

## THE FAMILY: THE PRIMARY DRIVING FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT

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### Introduction

Is the family indeed a primary driving force of Development?

I wanted to have fresh insights on this topic by facilitating a Focused Group Reflection (FGRs) on this theme. Participating in this session were graduating and post-graduate students in Asian Social Institute (ASI).

Most of those participating in the sessions are students of ASI who are recipients of scholarship grants from Catholic funding agencies abroad through the Asian Social Institute. They are in residence in ASI for two to three years to complete a Master's or a Doctoral Program.

ASI is a graduate and post graduate school with a difference in that it integrates three departments – the Academic-Research, Social Development and Administrative Services – toward its vision of Transformative Praxis towards Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. Founded in 1962 by a Dutch Scheutist Missionary Priest – philosopher, theologian and sociologist – he dreamed of forming and training leaders in social science, who will comprehensively understand the social situation in their specific socio-cultural-religious contexts, reflect on the situation and act on it from the perspective of the values and principles of Christian Social Teachings.

Below is the profile of the students who participated in the FGR that I facilitated.

**Table 1. Distribution according to Country of Origin**

No.	Country of Origin	Number
1	Cambodia	2
2	China	2
3	Burma (Myanmar)	4
4	Thailand	1
5	East Timor	1
6	Vietnam	8
	Total	18

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The students I am referring to are from emerging democracies in Asia. There are 2 Cambodians, 2 Chinese, 4 Burmese (from Myanmar), 1 Thai, 1 Timorese and 8 Vietnamese.

**Table 2. Distribution according to Gender**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Male	8
2	Female	10
	Total	18

There are 10 female participants and 8 male participants.

**Table 3. Distribution according to Age**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Age-Range</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	-20	0
2	20-29	7
3	30-39	7
4	40-49	3
5	50+	1
	Total	

Their ages range from 22 to 50. There were 7 who belong to the age range 20-29; 7 in the age range 30-39; 3 in the age range 40-49, and 1 in the 50s. Seventy-eight (78%) of the participants of the FGR is within the age range of 20-39 years old.

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**Table 4. Distribution according to Religious Affiliation**

No.	Religious Affiliation	Number
1	Roman Catholics	13
2	Buddhists	4
3	Free thinker*	1
	Total	18

\*The “free-thinker” here means one who does not adhere to the precepts of a religion. The ‘free-thinker’ here believes that one may join any religion provided a religion does well to people.

**Table 5. Distribution according to Status in their Religion**

No.	Religious Affiliation	Number of Priests	Number of Religious Sisters	Number of Lay Persons	Total
1	Roman Catholics	2	6	5	13
2	Buddhists			4	4
3	Free-thinker			1	1
	Total	2	6	10	18

In terms of religious affiliation, all are believers. Thirteen (13) are Roman Catholics, 4 are Buddhists, and 1 Freethinker.

Of the thirteen Roman Catholics, 2 are priests (1 diocesan and 1 religious), 6 religious sisters and 5 lay. All 4 Buddhists are lay.

In their narratives, except for one, the participants admitted that they come from the rural areas of their respective countries. This confirms ASI’s commitment to give opportunities to people of modest means to take up graduate studies.

### **Theorizing from Experience**

The FGR that I undertook is highly exploratory. It is not meant to come out with conclusive evidence that the family is indeed a primary force of development. I had wanted to discover from narratives of experiences and observations of the graduate students whether or not they would agree or not to the statement that *the family is a primary driving force for development*. Three days prior to the FGD, I distributed a paper containing the purpose of

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the FGD and the main question to guide them on the sharing of experiences. (See Appendix A) They should be able to give concrete experiences why they agree, or do not agree. Although they come from different places, we were at home with each other during the FGR. All of us do not have English as the mother tongue. We have emphasized to students that we should not be shy to speak in English, even if we make mistakes because the best language is the language of the heart. We rather should be very good in listening, feel what is not being said, to have the skill or the art of listening. In other words, we subscribe to the phenomenological principle of getting into the assumptive world of people, to get into the presuppositions and underpinnings of statements. The art of trying to understand from another's point of view should be a conscious attitude which is so needed when doing either quantitative or qualitative research. The findings, in fact of a quantitative research, will not have any meaning unless the findings are qualified, i.e. interpreted based on specific socio-cultural-religious contexts.

On the day that we had the FGD, some wrote their experiences, thoughts, and reflections. In a cosy room, the participants sat in a circle and from the very start they were cordial with each other, they having been staying in ASI's student hostel and meeting regularly as residents of the hostel and members of the Foreign Students Organization (FSO). FSO attempts at integrating the life of the foreign students of the hostel with the non-resident Filipino students and with the whole learning community made up of administrators, faculty, students and staff. All their insights, I would integrate with narratives of young people on their families in newspapers and writings of adult professionals or college students writing in newspapers and magazines. I too would informally interview persons on their work and reflect on the implications of their work-values for the family and community.

I asked for the FGR student participants if I could record in video their stories, reflections, and opinions regarding the topic in question. While sitting in a circle, each one was given time to speak. I as the facilitator would time and again interrupt to find out whether I understood right some statements in the narratives. Points of clarification had to be done when needed.

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After all had shared, there was a freewheeling discussion on the fast changes in communication and technology which has affected adversely society in terms of families being broken up, couples separating with all consequences on the socio-psychological make-up of both couples and children.

### **Reflective Narratives**

#### First Reflection: Textual Themes

##### **Narrative No. 1 (N-1)**

*During my childhood and teen-age period, I was taught to cultivate good virtues such as filial piety, generosity, diligence and frugality. I do remember when I was in kindergarten, that I was expected that my notebook must be fully filled with my writings on both sides of every page; I then could proudly show my notebook to my mother to be able to get a new one. This was teaching me the virtue of frugality. Though I was the youngest, and my father had passed away when I was seven years old, my mother did not spoil me. Like my other brothers and sisters I had to show honour to my grandmother and share food and toys with my brothers and sisters. I learned to share with neighbours as my mother often did. At the same time, I learned to do household chores – cleaning and tidying my room, washing clothes, cooking food (dumpling shao pao noodles steamed bread) making shoes out of cloth and sewing clothes to wear. My mother used to say “When you grow up and get married, you need to do those things for your own family; and what you learn at home should be taught to your children.”*

*After my entire sibling have grown up and gotten married, I joined the congregation of the Sisters of Providence of Yuncheng, what I learned from home found their use in the convent. There I could practice all the household chores; my personal characteristics, especially how to relate with my fellow religious sisters and with the people we served – have been developed first in my family.*

*I have not gotten married and have no children and family of my own. However, the development of my personality and all what I am able to do now in my new religious community has been very much influenced by my family, particularly my mother – in my varied roles in my adulthood – as a pharmacist in the Eye Hospital and clinics, as a formator of Novices, or as an administrator and “mother” of orphans with disability or as a treasurer of our community, presently in my role first as a graduate student and now as a post graduate student. In all these roles I am able to exercise patience while service the sick, teaching, forming and training the novices and*

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***taking care of the orphans, and contributing to the family and community life among us students in ASI.***

*I would like to share an experience with my older sister who is married. She lives happily with her husband and children. Once I visited her and she specially prepared “shao pao.” My sister first gave a shao pao to her daughter, then gave her another one and told her that the first one was for her but the second one should be for her grandmother who was living in the same compound. So my little niece carried the two shao pao and while walking towards the house of her grandmas, she was calling aloud “Grandma, Grandma” I asked my sister why she did not go to the Grandma herself to give the shao pao. My sister said, “My little girl must practice filial piety to the elders and know how to share with others.”*

*I have very little memory about my father. It was told to me that he was a very strict person. All my siblings feared him even though he never used physical punishment to discipline us. The only experience I could remember is that he had rescued me from being burned by fire in the kitchen. He was then very sick in bed and could not walk and hardly could speak. But he rushed to me. I was then 6 years old. We were the only ones at home. I was so frightened crying aloud. Our neighbours hearing my voice came and put off the fire. That moment I felt the love from my father.*

*My mother worked hard for the family. She was an ordinary woman but possessed a strong and powerful faith, the source of her energy. After my father passed away when I was seven, she raised us – five siblings by herself, and supported us in our education. She was, moreover, kind and patient in taking care of my sick father, honouring and attending to my grandmother, bringing up her children to be good housekeepers while working in the fields. She was generous to our neighbours and shared our food with them. She loved her children and with dedication fully spent her life for us. She was a courageous woman, no matter how difficult it was for her. She never gave up on anything or lost hope – a strong encouragement in my life.*

The Chinese traditional thinking based on Confucianism contained in the Book of Rites is the principle that **“the family is the epitome of the State.”** Anyone of the family can govern the State because he then can fill the world with **harmony and peace.**

Thus, the Chinese people **believe that the development of a prosperous State starts from the development of family which is the primary agent of self-cultivation and personality development. Parents, especially the mother, greatly influence their children by word and deed.**

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### Textual Themes (N-1)

1. *The State is a reflection of the lived family values of its members.*
2. *The father is a strict disciplinarian;*
3. *The mother exemplifies a Faith in God that was passed on to her from her mother blending with Confucian ethics that nurtured filial piety, generosity diligence and frugality.*
4. *Peace and harmony in the state springs forth from peace and harmony in each family.*
5. *Food is a great symbol of family togetherness and relationship with elders and neighbors.*
6. *The family is the primary school to develop one's personality which prepares one to practice social values of diligence, frugality, respect for elders and for people with disabilities, generosity and self-sacrifice.*

### Narrative No. 2 (N-2)

*It is in the family that we first experience authentic Christian living. It is in the family that we experience being fed, being given drink when thirsty being sheltered, being helped in times of difficulty, being comforted when sad, being pardoned when we have committed mistakes.*

*I remember when I was a child, I became critically ill. There was no hospital in my village. My eldest sister carried me to go to another village. According to my family, my lips were getting pale. In the meantime my mother went to another village to look for a doctor. She found one and I was treated with needles on my forehead and on my face. I reflect on this experience: No family, no life.*

*I have 4 brothers and 2 sisters. When I was a child, there was no religious freedom in China. My parents who have been reared in the Catholic Faith, despite the threat of heavy penalty from the government if we were seen praying, would consistently lead the whole family to pray behind closed doors. If the government would find out that we were praying as this happened with others, the government would have thrown us into a deep well to languish there. My parents were not afraid. We would all be in a big bed warmed by fire around it. On that big bed seven of us could sleep. It was on that bed that we used to pray together.*

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*I was taught by mother how to cook and sew clothes and to make shoes out of cloth. We were very poor but my mother could balance work with nurturing us to be good persons.*

*When I was six years old, my mother told me, "You will be a priest." I did not understand then what that meant. But I remembered her telling that I should become a priest. When I was about to enter high school, I told this to a priest-adviser that I liked to become a priest. He advised me to take up my high school in St. Mary's College. My mother was strong, full of courage. My father, on the other hand, was a hardworking person. He worked hard even until midnight.*

### Textual Themes (N. 2)

1. The practice of Christian life is first experienced in the family. Christian values are cultivated in the family particularly by parents who must have learned this from their parents.
2. Father normally is more of a disciplinarian. He works very hard for the family.
3. The mother is the cultivator of virtues of patience, diligence, generosity, faith, hope and love.
4. Elder siblings help the parents in caring for younger brothers and sisters.
5. It is in the family that we learn how to share with our neighbors.

### Narrative No. 3 (N-3)

*I belong to an ethnic tribe in the mountains. We are in all nine siblings, 6 boys and 3 girls. I am the youngest. My mother died early after having given birth to the nine of us. This may have caused me to grow faster in maturity and in spirituality. All of us helped each other and have been happy together. We are poor yet happy and peaceful with trust in God.*

*It is my family that taught me to pray Our Father and Hail Mary. Although in the beginning I did not understand the words of the prayers, the image of us*



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*praying together and the familiar sounds of the words stayed with me and led me to a way of life that will not neglect to pray.*

*My life has been motivated by the Light of faith and hope.*

*My father used to teach us this: The father is like 'fire'; gives us warmth and strength of character. The mother is 'water', tempers the 'fire' as it were. Pouring water into fire softens the strength of the fire. The children –brothers and sisters, are the wind. They make parents happy and bring a sense of well-being in their lives.*

### Textual Themes (N-3)

- 1. The family contains the basic elements of life, the source of our energy and our sustenance.*
- 2. Prayer life in the family leads to a Spirit-led lifestyle.*

*We have the freedom to choose our religion. My mother has no religion. She respects nature and believes in ancestor worship. My father is a Catholic. My uncle is a Buddhist. When I was in my teens, I used to envy my classmates who every Sunday would go to the beach to swim. My father who regularly goes to Sunday Mass noticing that I did not like to go to Church, told me. Noticing that I did not like to go to Church, he told me, "If you do not go to Sunday Mass, change your religion". I was bored going to Mass until a priest organized activities for the youth, for the adults, and I was drawn into it.*

*I learned very much for my father. He taught me how to pray. He coached me in my studies.*

*I was in a class of 45 students. I studied very hard. But I placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the class. Every time, it is always a male who gets the 1<sup>st</sup> place. No matter how hard I studied, it is always the male who ranked first in the class. I complained to my father, "how come I never got the first place, no matter how I tried?" My father countered, "Do not put too much value in a certificate that recognizes you as the first. That certificate sooner or later can be thrown in the toilet.. just work hard. You can be the president of the country if you want." Although my father would strongly argue with me on certain points,*

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*he is very kind. He helps people. He sacrifices for them. The benefits of his work, according to him, should redound first to the people, not to him.*

***My mother sacrifices for the family but never complains about her work. She is a silent worker. When she cooks, it is always with the thought that she will share food with the neighbours. She taught me to walk without making noise with my feet; she taught me to put gently the glasses on the table without making any sound.***

*When I was already in the convent, I got assigned to the kitchen. Like my mother, I prepared sweet soup not only for the community but also to feed the children in the neighbourhood. My superior was aghast and told me “Why are you doing this?” I learned from that incident that I need to do things in context.*

### **Textual Themes (N-4)**

- 1. There is freedom of the family to choose one’s religion.***
- 2. From parents, one learns how to think of common good of family and community.***
- 3. The mother shows neighbourliness and an orientation towards community by sharing food with the neighbours.***
- 4. When one lives in community, one has to abide by the rules and regulations. Obedience in the community should be upheld. Because of common ownership, stewardship will not allow anybody to make decisions on distributing wealth subject to policies of the community.***

### **Narrative 5 (N-5)**

*My family is the first school. Parents are our first teachers.*

*I lived with my grandfather on my father’s side since I was one year old up to now. Till I was ten years old, I did not know my father and my mother. My aunt, the older sister of my father who was not married took care of me. We follow the practices of a traditional family.*

*I was socialized to follow the practices of faith. Regularly, I would go to Church. I would be asked to sit in front; my grandfather would be in the second seat just behind me. When I would fall asleep, he would hit me with a stick. The discipline my grandfather gave me taught me to be a good person.*

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*My father would tell me stories from ancient times – stories with moral lessons. These stories spoke of the struggle of good persons with the bad characters; it taught me to choose always the good as against the evil. The values in life were contained in these stories.*

*Yes, in my early years I already sensed in a practical way what are Justice, Truth, and Morality. Once, my younger brother broke a glass. I knew it but I did not tell my grandfather. Because I was not open and honest to my grandfather, I was given a spanking. He made this remark on that incident, “If you had told the truth, you would have been better appreciated. I would have right away forgiven you.”*

*My family taught me life skills. I was taught household chores like cleaning the house, cooking rice, respect for elderly people, and work in the rice field. We were taught to value rice. According to my grandfather, “rice is the pearl of the land.” When eating rice, we should be together partaking of the meal. We are one with the rice; it is the way to communicate with the elderly. When we serve the elderly and others with rice, we communicate with them.”*

### Textual Themes (No. 5)

- 1. Family is the main motivation of life.**
- 2. Family is the first school, parents are the first teachers.**
- 3. Family nourishes one’s Faith.**
- 4. Family teaches values and life skills.**

*I could not have lived without my parents. My parents made me live and grow up. One time, my grandmother got sick. I my took care of her.*

*I reflected on this patient and enduring care of my mother for my grandmother: My grandmother gave life to my mother. So now, that my grandmother is sick she tries to sustain the life of my grandmother. When my mother would grow old, I have to be responsible for her life in the way that she has given me my life.”*

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*My family is a blessing. I believe all of us should contribute to the good of our families. We have to be responsible. And when we commit mistakes, we can always forgive each other.*

### Textual Themes on No. 6

- 1. Because we have been given life by our parents, we have the responsibility to care also for their life.*
- 2. To give life is to love. When we truly love, we are bound to forgive each other when mistakes are committed*
- 3. Father, mother and siblings symbolize the three elements of life – fire, water, and wind and all are grounded in the soil*

*The father builds the house. The father creates the home.*

### Textual Themes (N-7)

- 1. The father builds the house*
- 2. The mother creates the home.*

*First of all, I would like to thank my family (especially my mother) who has always been willing to share their love, care and everything with me. I have a sister and three brothers; I am the youngest in the family. When I was still five months, in my mother's womb, my father passed away. So I have grown with my mother. For me she is my hero and my role model. Without her and her support I could not be what I am now.*

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*Since childhood, I have grown up with a strong Catholic Faith that was handed down to us by my grandparents and relatives on both sides – from my mother and my father especially with my uncle who is a Catholic priest.*

*When I was 7 and going to school (that time my mother was already a widow), I was threatened by a classmate who said that he has a father and a big brother who could kill me and my mother. I cried and cried. My mother comforted me, caressed me and very calmly assured me that we need not be afraid. My father is with God, and he can intercede with God to protect us. Here I saw the strong faith of my mother. She worked hard for us and had full trust in God, that everything will be taken care of.*

*In my family, I would be reminded by my mother to maintain good health and a deep and strong Faith. If you are weak spiritually, you will be weak mentally, emotionally and physically as well; you will not be able to concentrate on anything because in our life especially when we feel insecure, one's faith could always revive one's energy to become normal again. Another thing my mother always remind us is 'to please always be united with your siblings or family because all of you are the closest and the most important in your life; you can substitute your friends or husbands or wives but you cannot get back your siblings when you lose them.'*

*I agree with my mother about the aspects in our life we need to develop; physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. A healthy mind in a healthy body helps us to focus on what we want to do and what we need to do. I would like to share that my grandmother is now 98 years old and she is happy about her 105 children and grandchildren.*

*The faith of my mother has been passed on to me. My mother taught me the household chores, cleaning the house and cooking. However, she did not want me to work at home but just concentrate on my studies. She told me that everything we have, we should share with our neighbours. When I received a donation from a relative in the United States as my counterpart allowance of my scholarship allowance granted to me by a funding agency abroad, my mother told me to give half of this allowance to the School that facilitated my scholarship. That is how my mother would teach us to be generous.*

*My mother took care of my father when he was sick. She is a widow, did not have formal schooling, but brought us up in the virtues of our Faith. Indeed she is both father and mother to me.*

### **Textual Themes (N-8)**

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1. *Every threat to the family is a threat to society (Pope John Paul II)*
2. *Good and strong families are the treasures of a country. (Pope Francis)*
3. *Each member of the family dreams of other members of society. When you cannot dream, you lose the capacity to love. (Pope Francis)*
4. *Just smiling to each member of the family will lead us to smile at everyone, stranger or friend. To smile is a manifestation of respect, awe for the other as blessing, and love. (St. Teresa of Calcutta)*
5. *Mother's cheerful self-giving leaves a positive mark in the growth of a child (St. Teresa of Calcutta)*

### Narrative No. 9 (N-9)

*In my growth as a person, my family is all my sources. The family has been watching me grow from infancy to adulthood guiding me with good values. I imbibed my faith, education, values, morals, love and dignity from my family. The family passed on to us our traditional culture which contained our morals, beliefs from passed generations.*

*I was socialized to treat people those I know and those I do not know with respect because I need to recognize each one's dignity. I should, according to my parents, treat all equally without discrimination. I should not consider my being a professional as higher than those who are considered non-professionals.*

*In my growth as a socially-oriented person, doing work for people I learned about dignity and decency – that how hard I work matters more than how much I make, that helping others means more than just getting ahead myself I learned about honesty and integrity – that truth matters.*

*I learned about gratitude and humility – that so many people have all a hand in my success. Many people made me the way I am today – the teachers who inspired us, our friends. I was taught to value everyone's contribution with respect. I think and consider seriously what my values are today and I will pass on these values to future generations.*

### Textual Themes (N-9)

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- 1. The family is the first source of our lived values.*
- 2. The following values have been instilled by the family: respect for the dignity of each one without discrimination, hard work and diligence more than the payment, helping others more than just getting ahead, gratitude for all those supporting in life, humility (recognizing that so many people have a hand in one's success).*

*Family is the cause of development when parents have been educated by their parents; otherwise they could become dysfunctional in society, have not known themselves and are not able to overcome their difficulties.*

*Because current society is limited in giving opportunities for children and youth to get an education and parents, due to limited means, cannot send their children to school, this situation adversely affects the children who become confused about their identity.*

*I have a brother whose nephew and niece have not received enough education. Family has not the chance to educate their children in the proper values. Nephew and niece struggled in life. Nephew was jailed because of crime. In the past, he witnessed his mother and father always fighting each other. The nephew has always been insecure and is confused about his family.*

*Families who teach their children to pray from the heart will know to how to reflect themselves.*

*I ask myself, will people be able to love, if they have not experienced love in the family?*

### ***Textual Themes N-10***

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- 1. The family life has an adverse effect on children.*
- 2. It is difficult for children to love if they have not experienced love in the family.*

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*My family is my motivation in everything that I do.*

*My family gives me the freedom of choice to try to be what I would want to be. Even if they have not the idea what I want in life, they do not offer any objection; I feel that they trust me.*

*My parents are farmers. And early in my life, I have decided not to be a farmer. I chose to be a social worker, perhaps, influenced by my father who is a very good leader in the community. He is a facilitator when resolving conflicts. I tried to become like him, a community worker. By joining him in the community, I learned how to work in teams.*

*In the family, I learned how to work as a member of a team of siblings. We work together in the fields and in the house. My mom taught me how to work with my other siblings. Being the eldest, I know how to share with my five siblings.*

*I have no religion. Meaning to say, I do not stick to any religion. Sometimes I go to the Buddhist Temple. I try to get the wisdom from all religions: Catholics, Christians, Buddhists.*

*My mother is a Buddhist; my father belongs to a national religion.*

### ***Textual themes (N-11)***



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- 1. When children are given relative freedom, the children feel they are trusted in their decisions; they reciprocate by being respectful of their parents.*
- 2. The parents become role models for children to emulate. When parents are community oriented, the children are likely to follow the example.*
- 3. The generosity of children is an influence from the parents' life of generous sharing and caring for others.*

### **Narrative No. 12 (N-12)**

*I was born from a poor family. At six years old I was already selling sugar cane and taking care of my youngest sister.*

*My father worked in a palm plantation. He would climb the palm tree. Yet at that time when I was six to seven years old, I knew how to earn money by selling fans from the leaves of the palm tree.*

*My parents work in the fields from early morning.. They ride the motorcycle to be in the workplace and arrive home in the evenings*

*I accompany my parents sometimes. I saw that when my father would get tired, he would sleep under the palm tree. Because of strong winds, I would get scared. When I get scared my father would hug me. Then we would transfer to sleep under another palm tree.*

### ***Textual Themes N-12***

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### Textual Themes (N-12)

- 1. Poor parents especially in the rural areas have to sacrifice to be able to give a decent life for their children.*
- 2. In such a situation, when the parents treat with tenderness their children, their children grow up with the spirit of sacrifice for something they would like to pursue and they realize that poverty is not a hindrance to the capacity to love.*

*My family for me is the main force for me to become a good woman.*

*My father was a teacher and was not in the good graces of the Communist government. So he was put in prison.*

*My mother had to work, work and do anything because my father was put in prison by government for 7 years until 1975.*

*My mother worked hard. I have five brothers and a sister. I am the youngest. I learned a lot from the parish priest who taught me English and music. In turn, I helped him write a book.*

*The family is very important for the children.*

*Every night, and every morning my mother would lead us to pray. After high school, I decided to enter the congregation. Every profession is monitored by the government. In fact I entered the congregation secretly. After profession, I thought of my father and my mother asking myself who will be helping them while I am in the convent? But I stayed on.*

*All good things that I have received come from the family.*

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### *Textual themes (N-13)*

- 1. If we turn out to be good, it is because of the upbringing of parents and their example of unconditional love, nurturing in children a love for God and fellowmen.*
- 2. If we are very much in the evangelizing ministry or in any kind of development work, our basic attitudes of love, compassion, care and sharing more often than not have been imbibed in the family.*

### **Narrative No. 14 (N-14)**

*I was born at home. At that time in my village, there was no hospital. My father helped my mother deliver the baby. And my brother would be his assistant. Still at a young age about 7 years old, my brother already knew what to prepare when my mother would give birth. He prepared the soup my mother would need, he boiled the water, prepared the basin with warm water and towels.*

*My character developed from my family.*

*My father was a real playmate to me. I would ride on his back.*

*My father would see to it that every morning, he would serve the rice bowl and salt which he had prepared. So every day, I enjoyed my father's rice bowl. If he misses to give me the rice-bowl, I lose my appetite for all my meals.*

*Playtime with my father has improved me physically, mentally and socially. I developed my self-confidence in this very healthy relationship with my father. Later, when I was working with UNICEF, it was told to me that when you have a good relationship with your father, you will improve doubly your self-confidence.*

*My mother taught me social ethics. I have been with her to offer fruits and food to Buddha in the Temple. To be honest, we were very poor and yet my mother would always share the little she has with neighbours. Perhaps this is the reason why I have studied social work. I believe that to be a social*

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*worker, one has to have love and compassion for the poor especially for children.*

### **Textual Themes (N-14)**

- 1. Father as playmate develops the self-confidence in the child.***
- 2. Mother nurtures the spirituality through her practice of giving a love-offering to the image of the Transcendent***
- 3. Generosity when natural in the family teaches the child love and compassion for others.***

### **Narrative No. 15 (N-15)**

*It is the first the family that instilled in us Faith and Morals.*

*Before we did not have a religion until the French missionaries arrived. They inculturated Christianity in our natural belief system of our culture.*

*From the family, I imbibed the culture of regarding men as superior to women; women should always be subordinate to the men.*

*Christianity changed this mentality of women subordinated to men.*

*I am the only son of 9 siblings who are all women.*

*We are all treated equally by my father who dreamed that all of us should go to school.*

*In my culture only men can inherit property. It is not so in our family. The ladies could also own property.*

*My mother is illiterate and yet she has influenced me to go regularly to the Church, to pray, and attend Church and school activities. She taught me to be in harmony with friends and respect my professors. She taught me to take account of people. This has led me to join the pastoral Council. There I had to give respect to elders and to love young people.*

*My father is a strict disciplinarian. If I would not go to school, he would spank me.*

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*In terms of respect for people, I was taught not to discriminate between friends and strangers. It is the example of my mother where I learned to work hard, study hard, help others, be honest, live harmoniously with family members, be grateful for everything received and have the humility to recognize those who support us in our ventures.*

*I would like to consider all these values to pass them on to future generations.*

### **Textual themes (N-15)**

- 1. Family instills in us Faith and Morals.**
- 2. Christian missionaries have instilled gender equality as against the cultural belief that women are to be subordinated to men**
- 3. Mother nurtures faith life, exemplifies hard work, serious study, honesty, harmonious living, gratitude and humility.**
- 4. Father is a strict disciplinarian**

### **Narrative No. 16 (N-16)**

*We are 4 siblings, two sisters in Bangkok and the eldest staying with my father and mother. I am the youngest.*

*I have learned to carry heavy things because our family worked in a sugarcane field. I had to carry this sugarcane to load in vehicles that will transport them to the factories.*

*When I was thirteen years old, I wanted to enter the convent. I regularly attend the parish religious services. When I would be late, I received a beating from the parish priest.*

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*My mother at first did not allow me to be a nun. It took three to four years before I could fulfil my aspiration. I was happy with my new family in community. I have stayed now for 25 years in the convent where I learned my catechism from my second parents – the older religious sisters. I learned a lot from both the older sisters and the junior sisters. But it was sad that on the day of my profession, my mother died and then my brother followed soon after.*

*My parents helped me to be responsible – training students in doing physical exercises but also spiritual exercises.*

*I believe that prayer is a way to deepen our Faith life. My parents taught me to believe that God is always with me. My mother brought me regularly to church and my father tried to make me strong by his strict discipline. My aspiration now is to reach out to people and touch their lives as a way to show gratitude for the spiritual legacy that was passed on to me by my parents*

- 1. God's calling to religious life represents my salvation from a life of toil and suffering.***
- 2. Prayer life deepens our faith and gives meaning to suffering.***
- 3. My aspiration is to reach out to people and to touch lives, a way to show gratitude for His Love for me..***

**Narrative No. 17 (N-17)**

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*In East Timor, there are two challenges in family life.*

*One is to live with the traditional structure of the New Rie (King). In this system, the chief/datu/king would not want people to go on higher education because they might have their own mind and eventually might not anymore conform to the King's orders and regulations for his people.*

*When the Indonesians took over the governance of Timor Leste, they used this traditional mentality against the Portuguese.*

*My father however, having been in the Indonesian government, had the opportunity to get formal schooling which made his mentality shift from a totalitarian ideal of governance to a democratic ideal of equal chances for all citizens to be educated without gender discrimination.*

*2) The second challenge concerns the country itself.*

*In the Timorese society, the tradition is that men pay a dowry to the woman's family. It is a matriarchal type of society. Therefore in terms of children, families crave to have more women than men.*

*I have four daughters. I would like all of them to go to formal schooling. In East Timor to finish Grade 4 is already an achievement.*

*My mother goes by the traditional culture. Girls need not study. Many tell me that having four daughters would make me rich.*

*As far as I am concerned, I take to my father's mentality that it is important for women to get an education.*

*My mother, by conforming to the culture balances my father in his wanting to give all women an education.*

*My father is a catechist and taught us to deepen our belief in God which has been passed on by my grandmother on the Father's side. From my grandmother we learned to enjoy a religious social event – The Fiesta. The fiesta introduced by the Portuguese has an element of the original culture of the Timorese.*

*I think there is always a tension between the traditional and the modern culture. Yet it is still important that people get transformed by taking off from their cultural roots. By understanding the tension, one might be able to help out the process of inculturation.*

*The new family in East Timor should be able to be conscious of the tension created by ideas from elsewhere, yet it is equally important that the*

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*integration of the traditional and modern could be facilitated by social science practitioners.*

- 1. In any country which has been colonized, there will inevitably exist a tension between the traditional culture and the dominant culture from colonizing powers.*
- 2. There should be facilitators who can unmask the assumptions of each culture for the people to make collective decisions as to how to integrate both for the common good on all levels – family, community and society.*
- 3. Normal tensions and conflicts such as these could be faced squarely since tensions and conflicts are normal facts which should be faced in order for a group, family community and society to grow towards their reason for being*

### **Narrative no. 18 (N-18)**

*Members of the family are fulfilling roles in community and society.*



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*The family especially our parents are our first teachers. The family is our first school. As teachers they respect and help people. My parents are farmers but they like me to be working with an NGO. They want me as a human person to contribute to the lives of others and to society in general.*

*I was influenced by my parents and siblings, yes, I do learn also from my younger siblings. We have negative and positive experiences when relating to others but with the education I get from my parents, we can also learn from negative experiences. Our parents guide us to change our bad habits to good ones and we learn under their guidance how to struggle that the best of ourselves emerge.*

*Of course such an attitude from our parents presupposes the underpinnings of love and is motivated by love with only one purpose that we turn out to be good persons with the intention to contribute to the good of family, community and society. I hope and dream about a situation that we experience true happiness, inner and a just peace.*

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### *Textual Themes (N-18)*

- 1. Parents always do things for the good of the children.*
- 2. Parents could facilitate that tensions and conflicts in the family as opportunities to learning and growth.*
- 3. Children who experience love from their parents radiate the same love to others in the family, community and society.*

### **Reflective Narratives: Second Thematic Reflection**

#### **2.1 The family as the well-spring of values**

The family is the source of one's worldview, values, positive attitudes towards the essentials – of spirituality to battle against materialism, value of solidarity and teamwork as against materialism, value of solidarity and teamwork as against individualism and selfishness. It is the primary force for goodness, value of respect for the other not discriminating against anyone, sense of dignity; working hard matters more than how much one makes; helping others means more than one's just getting ahead; honesty and integrity; humility recognizing that we have been successful only with the support of others. (N-9, N-1, N-2, N-3, N-4, N-5, N-6, N-8, N-9, N-11, N-13, N-15, N-18 = 13)

#### **2.2 The essence of Christianity is being lived in the natural operating values of the Family.**

The practice of blessed works as outlined by Jesus in St. Mathew, giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless, sympathizing with the suffering, pardoning and forgiving others are the natural experiences of children from their parents and siblings. Christian virtues of witnessing to the Truth, courage to relate

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to the Absolute through prayer, obedience and respect for the elders who represent the Creator of all life have been articulated in their narratives as integral to a Christian lifestyle, to serve in the Parish Pastoral Council, Faith in God and practice of regular prayer, Practice of Catechizing Community (N-2, N-5, N-31, N-3, N-6, N-8, N-13, N-15, N16, N-17 = 10)

### **2.3 The Influence of the Mother**

The mother as the cultivator of character and virtues of patient endurance, courage, silent worker, sharing food not only to family and relatives but to neighbors and even strangers, compassionate care of the sick, teacher of social ethics, spiritual offering of food to the Buddha and to neighbors, strangers and to the poor (N-1, N-4, N-6, N-7; N-8, N. 10, N-14 =7)

### **2.4. The influence of the Father/Grandfather**

The father fostering Christian practices, coaching children in their studies, promoting positive attitudes, teaching children to separate non-essential from the essential core of existence, playmates to their children, loving through courageous self-less acts, provider and tireless worker, disciplinarian; the grandfather cultivator of moral values through storytelling, instills the courage to live by the Truth, teacher of household shores. (N-4, N-1, N-2, N-7, N-14, N-15, N-16 = 7) )

### **2.5 Parents and generally the Family's aspiration for Children to complete an education.**

*Love for formal schooling of people in the rural areas even if their parents are illiterate or have little schooling. (N-15, N-2, n-4, N-8, N-11, N-14, N-17= 7)*

### **2.6 The Importance of Siblings.**

The importance of siblings, “represents the wind,” the closest to us who cannot be substituted”, teaches teamwork and sharing and solidarity tasks; siblings can learn from each other (N-2, N-3, N-6, N-8, N-11, No. 18 = 6)

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### **2.7 The Value of Human Relationships**

The family is where we first learn the value of human relationships. (N-8, N-1, N-2, N-3, N-4, N-5 = 6)

### **2.8 Giving From One's Poverty**

Enduring sacrifice of the poor, the generosity of the poor, unconditional love for children (N-11, N-12, N.3, N-1, N-2 – 5)

### **2.9 Food, a Symbol of Togetherness.**

Sharing of food is a symbol of family togetherness and bonding and could expand to community and to building networks of solidarity. (N-1, N-4, N-5, N-14 = 4)

### **2.10 The Family Contains the Basic Elements of Life**

The family represents the strength and warmth of fire; the mother is the water balancing the fire of strength with gentleness and the children are the wind that becomes that makes parents happy and creates for them a sense of wellness. (They are grounded in the reality of life on earth, which provides them the source of vitality). No family, no life, hence the need to contribute to sustain life of the family by taking care of the sick. (N-3, N-6, N-14 = 3)

### **2.11 Family and Nature**

“Rice is the pearl of the land.” Rice finds us together in meals. (N-5, N-4 = 2 )

### **2.12 No matter the objective limitations, family/parents/siblings could still exercise the freedom of choice.**

Family fostering gender equality (influenced by French missionaries) veering away from the cultural belief that women are subordinate to men, choice of modern democratic ideal of governance vs. a traditional monarchical ideal of governance (N-15, N-17 = 2 )

### **2.13 No love, no family**

Without the capacity to love, no family can exist. How does one heal a broken family which could lead to dysfunctional children in society. (N-10)

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### 2.14 *The family is the epitome of the state (N-1)*

The values lived, learned and imbibed in the home have become the source of energy of adult roles in society. The religious sister in N-1 radiated in her different adult roles the practice of virtues first instilled in her by her family - her mother and father and siblings.

Confucius in China considers the family as the epitome of society. According to him, the development of a prosperous state starts from the family. Anyone who operates well in the family could govern the State because he then can fill the world with harmony and peace. (N-1)

### **Narratives: Third Reflection - The Essential Insight**

*The family is the primary driving force of development because it is the main life-giver as a co-creator with the Absolute and the Transcendent, the first builder of character, the well-spring of all values related to respect for human dignity, integrity of creation, common good, social justice, respect for diversity and differentiation, principle of subsidiarity, solidarity and communion (Values and Principles of Christian Social Teachings).*

*In light of Christian Faith, the Family has to be preserved, protected to sustain its powerful witness to the Gospel of Joy, Compassionate Care and Enduring Devotion to Faith, Hope and Love.*

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### Group Reflection on Family Issues

#### Threat to the Family in a Commercialized Global World

**The participants of the FGR, although diverse in many ways, have one characteristic in common. They have come from families who espouse the traditional family values. They come from the poor, having grown up in the rural areas but aspiring that their children would go to the cities to study. Some of the Catholics found themselves drawn to enter religious life. They have all affirmed that the family is the primary driving force of development. But how about today? Is the family still the primary force?**

The second part of the FGR was a reflection on the increasingly globalizing age of today where all agree that now; the young people have been greatly and aggravatingly influenced by the fast changes in communication technology. They are daily exposed to mass media promoting consumerism. Due to high cost of living, both parents are caught in the dilemma of devoting time to earn more or to spend more time for their children.

Yes, the participants of the FGR have the aspiration, by the programs of study they have chosen, to be more equipped to resolve the problems of poverty, homelessness, drug addiction and child/woman trafficking. Several of the issues of family life stem from the global externalities of the situation. One factor – the government’s inhibition to interfere in private business - has created family issues and worsened the effects of climate change.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* has identified the root of our problem: **Anthropocentrism**, the tendency of the human person to lord it over the world of human beings and non-living organisms. Times have changed. The students are precisely in ASI to have a comprehensive understanding of the complex social situation in the world, in their families, communities and society at large, reflect on this and contribute individually and

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collectively towards their personal and social transformation from the perspective of the values and principles of Christian Social Teachings.

Economic globalization coupled with a rapid advance in technology, commercialization leading to a “throwaway culture”, with instant immediate gratification, leading us to a worldview that is egoistic (anthropocentric), mechanical, consumerist and materialistic as against the family ideals of two decades ago which is other or community-oriented, organic, ecological and spiritual worldview.

Yes, they admitted that times have changed. People tend to work abroad. Beggars wait on them every Sunday, or even weekdays (as the case may be). Religious and lay, Catholics and non-Catholics, males and females, married or single are confronted with externalities that become a threat to family wellbeing. Do parents still have the time to devote to their children? And if parents have no time for their children, will it still be valid to say that the family is the primary force of development?

The students recognize that the problem of the family stemming from Anthropocentrism (Person/Persons lording it all the rest, living and non-living organisms) in our highly-globalizing world is trending towards neutralizing the influence of traditional family values preparing the young to be responsible.

We are bombarded with statistics on the rates of divorce and legal separations, the negative attitude to life-promoting values (technical approach to family planning, and legalizing euthanasia) and new ideas of unions such as same-sex marriages which have to be discussed on sound humane and/or Christian philosophical premises. On the other hand, young people, women and men who become the victims of threats to the family, are to be listened to with understanding, mercy and compassion. Only the Lord knows the circumstances which make or even compel women and men, young boys and girls succumb to the path of death and destruction.

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The problem is critical but the crisis of the integrity of the family is the very reason why family movements have emerged to awaken people to our reality and why we are holding these seminar-workshops.

### Synthesis

In this increasingly globalizing age, the family has become a paradox – a source of security and insecurity. To overcome this tension is to pool our insecurities together and entrust these insecurities to our God who will cover up for our shortcomings in the matter of sustaining Love, the very basis and foundation when two people make a covenant with God “for richer or for poorer, till death do us part.”

That the notion of family is associated with everything that is good has been expressed in the FGRs that I facilitated. The FGR has confirmed that the family is a basic social entity which is the wellspring of human and/or Christian values: **Source of a worldview, values, positive attitudes and spirituality. It is the primary force for goodness, a weapon against externalities that tend towards materialism, consumerism, mechanistic behavior and egoism. As against the values of the world, the family nurtures the values of respect for human dignity and for all other living and non-living organisms, teamwork and solidarity, integrity and humility.**

Life begins with the family. No life could have existed without family. The family is a basic social entity through which we love unconditionally, develop healthy relationships and generate the basic human values (contained in Christian Social Teachings – respect for persons, common good, and social justice, recognition of the richness of diversity and differentiation, principle of subsidiarity, solidarity and communion.

To love is to promote the wholeness of life. Love is seeing ourselves as integral part of the whole, being conscious of our shared humanity connected with all that is in this planet earth. The family if at all, implicitly, is the nursery where the life for anyone of us begins. It is where life is nurtured and develops expanding in ever widening circles. To promote life



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and love spells authentic development – one in which the continual birthing of ordered growth of persons and other living organisms, community and society become sustainable.

His Holiness, Pope Francis himself, in his first social encyclical, *Laudato Si*, has used the analogy of Family for awakening us to the reality of our common “HOME” – Planet Earth where all of us, including all other living organisms, are brothers and sisters and following Francis of Assisi, should consider ourselves as connected with all the elements of Creation in the Cycle of Life.

*Hope springs eternal where families through thick and thin imbibe a sense of solidarity for the well-being of all.*

*Be a family to all which is saying: Conquer all with love, mercy and forgiveness.*

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## The Family: The Primary Driving Force for Development

November 7

Greetings of Peace and Joy!

May I ask you for your help that will be very much appreciated?

I am going to give a 15 minute talk as a member of a panel in a seminar-workshop organized and sponsored by the Pontifical Council of the Laity-Women's Sector. The theme of the seminar is *Women and Work*. I am supposed to be a member of a panel to deliver a talk on the topic: *Family: the Primary Driving Force for Development*. It will be a pleasure to meet you all on November 10<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday, to reflect with you on this topic. The following will be the guide questions:

Name (Optional)

Age

Religion

Program of Study in ASI

Your Aspiration as to your occupation after your studies

Nationality

Gender

Status in Religion

Former Occupation

To what extent could you agree with the statement that the family is the primary driving force for development?

- If so give concrete experiences of how your family has influenced you
  - (1) In your growth as a person
  - (2) In your growth as a worker? As a professional?
  - (3) In your growth as a socially-oriented person doing work for people?
- If you do not agree with the statement : *the family is the primary driving force of development, state the reason basing yourself on your experiences?*
- *Who have been your significant others in your personality development?*
- *Which institutions are your significant reference groups in your work?*

Thank you. See you in the Francis Senden Memorial Room at 10:00 p.m. Lunch and merienda will be served.

Dr. Mina M. Ramirez  
Presidnet.