

A CALL TO LIVE AS A FAMILY DURING THE TIME OF COVID-19

On my own behalf and on behalf of Catholic Bishops of Kenya, I bring you, our dear Christians and all people of good-will, greetings and message of hope and courage as we continue to live the reality of Covid-19. In a special way, I invite all of us to reflect on the family as a gift from God and the pillar of strength during good and bad times.

My brothers and sisters, the family is considered a basic unit of the society; it is the original cell of social life and its stability constitutes the foundations of a society (cf. Eph. 5:21-6:4). Pope Francis emphasizes that it is in the family where values, faith and culture of the society are learned and practised for the first time. For this reason, we urge the family to pray together, read the Word of God, evangelize and express mutual respect. We also encourage spouses to share their thoughts and cooperate in the up-bringing of their children.

As Catholic Bishops, we are aware of the challenges that have emerged due to Covid-19 pandemic. We note with great pastoral concern that emotions are running high and arguments are exploding frequently within our families. We acknowledge that we are living in extraordinary times with changing roles within our families, our homes and our work places. Worries of access to food, money, rent and job security have characterized the lives of Kenyans, deepening the anxiety of what the future holds for us. This has brought about anger which has resulted to different forms of violence (most of concern being gender-based violence and reckless behaviour), different abuses, indifferences, separations, among others.

We urge all Kenyans not to take this pandemic as an opportunity to deviate from our family values. Rather, we should take it as a God-given moment to rethink and reflect on the meaning and the values of a family and fruits of marriage and to remember that daily love and forgiveness are the pillars of every family. We also appeal to the parents and other household care-givers to continue with the noble responsibility of protecting their families and providing for their needs.

In our world today, there are many happy families, just as there are some families that are struggling to remain happy and harmonious, especially during this difficult time. In the Papal document entitled *Amoris Laetitia* (The joy of Love), we are told that crises form part of the life of every family. We are reminded that in the family, we are

called to live the love of God concretely, and on the other hand to grow in mutual love, the characteristics of which are beautifully outlined in St Paul's hymn of charity: Love is patient, kind, not jealous or boastful (cf. 1 Cor. 13: 4-7). Above all, a healthy family is the family that has a good relationship with God and among each other. Promotion of unity, cooperation, constructive communication, empathy, forgiveness, mutual understanding, appreciation and sheer enjoyment of one another's company are keys to maintenance of healthy and happy relationships.

Over the last few weeks, the clashes in Narok County have led to loss of lives, displacement of people and constantly living in fear. As Catholic Bishops, we restate our call on political leaders to shun divisive politics and instead demonstrate servant leadership. We also commend the Government for calling for dialogue between the warring communities to settle their differences amicably in a bid to end the conflict. We further condemn police brutality meted on innocent civilians by police officers during curfew enforcement. Let the law enforcers handle all situations in a humane way. Nevertheless, we encourage all Kenyans to be law abiding citizens and to be each other's brother's and sister's keeper and avoid conflicting circumstances with security agents.

Finally, we reiterate our commitment to continue working with the State and Non-state actors for the common good during these difficult times. We also continue encouraging Kenyans to pray and support the sick, the poor, the elderly, the vulnerable and persons with special needs within our society and to also abide by the directives issued by the Government so that we can all defeat Covid-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the media houses, especially the KBC, Ukweli TV, Capuchin TV and TV47, that have been transmitting live our Sunday Masses to all Christians in Kenya. I also thank St. Matthias Mulumba Choir from Thika Deanery for the beautiful singing. May God bless you all, may God bless and protect Kenya!

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