily accept mistakes and seek each other’s *forgiveness*. Consequently the spouses value, *Respect* and protect each other’s image and dignity at all times. The soldier is created in the image and likeness of God hence has an obligation to preserve personal and family dignity.

God called man and woman in marriage to love and accompany one another in a permanent, indissoluble union till death. The christian soldier needs to understand and live the sacrament of matrimony with *commitment*. Together they develop family *Spirituality*. “The family is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and reading of the word of God strengthen it in charity” (CCC 2205).

The christian soldier is called upon to *serve God and humanity*, to protect his Nation and evangelize through his work. The christian characteristics sanctify the soldier’s work, consequently transforming him into an instrument of witnessing Christ’s love. The guiding principle of this vocation can be found in Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II (GS) 1965, No. 79 where it says; “He who serves his country as a soldier is to consider himself as a servant of the security and freedom of the peoples. In performing his task properly, he really contributes to consolidating the peace...” Let the lay faithful constantly foster a feeling of their own diocese of which the parish is a kind of a cell and be always ready at their Bishop’s invitation to participate in diocesan projects. (*Christifidelis Laici* No. 25 *John Paul II*)

In the Acts of Apostles (Acts 11:26), the believers were first called Christians at Antioch because of their community life in the likeness of Christ. “The christian family is a *communion* of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2205). The growth of faith in a christian soldier will be enhanced by his participation in his christian community.

By *respecting, preserving and fostering* the particular values and riches of our people’s cultural heritage and traditions, we shall be in a position to lead our people to a better understanding of the mystery of Christ which is to be lived in the concrete and daily experiences of our lives (*Ecclesia in Africa*, Art 127 Pope John Paul II).

CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY

The world has become a global village with a diversity of values and practices. The evolution in information technology has greatly enhanced indiscriminate dissemination of secular values to the masses. The family as the basic cell of society has been hard hit, especially in its role as the basic school of humanity. The population control policies and propaganda have threatened the very survival of the family institution. This threat is further complicated by contraceptive practices, abortion, separation and divorce, same sex union, teenage pregnancy and pre-marital and extramarital sex. This has impacted negatively on the family and the soldier.

After his training the soldier finds him/her self *physically separated* from the family for long periods thus challenging his/her family role participation. Most of the soldier's life in service is spent in training and in deployments away from the family and home setting. For many soldiers, the military service is their first occasion to be away from home, from family, and from their home christian community. Most are young and this is a critical time in their lives, when their direction for future may well be determined, they require greatly the spiritual guidance of the Church.

Another challenge to the soldier's family arising out of continued physical separation is *Infidelity*. Man was considered incomplete by God his creator and therefore given companion in a woman. Temptations find a very fertile breeding ground when a couple is conditioned to long periods of separation. Mutual suspicions and loneliness creeps in, leading to extra marital affairs. Infidelity is not only a mortal sin but is also the cause of communication breakdown in marriage, delinquescence in children, stress leading to depression and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Separation and Divorce in marriage may also be a consequence of long periods of absence by the soldier from his family due to the nature of his work. This impacts negatively on the family and leads to instability and disillusion, loss of protection and security to all members of the family, loss of self-esteem and more often than not relapse into vices like alcoholism, insanity, incest, murder and others.

Diversity of family unions and situations is also a challenge which faces the soldier. The soldier may find himself in any one of the following family situations; Monogamous or polygamous union, cohabitation 'come we stay', single parenthood, broken relationships and orphaned children.

Other challenges hindering the strengthening of the soldier's christian family values are: economic hardships; retirement; peer influence; problems affecting the youth for example teenage pregnancies, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, HIV/AIDS; inadequate psychological support and counseling to the soldier and his family; inadequate spiritual guidance in military training institutions; inadequate counseling in pre-marital and parenting skills; inadequate financial support to pastoral programmes and inadequate Chaplaincy personnel.

INTERVENTIONS

It is important to address the family background issues of the soldier in order to assist him to be "transformed" into a Christian family life. The following are possible interventions which may help in the strengthening of the christian family values amongst our soldiers: Seminars and workshops for the ongoing formation to the soldiers and their families; counseling for marriage and family through the establishment of counseling services organic to the unit structure; strengthening of programmes for formation of spouses for example Marriage encounter workshops, Family life seminars and Couples for Christ and Pre-marital counseling in the Church programmes with the Unit Command involvement.

Other intervention programmes which help to address the challenges discussed above include formation of the youth through youth camps, youth festivals, sporting activities, community involvement, economic activities, development of talents, discernment of charisms and emphasis of spiritual activities in the promotion of various vocations in the life of the church.

In order to realize this, the military Commanders' intervention is highly desirable in addressing the spiritual welfare of the soldier. This may be done by the recruitment of more Chaplaincy personnel, increased financial support for spiritual programmes, establishment of family counseling centres to cater for service personnel's welfare as well as pre and post-deployment briefing. Enhancement of unit libraries with relevant materials and books on family, youth, counseling and parenting issues will go a long way in strengthening the soldier's Christian values.

National, Regional and International Conferences sponsored by pontifical council of the laity, family life are of paramount importance in articulating spiritual concerns of the soldier.

CONCLUSION

It is of great importance that Christian families are made aware of the values as discussed in the paper. This will of necessity require family life education, guidance and counseling to those already in marriage and young adults who are preparing for marriage. It is our earnest appeal that the Military Ordinariates in the world will endeavour at all times to encourage the lay apostolate and invite the soldier to participate actively. Closer co-operation with other religious faith groups in the Armed Forces is desired to enrich the soldier's spiritual values.

Our hope and prayer is that the deliberations of this Conference will go a long way in strengthening Christian values so much desired in the Armed Forces world wide.

Thank you and God bless you

26th September 2006