



Family Digest 9
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The Synod on the Family

“We Christians have to be ever closer to the families whom poverty puts to the test. But think, all of you know someone: a father without work, a mother without work ... and this makes the family suffer, the bonds are slack, loss or strong instability of employment weigh heavily upon family life, imposing a substantial strain on relationships. Living conditions in the poorest neighbourhoods, with housing and transportation problems, as well as reduced social, health and educational services, bring about further difficulties”.

Pope Francis

“Around the Globe, families have always been recognized as the basic unit of society that perform essential functions and serve as a source of stability, continuity and development. Being as different as alike, and the cradle of the generations to come, families are essential to the world’s future and their strengths and weaknesses reflect the fabric of the larger society. Family, as the world’s oldest human relationship, primary agent of social integration and of behaviour, is adapting constantly to changing socio-economic conditions and the progress of humanity.”

World Family Summit, Declaration on the Family, December 2004

2014 was the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, which offered an opportunity to focus on the family and on policies which build the capacity of families to cope with their many and various responsibilities. At the same time, South Africa’s Department of Social Development introduced the White Paper on the Family, which is now in the process of implementation. The White Paper adopts a life-cycle approach which allows for a comprehensive analysis of life events, family crises, processes and challenges relating to age, gender, and roles and responsibilities of each family member. It will further help to promote an understanding of an ideal and desirable progression through life’s stages. This approach will also guide the provision of services and resources that are appropriate for specific developmental stages and ages of family members – that is, provide appropriate services from the cradle to the grave.

The White Paper acknowledges that the family is the basic unit of society, which is in keeping with the Catholic approach of subsidiarity. There are many different forms of families living in a variety of different settings and encountering many difficulties and challenges: absent fathers; poorly resourced and frequently isolated mothers living in what is still a deeply patriarchal society; skip-generational households; and child-headed households. All of these face a daunting future. The level of violence in our society is extreme and women and children bear the brunt of it. While the legislative tools – which include the Children’s Act; the Domestic Violence Act; the Older Persons Act; and the recently-introduced Integrated Disability Strategy – have done much to improve the situation, the level of inter-personal conflict has increased. Structural neglect persists in spite of the provision of

social grants. While these grants are an important socio-economic intervention, and do much to alleviate the effects of poverty, they do little to address structural inequality. Other psycho-social support services need to be provided as well.

It is abundantly clear from our research and from that of other organizations providing services to the vulnerable, that the most significant and transformative interventions we can make in our troubled society involve the socialization of children – which takes place primarily in families. Positive parenting is imperative. Furthermore, there is no ‘normal’ family model; therefore, there is a need to be creative in the interventions that we make. However, certain criteria can serve as a guide: How does an intervention/social service build family self-reliance? How does it nurture family life? Will it strengthen families who are overwhelmed by socio-economic and psycho-social challenges? Will it help in the reintegration of separated or broken families?

As the Church embarks on the Synod on the Family next week, we offer a short selection of links to articles dealing with some of the less obvious, social and societal questions affecting families.

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<http://undesadspd.org/Family/InternationalObservances/TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014.aspx>

http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/protection_347.htm

<http://ewn.co.za/2014/04/08/OPINION-Child-abuse-SA-and-the-case-of-Delft>

<http://www.saopf.org.za/your-rights/older-persons-charter>

http://www.services.gov.za/services/content/Home/ServicesForPeople/Socialbenefits/oldagegrant/en_ZA

www.who.int/topics/disabilities

www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx

<http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/your-rights/social-grants/item/disability-grant>

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

<http://www.dcs.gov.za/VisitingOffenders/VisitationProcess.asp>