

PASTORAL LETTER
EVANGELISING FAMILY LIFE FOR A NEW CARIBBEAN

1. Introduction

The United Nations has declared 1994 to be International Year of the Family. The Catholic Church welcomed this decision and has declared that the period from the Feast of the Holy Family, December 26th 1993, to the same Feast in 1994, is to be observed as the Year of the Family.

The Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference have undertaken to write this Pastoral Letter to all members of the Church in the region and to all people of good will to emphasise the importance of the family, firstly to the members of the family themselves and then to the Church and society.

Part I

MARRIAGE & FAMILY LIFE

2. Our belief

We begin by stating that we firmly believe that marriage is the basis of family life. Matrimony is a call by God to a man and a woman to live together in a permanent, life-long, stable union of love and companionship. This union sanctifies the couple and gives them the right to procreate children whom they will educate to lead wholesome Christian lives in the world, and to direct them on the path to heaven, the destination of all human life. The family is the basic cell in society. As our families are, so is our society. When they are strong, society is strong; when they are weak, society is weak.

We wish to pay tribute to the many thousands of Caribbean people who live family life as a witness to the Gospel values taught in Sacred Scripture. We acknowledge the sacrifices parents make for their children. We recognise the courageous determination of spouses who strive to hold their marriages together when they have extreme difficulties in their relationship.

We wish to commend those people who give time and energy to promote family life through the numerous organisations that prepare young people for marriage and assist those already married when they have problems or when they seek to deepen their married love and live a more spiritual life.

3. Caribbean Problems

Unfortunately there exists a **high level of non-legal unions** in our region. For some this is part of the experience on the road to marriage. It embodies promise and hope.

For many it is a cycle of exploitation where women are used time and again by different partners in short term and irresponsible relationships. The cycle cultivates a condition of mistrust and insecurity. Women become dependent on visiting partners for financial help to survive and for companionship. They are demeaned and often subjected to physical and psychological abuse. Children in many such homes have the same mother but different fathers. Infidelity and lack of commitment are rooted in this cycle. This, certainly, is not the Gospel value proclaimed by Jesus.

Today's adverse financial conditions have influenced the high proportion of **mothers on the job market** resulting in both parents being absent from the home for long periods. This is detrimental to the lives of their children who, as a consequence, often lack a **proper family environment**. There can be dire consequences also for relationships between spouses and between parents and children. **The high occurrence of incest and other forms of child abuse** are present in every sector of society but are particularly noticeable where families live in cramped dwelling conditions. We are aware that in many homes adults lack the skills to handle disputes and frustrations and consequently resort to physical and verbal abuse or extreme violence. These days we are becoming increasingly aware of violence inflicted on women in the home.

4 Revelation: God's Plan for the Family

It is necessary to recall what God has ordained family life should be. This we read in the pages of Sacred Scripture.

Genesis: made in God's image and likeness

The Bible opens with the story of God making the world and its creatures, culminating in the creation of man and woman "in the image of himself, in the image of God he created [the man], male and female he created them." (Gn 1: 27) God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it." (Gn 1: 28) God's plan was to create man and woman, bless them and command them to be fruitful and multiply.

To emphasise his design, the following chapter in the Book of Genesis re-tells the story of the creation of man and woman and their equality before God. "This at last is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh!", exclaims the man. "This is to be called woman, for this was taken from him" And the Bible explains, "This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body." (Gn. 2: 23-24).

The constant teaching of the Jewish and Christian peoples has been that this is the beginning of marriage, a fundamental element of the natural law. Man and woman were called by God who is Love and they were called for love. Family, according to God's plan, begins when woman and man are joined together in the covenant of married love. This is how nature intends marriage to be: the intimate and indissoluble union of a man and a woman entrusted by God with the exclusive mission of loving and supporting each other as helpmates, begetting and educating children and living together in communion as a family.

The Family of Jesus

Jesus entered the world by becoming a member of a family. Mary was his real mother and Joseph his foster-father, whom he called father. (Lk. 2: 48) Mary and Joseph were husband and wife. (Mt. 1: 19, 20, 24). They formed a family. Jesus was born into this family. The Holy Family is the prototype and exemplar of family life for all Christian families. In the Bible account, the Holy Family was part of an extended family. We read of aunts, uncles and cousins who were called "brothers and sisters". This wider family supported its members. An example is when Elizabeth, who was expecting John the Baptist, received a three month visit from her cousin Mary.

In our Caribbean society the extended family had been a very important experience of family life for many. This significant value, however, is now under threat because of external cultures influencing adversely our way of thinking and living. These cultures propagate greed, envy and debase moral values. They encourage people to live for themselves as individuals.

5. Pastoral Directives

The reality of family life in the region as it is lived today challenges us as pastors to an awareness of the types of family unions that exist in our dioceses. We recommend the following practical actions:

Dioceses:

We, your bishops, pledge to make **evangelisation of families a top priority** in our pastoral planning, renewing our commitment of time, personnel and money to this service.

Parishes:

- (i) Each parish should organise a **study group or family association** to assist those who wish to deepen their knowledge of, and live a more spiritual and fulfilling married life.
- (ii) Parishes should provide **trained family counsellors** for those with marriage problems.

Priests:

Pastors should organise an invigorated **evangelisation**, focusing on the family and directly touching the lives of **those in common-law unions and visiting relationships**.

Families:

- (i) Families must have correct priorities and values in their lives if this community of faith, love and life is to grow into a loving, responsible and disciplined heart of society. We call on individual families to give **more time to each member**. Time that is spent together is time that builds family life.
- (ii) It is above all in the family that parents and children live the richness of that love which is in the heart of God. Our Caribbean extended family is this sacred place where all our true values are absorbed. Bring to the heart of this extended family the **witness of love for one another**.
- (iii) Where and when possible we ask **married couples to assist others**, directly or through one of the many organisations that help strengthen family life.
- (iv) When problems arise in marriage which overpower the couple, we urge them to **seek help from competent people**.

Couples living in common law or non-legal unions:

The experience of many couples who live together in permanent, responsible non-legal unions is that they know their situation to be incomplete. Many people have become trapped in unions and relationships from which they see into have no escape. While we bishops cannot equate these unions with marriage, we pledge to exercise greater pastoral care and concern so that those who have entered into these unions will not lose their dignity or be alienated from the Church community. Let priests and other pastoral workers offer their help and understanding to enable these couples to make the proper decisions which are in harmony with God's plan for the family and their own well-being.

Children:

Children have a positive role in family life. They receive much. They also have much to give. They contribute to the family by their love, respect and obedience. These qualities must be experienced before they can be shared.

Governments:

- (i) Families, because they are the basic cell of every nation, **should be the first priority of Governments**. It is not sufficient to promise that present Government policies will help families in the future. The families of the present need immediate care and protection.
- (ii) We call on Governments to provide adequate housing or helps with financing so that each family can have its own dignified home.

Part II

ROLE OF PARENTS

6. Encouraging Signs

It is encouraging to see the interest of many young people in preparing for marriage. There are more group instructions now than formerly and there is a growing participation by married couples in assisting with these preparations. The increasing awareness of the dignity of women, the greater respect for family life, the heightening involvement of families in society are facts that cannot be denied. The ideals presented by the word of God and by the Church are having greater impact.

7. Caribbean Problems

An agonising worry for families in our society is **unemployment and underemployment**, which is estimated at over 20 percent of the work force in the majority of our territories. This is a prevalent cause of the violence in society and in the home towards wife and children. Lack of adequate employment partly explains the **poor self-image** of so many, aggravating a problem that has historical roots. Both unemployment and poor self-image make family relationships difficult and, at times, impossible. They explain, to some degree, the attitude our "phantom fathers", those who get a woman pregnant and disappear, re-appearing when the baby is born. Rarely will they support her in a meaningful and substantial way.

The employment of women in the 20-39 age group is high and one consequence is that **mothers and fathers are absent from the family** during a large portion of the day, to the detriment of training in family values. Another result is that there is less desire to have children. This can give rise to a contraceptive mentality, sterilisation and abortion.

8. Revelation: God's Plan for Parents

St. Paul tells us that “every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name” from “the Father”. (Eph. 3: 14-15). Fathers derive their dignity and title from God the Father, the Creator, because they continue the work of creation when they beget. That is the meaning of the term ‘procreation’. God, of course, did not only create. He continued to sustain and provide. Human fathers share that role also, providing for and nurturing the offspring they procreate. Obviously, if they use women for pleasure, are irresponsible, unfaithful in marriage and abusive to their spouses and children they cannot deserve the title which likens them to the Creator nor do they reflect the loving qualities of the provident God.

Women also resemble God the Creator and Provider in motherhood. In marriage they give themselves as complete and perfect gift to their husbands and children. They model themselves on Mary, the Mother of Jesus and Mother of God.

Ephesians 5: 21-33

One of the most glorious passages on marriage in the Bible is to be found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This is a call to mutual love by husband and wife. Paul refers to marriage as a “great mystery”. By “mystery” he does not mean something which could not be understood. Indeed, he explains the “mystery”. As used by Paul it means “sacrament”, or “sacred sign”. He tells us that marriage is a sacred sign of the relationship of love, expressed in sacrifice, between Christ and his Bride, the Church. When we refer to the family as the “Domestic Church” or “The Church of the Home” we are expressing our belief that Christ is present by his love in the home. His loving presence creates love in the home.

In this same text, St. Paul uses the word “love” to describe the relationship between husbands and wives. Love, for St. Paul, is generous, self-giving and sacrificial. It is the sincere, unconditional gift of self to another. It must be free, mutual, lasting, faithful and exclusive. It is modelled on the mutual love of Christ and the Church.

Every act of intercourse must be an expression of love for the spouse. It must be open to life. We recall words from St. Paul to the Galatians: “You were called, as you know, to liberty; but be careful, or this liberty will provide an opening for self-indulgence.” (Gal. 5: 13) This makes us respectful of the gifts we have received from God. Freedom has its limits. Our freedom is not licence to do as we please. That would not be the mind of Christ.

9. Pastoral Directives

As a consequence of these observations, we recommend the following practical actions:

Dioceses:

- (i) We undertake, to the best of our ability, to form families as the Domestic Church by preparing women for their calling by God to be wives and mothers. This we will do by encouraging the **development of the family organisations** which can help individual families.
- (ii) Next, we undertake to study means of helping men in particular to overcome the spiralling **domestic violence**. For this we will set up systems in each diocese that will respond meaningfully to this need.
- (iii) The Church has already established several **homes for abused women and children**. We undertake to increase these in number, providing places of refuge for the victims.

Parishes:

- (i) Parishes should give a sense of belonging and of support to our Catholic men by involving them in **associations of males**. Men need to have an awareness of mission in the Church; they need to be helped overcome the *macho* and irresponsible behaviour which has existed for too long.
- (ii) Parishes also should have **associations of women** who can assist each other and reach out to families in their needs.

Priests:

Priests should be particularly **supportive of movements for the development of women in society**, ensuring that their dignity is respected. The woman's role in formation of sons is still strong in our society. Her refining influence on the male can act as a transforming leaven in the community.

Families:

- (i) Parents, especially mothers who play such an important role in the formation of the minds of youth, must train their children to reject the traditional concepts of the male *macho* and male irresponsibility.
- (ii) We make our own the words of the Bishops of the United States who wrote, "We urge men to interpret their traditional role as **'provider' for a family in more than an economic sense**. Physical care of children, discipline, training in religious values and practices, helping with school work and other activities: all these and more can be provided by fathers as well as mothers." (Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops to Families on the occasion of the United Nations 1994 International Year of the Family).

Governments:

- (i) We appeal to Governments to **grant substantial tax relief** to women who make the sacrifice of working in the home. "While it must be recognised that women have the same right as men to perform various public

functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are not in practice compelled to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family. Furthermore, the mentality which honours women more for their work outside the home than for their work within the family must be overcome. “ (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 23)

- (ii) Recently Pope John Paul II has put forward a valuable suggestion for cases where women who have young children are being forced to work outside the home in order to support themselves and their children. If, instead, they were enabled to stay at home and so see to the proper upbringing of their children and be given remuneration by the State for this valuable work, this would not only benefit the children but also leave vacancies for those seeking employment.

Private Sector:

Our further appeal is to the Private Sector to do even more by way of creating jobs. As unemployment is a major reason for violence and crime in society and in the family, the solution cannot be anything other than employment.

Part III

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

10. Our Hope

Many young people are challenging the values of the age. They have a strong desire to do the correct thing. They are generous with time and talents. Thousands of them are willing to take direction when given with respect by those who listen to what they have to say.

They are confused about right and wrong, good and evil, values which they must be taught as they cannot discover them for themselves. They are searching. They need to see and understand the connection between faith and life. Ministry to youth must encourage them to become more involved in the Church so that “they may come to know Christ Jesus.”

11. Caribbean Problems

Children as young as ten years are becoming sexually active and there is a **growing incidence of pregnancy** in this age group, increasing each year thereafter. At 14 years of age many have had sexual intercourse already. Surveys indicate that a very high percentage of adolescents have had sexual intercourse. In most territories 20 per cent of all births are to females under 19 years of age and 60 per cent of these are born out of wedlock.

The **overcrowding in homes** which do not have separate bedrooms for the males and females, and often only one room for parents and children, account for early sexual awareness and activity in many children. It is also a reason for the high incidence of incest among brothers and sisters.

Surveys add that in general **few signs of love and affection are shown to children** nor is time spent talking, listening and sharing with them. Surveys also indicate that parents do not request, only issue commands. They do not say “Thank you” to their children.

Prayers and church attendance are neglected in a large percentage of homes today.

12. Revelation: God’s Plan

The Gospels make it clear that Jesus loved children and wished that no one would cause them scandal. ‘Let them come to me’, he urged. Children in the family share equal dignity as persons with the adults. They are born with an innate love for God. Our privilege is to build on this. If only they show interest in and affection for their children parents have ready-made clay that they can mold into a beautiful gift for God.

At the same time, parents must realise that children need to be trained to have a sense of responsibility and this requires discipline. Discipline does not mean punishment, beatings, shouting, screaming or belittling the child. It means that children are taught right from wrong, are helped to do what is good and shun what is evil. It means teaching them to act responsibly. They need heroes and heroines to emulate. They need their parents to fill this role for them. They need this type of formation for life.

Speaking to the Antilles Episcopal Conference in January 1994, Pope John Paul H said, “The message of Christ is the key to a student’s advancement in maturity and virtue, which in turn is the condition of progress in learning. The light of the Gospel gives young people the strength to commit themselves to serving the common good, and instils in them the courage to face even times; of social and economic trial with serene hope.” (*Ad Limina Visit* address)

13. Pastoral Directives

Our children are our hope and our future. We recommend the following for their development:

Dioceses:

- (i) Our Catholic schools are a source of great support to parents in rearing their children. We pledge to give **more attention to the quality of help we offer** through these institutions and their personnel, particularly our Catholic teachers.
- (ii) With renewed catechetical programmes, **“religious instruction is to enjoy a pre-eminent place in the curriculum.”** (*Ib.*)

Parishes:

Every opportunity must be taken to help parents in the rudiments of parenting. They have to be helped through parish and community programmes. All our institutes and supportive systems have to be put at the **service of the family**.

Schools:

Family life education, which is not the same as family planning or sex education, but which prepares young people for life in their own homes (home economics, budgeting, cooking, etc.) must be taught in schools. Boys, as well as girls, must engage in suitable **family life educational programmes**. We encourage “Living Skills” programmes which are so successful in other countries and which could be established in our region.

Families:

- (i) Parents must be **helped to give sex instruction** in the home adequate to the personal requirements of the children. In *Familiaris Consortio* the Holy Father says, “Education to love as self-giving also constitutes the indispensable premise for parents called to offer their children a clear and delicate sex education. Faced with a culture which largely reduces human sexuality to the level of something commonplace, since it interprets and lives it in a reductive and impoverished way by linking it solely with the body and with selfish pleasure, the educational service of parents in the area of sex must aim firmly at a training that is truly and fully personal: for sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person — body, emotions and soul —and manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love.” (No. 37)
- (ii) We urge parents to form their children in **Christian family values** by living these values in their own lives. Values are most often caught, not taught. There is no better way of teaching than that of personal witness.
- (iii) **In disciplining their children parents should be able to give adequate reasons** for the measures they take so that children may understand the reasons for correction. The use of corporal punishment needs to be applied in a balanced way.

Children:

- (i) Children should be **helped to identify with the poor and the sick children** in the community and in this way they will grow in moral and spiritual maturity, and will come to live a life of commitment to the needy who are the image of God.
- (ii) Children, by regular attendance at Mass, by reception of the sacraments and by fidelity to prayer, will **develop a life of faith** which gives meaning and direction to their lives that will stand them in good stead as they face a world of secularism and materialism.

Governments:

- (i) The early years of childhood are critical for a child’s intellectual and psychological development, and we appeal to Governments to ensure that **early childhood education** is available to all children, that proper

nourishment is provided when needed and that teachers in these pre-primary schools are properly trained and enjoy the same benefits as their counterparts in the Primary School system.

- (ii) We suggest that a **volunteer service programme** between Governments in the region be established to provide young people with the opportunity to serve in different parts of the region as a means of sharing their talents with others, broadening their experience of the region and planting the seeds of Caribbean integration.

Part IV

DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The difficulties and problems encountered in family life fall into two main categories.

A. SOCIAL & ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

In addressing the first, the social and economic problems that affect many families, we wish to focus on the following points:

14. Family income

Insufficient family income is a fundamental problem. This includes inadequate housing and unemployment, particularly among males.

Pastoral Directive:

There is no simple answer to this problem of inadequate family income. However, we encourage Governments to have a family perspective in all their policies and especially in the annual budget. The family, as the fundamental cell in the nation; should receive its due amount of attention. Let the State ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family. This requires a continuous effort to improve workers' training and capability so that their work will be more skilled and productive. (d. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*. No. 15)

15. Media of Social Communications

The influence of the media of social communications, particularly violent and pornographic music and TV, play havoc with family values. A foreign culture, with false values and standards of judgement, is pervasive, affecting our people during most of their waking hours.

Pastoral Directives:

- (i) Our **schools** should help in the formation of critical judgements of these influences.
- (ii) However, the best antidote is family viewing and listening where **parents** participate with their children and share their values afterwards. Anything that does violence to human dignity and goes contrary to Christian values and morality must be rejected. While we search for and affirm the good in

our culture, or any other, we cannot at the same time tolerate what is evil, degrading or undignified.

16. Stress

There is increasing stress in families. Living, working and economic conditions are the causes of this. Very often this stress is relieved by anger shown to the members of the family. Many marriages fail because of this stress.

Pastoral Directives:

- (i) It is necessary that **families** learn to relax, to re-focus on their relationships and take time off to be together as a family. Parents also need to take time off to be alone.
- (ii) We recommend that parishes and groups promote **days of retreat and recollection and events aimed at family interaction and recreation**. In parishes there must be time for play and socialising as members of the local community.

B. MORALITY AND FAMILY LIFE

The second category of problems facing family life today are the moral issues. We focus on the following:

17. Abortion

Abortion has become one of the great evils of our age. It destroys God's greatest gift, that of human life. Even though it is not legal in every part of the region it is available everywhere and is widespread. Consciences have become blind to its true meaning of taking a human life. Many are ignorant of the seriousness of the sin of abortion. In addition it is practised by some as a conventional form of contraception. Many of the women who have abortions do so under peer pressure or demands from their parents or boy friends. However, there are encouraging signs: we are pleased to note that Pro-life groups are increasing. Many of our youth are very strong in their rejection of abortion.

Pastoral Directives:

- (i) As **pastors** we urge people to choose life and to seek all the help they need when faced with difficult decisions which have to be made in favour of life.
- (ii) We encourage **each person** to let others know the enormity of abortion and to form their consciences according to the mind of God.
- (iii) The Church has several **homes** in the region that shelter pregnant girls who refuse to have an abortion and who have no where to go. Some families also give this support to unwed mothers. We thank them for their encouragement in providing these homes and helping these mothers.

18. Sterilisation

Sterilisation is becoming a much more common form of contraception, used almost exclusively by women. We regret that so often sterilisation is instigated by doctors. One of the most common forms of sterilisation is the tying of tubes. It is clear that the Church's teaching, based on the natural law, is not known by the majority of people. The Church states that direct sterilisation, either temporary or permanent, is unlawful and may not be performed for any reason.

Pastoral Directive:

We ask **each person** of good will to assist in educating people to the seriousness of this operation and encourage them not to permit it.

19. Contraception

Contraception means the deliberate and direct intention to prevent conception by artificial means. It is forbidden by the Church because it is an intentional attempt to exclude one of the essential purposes of marital intercourse, namely the begetting of children. It is claimed that most Catholics do not accept this clear teaching of the Church but it is quite certain that this teaching has never changed.

Pastoral Directives:

- (i) We wish to encourage those who are trying to live according to the teaching of the Church and those who are using **Natural Family Planning** (NFP). Bold efforts need to be made to educate and prepare an increasing number of couples and individuals to teach NFP and make it easily available to couples. NFP builds families in love and self-giving.
- (ii) We would like to add a plea on behalf of those who have **large families** today. Staunch Catholics are not above making remarks and jokes that are offensive to people who have several children. This is certainly to be deplored. Family and life are gifts from God. There is nothing wrong or ridiculous about that, indeed quite the opposite. People with large families deserve our respect and support. We publicly applaud them.

20. Divorce

Separated spouses are common. We admire those who have seen their marriage irretrievably broken and yet do not seek a divorce. Our compassion extends to them. We pledge to support them.

It must be remembered, too, that many broken marriages were really never valid because, for example, of defective consent by one or other party or by both, and so there could be grounds for a decree of nullity and so for entry into a valid marriage

Divorce is legalised in our region. This makes it readily available and accepted as the legitimate option if a marriage does not work out properly. Yet divorce attacks the very institution of marriage and the family. It is not always seen as a moral issue. Nevertheless, it is against the clear teaching of the Gospel. It is a serious contemporary problem which strikes at the very heart of the family. "Spouses and children are affected

most immediately but so too are grandparents, other relatives, and friends dial make up the extended family. Divorce can create in young people a fear of and reluctance to make lifelong commitments. It often pushes families into poverty and contributes to other social ills. (US Bishops, *Ib.*)

Pastoral Directives:

- (i) We ask **each person** to help those who are having serious problems in their marriage relationships. Encourage them to visit qualified counsellors in time.
- (ii) Encourage those **who are planning to get married** to take seriously the preparation for marriage that is provided for them
- (iii) We undertake to improve the Church's apostolate to the divorced. They are still part of the Church. Catholics who have been divorced and re-married outside the Church cannot receive the Eucharist but they should take a dynamic part in Church activities.

CONCLUSION

Finally, we wish to offer a word of encouragement to two categories of family.

21. Single Parents

Even if a man or woman is personally liable for the situation where one alone has all the responsibility for the upbringing of a child, he or she deserves the support of the Church and the encouragement of everyone. The grace of God does not exclude any of these parents and their children. Special provision is needed for the young unmarried mother who is exposed to particular moral, economic and social difficulties. Often a grandmother or a guardian have assumed the role of parent. They are to be encouraged. The Bible showed great concern for widows and widowers. They too deserve concrete assistance and protection.

22. Families without Children

There are many married couples in our midst who do not have children. They suffer deeply. They need our support. They should remember that they are family and that the Christian community respects them as such. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that "Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality and of sacrifice." (No. 1654). Many of these couples have adopted children with great benefits to themselves and to the children they have adopted.

23. Preparation for Marriage

Preparation for marriage is essential. All those entering this union must be aware of the nature of marriage and the family. A committed, permanent, faithful relationship of husband and wife is the basis of family life. The remote preparation should commence in the home from the earliest years, then in the school and through youth programmes. During courtship days, young people ought to be aware that this period is the proximate

preparation for matrimony and that they should not anticipate what God designed for marriage itself. Once a couple is engaged they should enter into the immediate preparation by attending special courses, retreats, weekends and they should worship together as far as possible and learn to pray together as a couple.

“Future spouses must know the profound significance of marriage, understood as a union of love for the realisation of the couple and for procreation. The stability of marriage and of conjugal love requires as indispensable conditions: chastity and self-control, the formation of character and the spirit of sacrifice. With regard to certain difficulties of married life, rendered more acute by the conditions of our time, chastity during one’s youth as an adequate preparation for marital chastity will be a decisive help to the married. They will need, therefore, to be informed about the divine law, declared by the Church Magisterium, necessary for the formation of their consciences.” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, 1983.)

24. Evangelisation of the Family a Church Priority

The Church can have no pastoral plan without the family being a priority. Pope John Paul II, speaking to the bishops of our Conference in January of this year, 1994, stressed the importance of a family pastoral plan. “By making catechesis and formation for family life a priority in all pastoral planning and a constant point of reference in the activity of every parish, you and your co-workers will provide the means to re-invigorate the fundamental cell of the Christian community and of the whole of society in the Caribbean.” (Pope John Paul II, *Ad Limina Address*, January 1994). We are undertaking such pastoral planning at diocesan levels according to the needs of our people and our resources.

We pledge to journey with our people and their families during this time of change and challenge in our region. From the beginning God called the family to unity, equality and responsibility according to his plan. We have given a glimpse of what exists and what God wants for the family. We beg the co-operation of each and all.

25. Call to Prayer

Without God’s help, nothing can be accomplished. We call upon the whole Church in the Caribbean, priests, religious and laity, married couples, single parents, grandparents, widows, youth and children, to **pray with the family and pray for one’s own family and all families**. May each Domestic Church be a place of prayer and worship, where Jesus is encountered and where each person finds true holiness. This has to be our major thrust for the future of the Church and the region which passes by way of the family.

Signed:

Archbishop Kelvin E. Felix, President, *Archbishop of Castries, St. Lucia*,
Archbishop Maurice Marie-Sainte, Vice President, *Archbishop of Fort de France, Martinique*,

Archbishop Samuel E. Carter, *Archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica*,

Archbishop Anthony Pantin, *Archbishop of Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago*,

Bishop Lester R. Guilly, *Bishop in St. Lucia*

Bishop Edgerton Clarke, *Bishop of Montego Bay, Jamaica*,

Bishop Aloysius Zichein, *Bishop of Paramaribo, Suriname*,

Bishop Anthony Dickson, *Bishop of Bridgetown, Barbados*,

Bishop Benedict Singh, *Bishop of Georgetown, Guyana*,

Bishop Willem Ellis, *Bishop of Willemstad, Curaçao*,

Bishop Sydney Charles, *Bishop of St. George's, Grenada*,

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Bishop Ernest Cabo, *Bishop of Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe*,

Bishop John Mendes, *Auxiliary Bishop, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago*,

Bishop Robert Rivas, *Bishop of Kingstown, St. Vincent & the Grenadines*,

Bishop Paul Boyle, *Vicar Apostolic of Mandeville, Jamaica*,

Bishop Elliott Thomas, *Official. Observer, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*,

Rev. Francis Huysmans, *Apostolic Administrator, Roseau, Dominica*

Pine Grove, Jamaica

30 July 1994

PRAYER

O Divine Trinity,

Three Persons, One God,

in you all unity and equality are to be found.

Bring all families to an awareness of their equality and unity

as husbands and wives, parents and children,

joined together in the covenant of love which is marriage.

Show anew in our age

the example of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

so that life may be cherished

children may be loved and respected,

parents may listen with open hearts

and children may grow and mature in wisdom and grace,

in trust and in truth before God, their parents and the community.

May Jesus, Mary and Joseph be for us a model of family life
according to your plan established from the beginning of creation.

May their "Yes" as a family to your will

in every event and decision of their lives,

inspire our families today,

especially when challenged with difficult choices and decisions.

Give us the courage to choose what is right
and to do your will.

May our homes reflect the home of Nazareth.

Look upon the needs of single parents, the separated and divorced
those who are not legally married.

Strengthen the faith of those who have to cope with sickness
or the care of the handicapped child.

Give hope to those without work or proper housing
which affect their dignity and development as a family.

Watch over us in the Caribbean today
and bless all our efforts at improving the conditions for good family
life in our region.

O Divine Trinity,
three Persons, One God,
Exemplar of the family,
guide us and lead us in the way of your love,
O Family Divine.

Amen.