

THE FAMILY:OUR MOST COMMON CONCERN

Dear Friends of CHINS:

It is a very special joy for me to have this privilege of writing to you. From everything that I have heard about CHINS, I have been enormously impressed. I have had the opportunity to meet some of you who are associated or have been associated with CHINS in the past, and have discovered from these friends a common concern and that is The Family.

The family today has many meanings. Very often now a days it is not always composed of a dad who works, a mom who stays at home to do the housework and take care of the small children, and the children themselves. Rather, we find many other forms. Many families are single-parent, in which case only one of the parents, either the mother or the father, are present at home with the children. There are also families composed of parts of two or more families, as in the case of a family composed of two spouses from a separated or divorced situation together with the children of either one or both of the spouses. There are also families composed of grandparents who care for their grandchildren as well as families where the children are adopted by their step parents. In our Las Cruces area, la familia also refers to the extended relationships beyond the parent-child relationships. Members of the extended family are cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, padrinos, madrinas and many others that we recognize as true members of our familia.

In our day and age it isn't the threat of nuclear war, nor is it the national debt that might keep us awake at night, it is rather issues that concern our families. Parents worry about their children and what might be happening to them. Children, in turn, may be equally concerned about their parents, about their limitations, emotions and behavior towards them. Many of our personal hurts have their sources in broken relationships in the home. I would like to enumerate just a few items that are characteristic of healthy and happy families.

If we look around our family and concentrate on their needs, we will find that they are all thirsting and hungering, not so much for physical and material needs, but rather there is a thirst and hunger arising out of our emotions. Our needs are not always physical. They can also, and more often than not, be emotional. There is no doubt that we all have a need to be loved, to be understood, to be affirmed and supported by the rest of the family members. These kinds of needs are not met by gifts, rather they are met in the day to day dealings, conversations, reactions and general behavior among family members. In a healthy family, all the members understand that

they all have something to give to the happiness of the rest and all have a need from the rest as well.

One of the basic things that happens in a healthy family is that communication, real communication takes place. In a healthy family, everyone is listened to, people are honest, people are allowed to speak without interruptions, and then there is always a positive response from those who have listened. In healthy communication, there are no put downs and turnoff words or phrases, or questions such as, "What did Johnny flunk today in school?" or directed to mom, "Did you burn any beans today?"

A healthy family is a reconciling family. We know that no family is perfect and that we hurt each other without meaning to. This means that the words, "I'm sincerely sorry" and "Please forgive me, I promise not to do it again," are heard as often as needed. Reconciling has to be done as soon as possible. We can't go through life holding things back, for one thing, this causes terrible stress and reconciliation can often be done quickly and very easily.

"Tabletime" is necessary, that is, as often as possible a healthy family comes together around the table for eating purposes and also to update one another on what is going on in the family. Tabletime is very necessary especially when both parents might be working and the children may be involved in many school and social activities. Many families have a family night, where everything is cancelled outside the house, at least one evening a week, to allow the family to eat a leisurely meal together.

A healthy family affirms and supports. We all need to be recognized for the good things that we do and supported in all our noble efforts. In many families attention is given to an individual mostly when that individual messes up, where as everyone has a need to be told that others recognize the goodness of one's actions or efforts.

Respect is extremely important especially towards those who may feel bad because they are not like the rest of the family. Not all in a family, for example, are good baseball or football players, but have other talents which must be respected. Ideas and opinions should be listened to even though not everyone agrees with this or that family member. A member of the family, for example, may decide that he or she will be a vegetarian or will learn a unique musical instrument, such as the violin. Rather than laugh at this person, the other family members should try to understand and respect those kinds of decisions.

Keeping promises to other family members builds trust and trust is an essential factor in a healthy family. It can

happen that the trust is broken, but it must always be remembered that trust can be mended. I truly believe it's a mistake to give up on someone because they have broken a promise. A very bad attitude could be expressed with these words.

"I won't ever trust you again!" This can have a disastrous result if the person saying this really means it.

Sharing time is important for a healthy family to develop. Many of the things that we do such as watching television can take us away from communicating and relating with one another. It is important that we share time with one another and make that a very important priority. Something is wrong when the children will prefer to spend all their leisure time only with their friends. While going away somewhere can be a lot of fun for a family, it is not always necessary. In fact, fun together doesn't mean spending a lot of money together either. The important thing is that we be together, share life together, play and be at one in the spirit of joy.

A healthy family teaches morals. Needless to say, the worst thing that parents can do in this regard is to be hypocritical. No one recognizes hypocrisy in adults better than teenagers. I remember a lady telling me once, "I don't know where my children get the bad words they say, they never leave the house!" Parents should not be afraid to make rules and regulations for their children. Very often children appreciate the direction and concern the parents have for their moral welfare. Neither should children always give the reason for saying no to their peers that their parents don't want them to do this or that. Children themselves should be responsible for the development of their own moral principles and say to their friends, "I don't believe in doing this." In this regard, friends can be very instrumental in teaching morals to one another. It is just as easy to be a good influence as it is to be a bad one.

I hope the preceding words will be of some help. I pray that the Lord will bless each one of you and keep you in His love. I will pray especially that your family will be a happy and a healthy one.

Bishop Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B.
Diocese of Las Cruces
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