

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 53

The family as active participant in social life – Solidarity in the family

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How many of us see our family as having a key role to play in the development of a better Trinidad and Tobago and a better world? Throughout the history of the world perhaps the most obvious examples of people who may have felt that way are those involved in politics such as Royal families, the Kennedys and the Bushes of the United States of America.

There are also other families throughout world history and our own local history who have taken up causes for the betterment of human development. But more often than not, it is individuals who have felt the drive and passion to change things; of course many of them have had family support.

Because of the compelling evidence of the breakdown in family life in today's society such as crime, street children, high divorce rates and a whole myriad of other social ills, much of the discussion on the family in society focusses on the role of the state in promoting and protecting healthy family life.

There is little discussion that seeks to provoke thought into the whole area of family responsibility to society. We often speak of collective responsibility as a community, or individual responsibility, hardly ever "family responsibility".

For a family to be an active participant in social life, it must first be founded on the principles of love, whereby individuals find fulfilment and are able to sincerely give of themselves. "To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually (*Families Gratissimam Sane*)".

This allows the single family unit to unite together for common causes as well as to link with other families in the same causes. The solidarity of the family moves beyond the single family unit. *The Compendium* Chapter Five, Part IVa: Solidarity in the family tells us:

"The social subjectivity of the family, both as a single unit and associated in a group, is expressed as well in the demonstrations of solidarity and sharing not only among families themselves but also in the various forms of participation in social and political life. This is what happens when the reality of the family is founded on love: being born in love and growing in love, solidarity belongs to the family as a constitutive and structural element."

"This is a solidarity that can take on the features of service and attention to those who live in poverty and need, to orphans, the handicapped, the sick, the elderly, to those who are in mourning, to those with doubts, to those who live in loneliness or who have been abandoned. It is solidarity that opens itself to acceptance, to guardianship, to adoption; it is able to bring every situation of distress to the attention of institutions so that, according to their specific competence, they can intervene."

Families united in love can make a significant contribution to assisting persons in the society who are in disadvantaged positions. Families can join together to do very simple but meaningful things such as organise food hampers for the poor and entertainment for persons in homes, donating school supplies to a poor family.

Volunteering can help families provide needed, valuable services for the community while offering opportunities to strengthen their family unit. Other advantages to families actively involved in the community include:

- Parents are able to pass on important values to children, and to experience a shared sense of accomplishment
- Families are able to spend quality time together especially with all the demands of work, school, and extracurricular activities
- Positive role models are created

Family volunteer programmes are an investment in the future, promoting the value of service to a younger generation. The society must create opportunities for families to volunteer.

“Far from being only objects of political action, families can and must become active subjects, working “to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family.

Along these lines, families should grow in awareness of being ‘protagonists’ of what is known as ‘family politics’ and assume responsibility for transforming society (*Familiaris Consortio*)”. To this end, family associations must be promoted and strengthened.

“Families have the right to form associations with other families and institutions, in order to fulfil the family’s role suitably and effectively, as well as to protect the rights, foster the good and represent the interests of the family. On the economic, social, juridical and cultural levels, the rightful role of families and family associations must be recognized in the planning and development of programmes which touch on family life (Charter of the Rights of the Family)”.

On this note the family programmes of the Church such as Couples for Christ and the other organisations that come under the Archdiocesan Family Life Commission must be supported.