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Press Release and Message from the CCEE-SECAM Seminar in Mozambique

CCEE-SECAM Press Release.

Mumemo, Mozambique, May 31, 2015

Bishops of Europe and Africa have pledged to redouble their evangelization efforts through a more focused family pastoral care in all their dioceses and instill the vision of the Christian family not only in their faithful, but also in every person of good will.

This was contained in a Final Message adopted at the end of a Seminar jointly organised by the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) that took place in Mumemo, Mozambique from May 28-31, 2015.

The bishops expressed their desire to “ let the light of Christ shine, by increasing our pastoral care of the family, by preparing our youth for Holy Matrimony, by accompanying our families with or without children, with spiritual support, by taking care of the elderly and not forgetting the divorced in whatever circumstances.”

(Please find attached the full text of the Final Message of the bishops that was read by Mons. Duarte Da Cunha, Secretary General of CCEE on behalf of the bishops of the two continents.

During the three-day Seminar a number of topics including the following were presented by resources persons representing the two continents:

a) Anthropological, social and ecclesial challenges for the family by Archbishop Benjamin Ramarosson, Archbishop of Farafangana, Madagascar and Most Rev. Ludwig Schick, Archbishop of Bamberg , Germany.

b) The Joys and Sufferings of the Family: Pastoral challenges; Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Olweny of Africa Family Life Federation (AFLF) in Kenya gave a Testimony of their family life; this was followed by presentations by Bishop Jose Caminate na Bissign, of Bissau, Guinea Bissau and Bishop Anders Arborelius, of Stockholm, Sweden.

c) The Mission of the Bishop in proclaiming the Gospel of the Family: by Bishop Louis Portella Mbuyu, of Kinkala,Congo-Brazzaville and Archbishop François Granier, of Cambrai, France.

d) The role of the Church and the Bishops in dialogue with society and States in family matters: by Bishop Sithembele Sipuka of Mthatha, South Africa and Most Rev. Everard de Jong, Auxiliary Bishop of Roermond, Netherlands.

The Seminar was brought to an end with the Celebration of Mass in Maputo on the Feast of the SSolemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. It was presided over by Bishop Lucio Andrice Muandula, Xai-Xai and President of Episcopal Conference of Mozambique.

NB: All presentations that are for public consumption will be posted on the websites of CCEE and SECAM in coming days.

MESSAGE FROM THE 2015 CCEE-SECAM SEMINAR OF MUMEMO, MOZAMBIQUE.

1. Introduction: We the Bishops from Europe and Africa, delegates of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) have been meeting here in Mumemo, Mozambique, together with a married couple, some Religious, Laymen and women participants. We have come to the end of our seminar of May 29 - 31, 2015, (the fourth such seminar in our journey of Communion, Solidarity and Collaboration which started in Rome, Italy, in 2004). We have deliberated on the theme: *The Joy of the Family*.

We spent time listening to the joys and challenges of families, testimonies from delegates and other participants; we have been reflecting, praying and trying to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying today to us as Shepherds of the Church in Africa and Europe as we prepare for the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on **The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World**.

At the end of this seminar, on this Sunday, **Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity**, feast of the divine Family of unity and communion, in the face of today's joys, challenges and even crisis that marriages and families are going through, we would like to share a message of joy and hope with all the sons and daughters of the Church in Africa, Europe and elsewhere, and with all men and women of goodwill.

2. Joys and Challenges of the Family: With grateful hearts, we remember our own families, our father and mother, brothers and sisters, our grandparents and other relatives, a home, where we felt loved and we received education in human values and behavior, our first initiation to faith and prayer life that still support us even today as bishops.

Of course, not everything was perfect. Some of us came from families with challenges too. We all however celebrate this God-given gift of family, father, mother, and children as the natural basic human cell indispensable for every person.

Today, we also see around us many happy families. Places where spouses love one another with a love that grows with the number of years of marriage; we see homes in which children feel loved; where faith in God and family values are lived and passed on; where there is unconditional acceptance and mutual cooperation, room for mistakes, fraternal correction and place for forgiveness and reconciliation; where every child is welcome, with whatever traits and disabilities. We commend such families, and we are grateful to God for them!

At the same time, as Pastors, we are close to those, who though married, are living in some marital crisis. We suffer a lot with broken families; with poor families that hardly make it through the day. We are touched by people afflicted with illness and who cannot be taken care of for lack of financial means, or lack of professional healthcare. We know also many people who are caught up in substance abuse, a source of great suffering for their family; people working abroad, far away from their families in near-slavery conditions; many families torn apart by hatred and even war, by migration and human trafficking. We are worried by some of the negative influences within the media.

Our hearts are broken, when we notice young children, orphaned, abused, without education, many of whom live alone on the streets, and teenagers lured into violence, crime, prostitution, etc. We

hear of so many mothers, who desperately see no future for their unborn child, and so resort to abortion. What a pain this must be!

But joyfully, we also see the Holy Spirit at work, in so many families that live a life of selflessness and sacrifice, being generously open to new life, and giving themselves without conditions to other family members, and in that way really finding fulfillment in themselves. This is what Jesus says to such people: “...*Whosoever loses his life for my sake will find it...*”(cfr. Mt. 10.38-39), and again: “*No greater love has anyone than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends*” (Jn. 15.13).

We hear of so many good initiatives that support families in their daily burdens and circumstances. In Africa especially, the bonds of family members are very strong. We admire the vitality of living faith-communities, and the presence of so many young people. In Europe, we rejoice over the many new religious movements that have arisen in recent years, that explicitly embrace family life, and are bringing about a new spring and élan to this wonderful creation of God, the human family. We cannot but rejoice in these good signs.

3. Vocation, Spirituality and Mission of the Family: Africa is regarded by scientists as the cradle of humankind. It is here that we dare to challenge the current state of families and try to find solutions to it. We therefore encourage families to pray regularly together, since this is the heart of the life of love and faith that all family members are called to. As Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta often said, “*The family that prays together, stays together*”, we exhort families and family members to pray especially the holy rosary. Regular participation in the Holy Eucharist also brings peace of heart and mind, and strengthens families. Since all are called to a life of holiness, let family members strive for holiness! Prayer groups of mothers and fathers for their children for instance can fill the need for mutual support.

Education in human values and virtuous behavior is also indispensable, a grave responsibility of parents for their children. Open communication between parents and their children, in order to face the challenges of our culture, and in their formation is now more necessary than ever. We therefore take this opportunity to call on political leaders and civil authorities to ensure that families are enabled and provided with the wherewithal to fulfill their parental responsibilities towards their children for the greater good of the society. Children and the youth of today need to be helped also to acquire the ability to discern and the will to choose what is right and just and virtuous, and to avoid evil.

Thus can the Christian family also take up its own missionary vocation to be a place of welcome for those that are desolate and destitute, a safe place of dialogue, where cultures meet and are purified by the Gospel; the place where children are born and nurtured who will become our future politicians, artists, scientists, engineers, doctors, craftsmen and women, civil and public servants, our future fathers and mothers, priests and religious, all being warmly encouraged and accompanied in their search and pursuit of their God-given vocation in life.

4. Our Mission as Bishops: In communion with Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, as Shepherds, we pledge to be more present to all families in whatever situation they are. We present to them Christ the Emmanuel (God with us), who never ceases to mercifully and graciously look at every person as a child of God in whatever situation; it is he who frees us all from sin. He, the Word of God, born of the Virgin Mary, will help families to continue to grow in love and faith; he will strengthen the bonds between man and woman, between children and their parents. His presence will console those who are burdened and lonely, sick and abandoned (see Mt. 11.28). He it is who gives meaning even to suffering in whatever state we find ourselves.

Furthermore, we pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the thoughts and deliberations of the Fathers of the coming Synod. May the image of the family irradiate like the sun that although many times obscured by clouds still warms the hearts and lives of all human beings! May the ideal family never be totally eclipsed by our human weakness and sin!

As Bishops, we will double up our efforts to let this light of Christ shine, by increasing our pastoral care of the family, by preparing our youth for Holy Matrimony, by accompanying families with or without children, by taking care of the elderly and the divorced in whatever circumstances they live, and more.

5. Concluding exhortation: We like to conclude this message with these encouraging words of St. Paul to the Philippians 4.4-9: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you”.*

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph be the role model for all families! May Mary, Queen of Families, be your constant intercessor!

Mumemo, Mozambique
Sunday, May, 31, 2015
Feast of the Most Holy Trinity.