



International Confederation of Christian Family Movements



TEN CHALLENGES TO FAMILIES IN THIS DECADE

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The behaviors that we emphasized in this small test are already observed in our countries. Some are not yet very perceptible. Others are common and no longer cause social reactions. They are world-wide tendencies, that radiate from the rich countries and influence cultures of the developing countries.

1. The valuing of the family union versus the tendency of family dispersion.
The cultures of North America and European are transmitted with great intensity through the cinema and of mass media. The men and women of the American films live alone or, at the most, and in the case of women, two live in the same apartment. They are always far from their family of origin, who are absent from the scene. Recent statistics show that 40% of the houses in Sweden, 35% in England, 30% in France and 26% in the United States are occupied by a single person. Couples with children correspond to less of 24% of the houses in the United States, whereas in 1960 he was 45%. Children of middle-class or above tend to leave the house in search of "independence". The job market and the shortage of workers also contribute to the dispersion and family separation, with increasing professional and geographic mobility. The challenge in this decade will be the reversing of that tendency, with the valuing of the coexistence and cohesion of the family and family ties and solidarity.
2. The return to the marriage that at least tends to be stable versus the tendency to informal and unstable unions.
More of the influence of the North American culture: the informal transitory unions grow. In that country the number of couples without civil or religious married contract grew in ten years of 3.2 million to 5.5 million, indicating an accelerated tendency for that option. In American films it is common to see that the couples form and soon they are living together, without any formal intention to make it permanent and stable.
3. The valuing of interpersonal communication in the family versus the pressure of the mass media and Internet.
TV created a new type of isolation between the members of the family. Even if there is only one television set in the house, members remain together but distant, as if hypnotized by the plots of novels or films. They no longer talk. The most that they discuss is what program to watch. They are less connected if there is more than one television set: in the bedroom, the kitchen, etc. and the Internet came along to aggravate the problem. The hours of individual isolation kill family conversation. The lack of time for true dialogue is the root of the disintegration of many families and the breakup of family ties.
4. The valuing of sexuality as an expression of love versus the porno-erotic wave.
The wave is overwhelming. Almost all the films and soap operas appeal to a base level of sexuality, often crude, nothing like the rich expression of love that sex must be. The Internet gratuitously offers to anyone thousands of photos of the most shameless pornography. Human sexuality is degraded and drained of its rich human content. The challenge will be to restore the beauty of human sexuality, overcoming old taboos and equal rejection of the baseness delivered by the mass media that degrades it.
5. The revaluing of ethics versus the trivialization of fraudulent millionaires.
Never has been seen such an enormous wave of corruption without impunity, projecting the idea that crime pays. The financial costs are in the thousands of millions of dollars, but only those that rob little and cannot pay lawyers for freedom go to prison. Unpunished and socially successful thieves lead to the increasing practice of frauds of all types. The challenge of families is to get angry and to show their rejection of those practices, enthusiastically espousing ethics in the formation of their children.
6. Austerity versus untenable consumption.
The pressure on families to consume more and more, with the support of intense publicity, concerns about family economics pressures them to extend the work day to make the rent, and contributes to exhaust our mineral wealth and the devastation of our forests. The waste in our houses is enormous and consumption is anti-ecological. There is an increase in products and disposable packages. Damage to



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the environment has as its root obsessive consumption, one of the predominate characteristics of the economic model in the world. The challenge of families will be the valuing of austerity against the consumption predator, like a signal of solidarity with the impoverished parcel of our towns.

7. Education for cooperation versus the tendency of hallucinating competition.
The neoliberal economic model, now globalization, and competition governed by the laws of the market. The search for competitiveness becomes an obsession. One also competes not only in the commerce but in one's profession, at work, and almost all social relations outside of the family. That spirit of competition overpowers the home and degrades family relations of cooperation and gratitude. The challenge is to row against the current, breaking the competitive model with the practice of the gratitude. That practice is contagious: it carries to others to change their behaviors and is able to change the competitive atmosphere in the workplace, the schools, and public offices.
8. Valuing of life versus the expansion of consumption of the alcohol and other drugs.
This is the most worrisome plague of our time and there is not a short term tendency to reverse it. Alcoholism is spreading into more families. Strong drugs are a cause of early death. To fight the problem of drugs in the family is a challenge that demands learning and an enormous capacity of tolerance, patience, sacrifice and resignation. The challenge of families will be in prevention, closely bound to valuing personal life, to healthful practices, but mainly the best quality of loving family relations.
9. Search of an adult faith versus superficial religious expressions.
The formation of faith finds the parents of today disturbed. Traditionally religious formation was limited to registering the children in parochial catechesis for first communion and later to make sure that they attend Sunday Mass. Also the predominance of infantilism in faith, often reduced to superficial religious practices. In the noticeably religious society of the past, that practice seemed to work. In the secularized modern world, the faith of the Christians cannot remain at that infantile level. The tendency is to religious indifference or the adherence to a religiousness of a nonconvergent magical type without the demanding and compromising proposal of the gospel. The challenge of the families is the formation in the faith which expresses itself in daily life, in the service to the other, the commitment with justice, understood as the true pursuit of Jesus.
10. The exercise of citizenship versus the tendency to political alienation.
There conspiracy evident to maintain politically alienated towns. Families are surrounded by the news manipulated by commercial and political interests that prevent the access to the truth. A conscious society would address public policies for personal benefit. Alienated parents do not stimulate their children to assume citizenship and a transforming presence in the society. Individualistic personalities form and the myth is fed on that "the policy is dirty thing", or dangerous. The challenge to parents is to stimulate the children to participate in the political life of their country to promote communal benefits.