

Editor's words

1993 is the International Year of the Family, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution, proclaimed that May 15 of every year shall be observed as the International Day of Families. It also provides an opportunity to promote awareness of issues relating to families as well as to promote appropriate action. 2024 marks the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Most people, including Chinese who value family, wish to live a happy and good life, living in harmony with their families without worries. Since the family is the basic unit of society, the happiness of the family affects the wellbeing and healthy development of individuals and society as a whole. However, there is often a gap between reality and ideals. Family problems, ranging from lack of communication and alienation between family members, to domestic violence, divorce, and abandonment of elderly parents, all have a huge impact on the wellbeing of a family. In recent years, many social phenomena, such as juvenile suicide and caregiver pressure, have also attracted a lot of social attention.

The above phenomena, on the one hand, reflect the internal problems of the family. There is a lack of communication or respect among family members, and even discord and conflict, leading to family and social problems.

On the other hand, originally, many families in society can live happily. However, due to financial difficulties and other external factors, many families are unable to improve their living environment or even have to face family breakdown, which in turn affects the quality of family life. Moreover, in some rapidly developed cities, such as Hong Kong and coastal cities in the mainland, social atmosphere and culture have led to excessive working hours, resulting in a loss of work-life balance.

The Catholic Church has always valued family. In the Catholic social tradition, since the end of the 19th century, church leaders have highlighted various social phenomena and the causes that affect the development of the family in different occasions and documents. Among them, modern popes such as John Paul II, based on Christian faith, discussed the various challenges faced by families and society, as well as the role and responsibilities that the church can assume. In the 1980s and 1990s, he promulgated the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and other documents. Moreover, Pope Francis convened a synod of bishops in 2015 to discuss family issues. Later, he issued the post-synod apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, encouraging Christians to cultivate Christian values, caring for and accepting families in difficulties.

As society continues to change and face various challenges, how can Christian families respond? How do Christians from different professions and church groups take

care of the needs of families in their professional and pastoral services? This issue of *Tripod* attempts to reflect on family wellbeing and common good from different perspectives.

There are seven thematic articles in this issue. The first two articles explore family, family wellbeing and pastoral care from a macro perspective. First, Dr. Mary Yuen examines the relationship between family wellbeing and common good from the perspective of social ethics. The author examines the concept of family wellbeing from the perspectives of social sciences and Catholic moral theology respectively. Both perspectives employ the internal situations of family (family unity, family resources, physical and mental health) as well as the relationship between family and the external environment (social resources, social connections, work-life balance) to measure a family's wellbeing. The Catholic Church emphasizes that the concept of "domestic church", apart from emphasizing its internal relations as communion and sharing, it also points to the social mission of serving others and transforming the society, contributing to the common good. Based on the above understanding, the article discusses the pastoral responses and recommendations of the church, giving some examples of how church groups have responded to building good and healthy families.

Dr. Raymond Yeung's article looks at family pastoral care from the perspective of family medicine. Dr. Yeung, who has clinical and teaching experiences in family

medicine, points out that family medicine emphasizes the physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of the patient, and also pays more attention to the interactive relationship between the family and the patient. As a Catholic and also a family doctor, he shares how to actualize the spirit of evangelization in his work and to approach patients with Christian humility and empathy, caring for them and preaching the good news of Christ's love to them. Finally, he points out that doctors need to become partners with other family pastoral workers, dividing work among themselves, and making good use of other relevant resources in the community.

The next four articles focus on marriage and family life in mainland China and Hong Kong. Sr. Wang Jiawei discusses the love and marital status of family couples in the contemporary Chinese social and cultural environment, such as couples living in separate places, difficulty in satisfying sexual needs, and children lacking parental care in rural areas. In the context of rapid economic development and urbanization, as well as the "one-child policy", the author analyzes the personalities and marital characteristics of couples in today's Chinese families, that is, family relationships are objectified, divorce is arbitrary, and the ability to deal with family problems is poor, and so on, leading to marital crisis.

Based on his rich experiences in and reflections on handling marriage cases in the Church tribunals, in

his article, canon law expert Fr. Hyacinth He explores the meaning of marriage and family from the Catholic perspective. The basic elements and purposes of the marriage covenant, as well as the interrelationship between marital stability and social harmony are emphasized. The author analyzes the basic characteristics of the definition of marriage in canon law, namely unity and indissolubility. The article emphasizes the importance of preparation for marriage, including pre-marital counseling, courses and inquiry that emphasize the sacramental nature of marriage as a serious divine matter. Fr. He also addresses the challenges faced by couples today, such as worries about divorce and social pressure against having children and misconceptions that lead couples to divorce.

Serving in a church organization on marriage for many years, in his article, Mr. Kevin Lai introduces the key points of the document “Catechumenal Pathways for Married Life,” that the Church should responsibly accompany prospective couples and help them to properly prepare and build a solid foundation for their marriage. The document suggests initiating the “Remote Preparation” program, which aims to cultivate respect for human values in children from an early age, helping them to develop self-esteem and respect for others. This process emphasizes the concepts of the Christian faith, especially the theology of sexuality and the body, and lays the foundation for future married life. The author also points out that in response to this program, the Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family

has launched a “Pilot Marriage Accompaniment Programme for Newly Wed Couples,” with the aim of supporting newlyweds in building strong marital relationships. Lai argues that if newly-wed couples can have experienced companion couples to accompany them, they can gain confidence and support to overcome the feeling of loneliness and other problems; marriage organizations can also help to dissolve crisis if they can intervene at a suitable time.

Employing the controversy over civilly remarried Catholics receiving Holy Communion as an example, Fr. Martin Yip illustrates the importance of adhering to the two cornerstones of marriage - indissolubility and exclusivity. In addition to introducing the historical context of the controversy, Fr. Yip also analyzes in detail the arguments for and against the “Cardinal Walter Kasper’s proposal” and brings out the core values of marriage behind the controversy. He also conducted a comprehensive analysis and reflection on the new discussions brought about by the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, emphasizing that the entire Church should accompany and care for the brothers and sisters whose marriage relationships are in an abnormal state. He points out that the Church should accompany them with a pastoral vision of compassion and inclusivity, guiding them to understand the true meaning of marriage in the gospel. This is exactly the vision needed as a synodal Church.

The last thematic article was written by social worker Miss Alice Lee, about the role of elderly in family and pastoral care to the elderly. With many years of experience in serving the elderly, the author discusses the characteristics and needs of the elderly in their development stage and life cycle. She believes that at this stage, the elderly need to face challenges such as decline in physical functions, drastic changes in family and social roles, more complex family intergenerational relationships, death and bereavement, and so on. Therefore, the elderly and their caregivers need more spiritual care. Spiritual care can help the elderly understand the mysteries of life through Christian faith, gain wisdom to face all changes and pains, and make life more complete. They can also play a significant role in evangelization and bearing witness, as well as sharing their faith experiences.

Apart from the thematic articles, in this issue, Fr. Patrick Taveirne wrote a book review on *Parallel Lives, Congenial Visions* in which many important figures of Chinese and Japanese Christianity are introduced.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all authors who contribute their wisdom and insights in this issue.

Mary Yuen