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ALFI is a multi-sectoral organization committed to foster and defend the sanctity of marriage, to promote family solidarity, and to protect life at all stages of development.

RH bill and the Year of Faith by Atty. Maria Concepcion S. Noche

A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. Precisely because it is a free act, faith also demands social responsibility for what one believes.



Pope Benedict XVI has published his apostolic letter called “*Porta Fidei*” or “Door of Faith.” This document officially proclaims a Year of Faith, to begin on October 11, 2012 and end on November 24, 2013, the Feast of Christ the King.

October 11, 2012 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a text promulgated by Blessed John Paul II. The Catechism, an authentic fruit of the *Second Vatican Council*, was requested by the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 as an instrument at the service of catechesis (Cf. Final Report of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops (7 December 1985), II, B, a, 4 in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, ix, n. 1797) and it was produced in collaboration with all the bishops of the Catholic Church.

From the start of his ministry as Successor of Peter, Benedict XVI has spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith. Today, a profound crisis of faith has affected many people. They think of faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society and its content and the values inspired by it have lost their meaning (*Porta Fidei*, paragraph 2). The celebration of the Year of Faith is meant to usher the whole Church into a time of intensified reflection and rediscovery of the faith so as to reinvigorate it, confirm it, profess it, and live it.

The divide that the RH Bill controversy has created among Filipinos in general and within the Catholic Church in particular, points to a profound crisis of faith. The differing pronouncements expressed by the members of the

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Rally speakers voice out: RH bill does not complement Filipino culture by Nicole Bautista

MANILA – “*Siyensya ba ang sagot sa ugali?*”

That was one of the many questions posed during the well-attended Pro-Life prayer rally in EDSA on August 4, 2012. Despite the continuous rains in many different parts of Metro Manila, an estimated 60,000 people from all over the country (and of different religions) answered the call from leaders of the Catholic Church to gather in EDSA for a prayer rally against the passage of the Reproductive Health Bill. The bill is a population control measure that aims to make contraceptives more easily available to the public via government funding.

To put the question in context, the speaker, President of Doctors for Life Dr. Eleanor de Borja, discussed the incidence of HIV AIDS in Thailand (1.3 million) as compared to the Philippines (8,000). She asked: Why is it that in Thailand, where the use of condoms is prevalent, there are 100 new cases of AIDS every week? Clearly, the widely accepted theory that condoms can put a stop to the spread of AIDS is, in practice, easily proven false—after all, it’s not just cause and effect; the problem is rooted in culture and behavior.

Long term effects

The problem in Thailand is difficult to solve because their attitude on sexuality has already deeply changed. It is an effect of their country’s own reproductive health policy. Obviously, the same RH bill will affect Filipinos no less differently. That’s because molding culture, behavior and attitudes begins in youth—and, with the bill, so does mandatory sex education.

Contraception is corruption. “Contraception, corrupts the Filipino culture by promoting a mentality that babies are the cause of poverty—which completely goes against the regard of Filipinos towards their children.”

- Archbishop Socrates Villegas

A doctor of Family Medicine, Dr. Lucille Montes discussed the

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Anna Cosio

Seeing RED by Liza Marie Alvarado

Some thoughts about a documentary film

BloodMoney: The Business of Abortion is not for the faint of heart.

This 80-minute documentary examines the history of abortion in America – and how! Narrated from the perspective of Pro-Life advocates, some of whom used to be at the forefront of promoting abortion, the film examines arguments regarding the beginning of human life and the very basic human right to life. It exposes the not-so-hidden agenda of Planned Parenthood of America, the world’s largest provider of abortion services and contraceptive devices; and the blatant misuse of judicial power in the landmark cases of *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, which set precedence on the legalization of abortion in most American states. The film also brings to fore the risks of so-called “safe” abortion and reveals the consequent human grief it causes – re-

alities counsellors try either to ignore or downplay whenever they’re talking a pregnant woman in crisis into “getting rid of her problem.”

The numbers presented in *Blood Money* are staggering: Three thousand five hundred babies are aborted in America daily. Abortion clinics target three to five abortions from every girl between the ages of 13 to 19. Fifty to one hundred women die every year from abortion. Abortion is a multi-billion dollar moneymaking industry – and no, this is not something made up by

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clergy and conflicting positions espoused by the lay faithful on matters rooted in their faith make a celebration of this kind most welcome and relevant.

Arguments from different sources have been advanced, studies and findings of scholars and experts have been quoted, data and statistics have been extrapolated, so that one may claim that all possible points of view have been considered and exhausted. Perhaps, it is high time one paused, searched his heart and responded to that summons to take the path to be authentic witnesses to the truth.

Amidst the animated and sometimes heated verbal tussles, there is an acute need for a stable, valid and lasting foundation that could bear consistent and credible witness in historical circumstances that may be different from those of the past. This enduring foundation is the Catechism of the Catholic Church which provides a “permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.” (Porta Fidei, paragraph 11).

For the proponents and opponents of the RH Bill, Porta Fidei beckons serious consideration coming as it does from the Supreme Pontiff himself. He says that the “door of faith” is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. (Porta Fidei, paragraph 1).

Benedict XVI has sketched a path intended to help us understand more profoundly not only the content of the faith, but also the act by which we choose to entrust ourselves fully to God. Knowledge of the content of faith is essential for giving our own assent, that is, for adhering fully with intellect and will to what the Church proposes. But knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and understand that which has been proclaimed is the word of God.

So, how do we know the content of our faith?

Timing the launch of the Year of Faith to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican Council II provides a good opportunity to help people understand that the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, “have lost nothing of their value or brilliance.” There, we also find a sure compass by



which to take our bearings in the century now beginning. As emphasized strongly by Benedict XVI: “if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church.”

The fundamental content of the faith receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded, and proposed in her two thousand years of history. Blessed John Paul II wrote: “I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.”

It may not be amiss to state at this juncture the unmistakable teaching in the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the matter of contraception: “every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible’ is intrinsically evil.” (paragraph 2370, citing Humanae Vitae, 14).

Knowing the content of the faith, there is a need for all believers to have a stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. A

Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. Precisely because it is a free act, faith also demands social responsibility for what one believes.

The issues on the RH Bill, thus, can be understood in light of the teachings contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. But as Benedict XVI says, knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless our heart sincerely seeks the ultimate meaning and the definitive truth of our lives. To this search, Faith beckons and makes us authentic witnesses for Christ. ■ mcsnoche@gmail.com

ALFI would like to thank Jess Abrera for his contribution as guest cartoonist for ALFI News.

JESS ABRERA, one of the leading editorial cartoonists in the country today, has been working for at least 25 years at The Philippine Daily Inquirer where his comic strips A. Lipin and Pinoy Nga! are published. His hard-hitting politically-themed strips that, according to Kulay Diwa Gallery of Philippine Contemporary Art, “show no mercy for injustice, thievery in high places, and official stupidity,” have earned him the ire of some and the acclaim of many: He received the National Book Award from the Manila Critics Circle for Pinoy Nga! He won Best Humor in Cartoons from the Catholic Mass Media Award (CMMA) and Best Editorial Cartoon in 2006, 2007 and 2008 entering him into CMMA’s Hall of Fame. He also received the Grand Prize for children’s book illustration in 1987 for the book Handyong from The Philippine Board on Books for Young People. He graduated with a Fine arts degree from the University of the Philippines.

RH = AO: Meeting ‘unmet needs’

The leaders of the House of Representatives announced that a motion to terminate the period of interpellation on the Reproductive Health (RH) Bill would be voted upon on August 07, 2012.

On August 06, 2012, about 180 representatives were reported to have gone to the Palace for lunch upon the invitation of the President of the Philippines. In the evening of the same day, the House of Representatives voted to terminate the period of interpellation and debates, a day earlier than originally planned. This means that about 20 legislators who were on queue to propound questions to the proponents of the RH Bill lost their chance to do so. The voting was done via viva voce and it was determined that the aye vote won. Thereafter, there was a motion for nominal voting (for each representative to state and explain his vote) but the motion was withdrawn before it was voted upon.

The next phase in the legislative process is the period of amendments.

On August 14, 2012, Rep. Dennis Socrates attempted to deliver a privilege speech on what transpired on August 06, 2012. He was able to deliver only a part of it during his appeal of the ruling that he was “out of order.” After some verbal skirmishes over the viva voce vote, the result of which was un-

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Millennium Development Goals, maternal mortality rate, birth control, and contraceptive prevalence

An analysis by Jose S. Sandejas, PhD

The Philippine Government agreed in 1990 to join the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Project of the United Nations, which, as its 5th goal, targets to lower by 75 percent between 1990 and 2015 the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), defined as the ratio of the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. This mathematically-impossible goal (we will prove in this paper why this goal is mathematically impossible) is being used as a justification to pass the RH Bill in order that contraceptives can help women control their pregnancy-frequency thereby avoiding unsafe abortions—such far-fetched and wrongly-based reasoning to foist on women the deceptions of the RH Bill.

This paper provides evidence that the only way the Philippines can work towards the reduction of the MMR is by improving the provision of maternal health care especially to the poor, through budgetary allocations in both the national and in the local governments. This paper also provides reasoning and evidence that the Philippines cannot achieve any reduction in MMR through birth control and contraceptives distribution, availability.

The need to provide more and better maternal health care nationwide

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO) website, only 70 percent of live births are attended to by physicians, nurses, midwives, or manghihiilot. This means that of the 1.7 million live births in 2010, more than 500,000 live births had no medical practitioners’ at-

tention. It is a small wonder, therefore, that there were only approximately 1,700 Maternal Deaths in 2010. The following data come from the Department of Health (DOH) website:

TABLE 1: Maternal Mortality Rates (MDG targets 75% reduction)		
Year	Total No. of Maternal Deaths	Rate per 1000 Livebirths
2006	1,721	1.0
2000	1,698	1.0
1995	1,488	0.9
1990 (MDG start)	1,579	1.0

(Note that in the table above, the MMR targeted by MDG to be reduced by 75% has not moved one bit.)

The following regional chart shows that the Maternal Death Rate (No. of Maternal Deaths per 1,000 Live Births) in Central Luzon (where expectant mothers have better access to maternal health care) is only 0.2 deaths per 1,000 live births; while that for Southern Tagalog is 1.3 deaths per 1,000 live births; or 650 percent that of Central Luzon (data compiled by Congressman Roilo Golez for his discussions about the Reproductive Health Rights Bill). The weighted average Maternal Death Rate across all regions is 0.8 for the entire Philippines.

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social implications of the mandatory sex education that the RH bill is set to implement. Dr. Montes, who has seen the pilot sex-ed programs of the DepEd, stressed that while it has some good portions, there are questionable lessons that focus on population control and “reproductive rights”—“*tulad ng paano umiwas ng pagbubuntis at STD.*”

The controversial measure implements a six-year sex education program with the aim of addressing sex crimes, STDs, and teen pregnancies. But, is sex education that is focused on contraception and sexual rights (and not within the context of marriage and starting a family) actually effective? “Lalong sumasama ang kinaabukasan ng mga kabataang galing sa mga bansang may sex education,” asserted Dr. Montes.

Corruption

It is no surprise, then, that Lingayen-Dagupan Archbishop Socrates Villegas, in his message read by Former Philippine Ambassador to the Vatican Henrietta de Villa, asserted that “contraception is corruption.” Contraception, he said, corrupts the Filipino culture by promoting a mentality that babies are the cause of poverty—which completely goes against the regard of Filipinos towards their children.

In the same vein, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle focused on the true attitude of the Filipino people regarding family life: “Pinakamasisipag ang mga dukha,” he said, referring to those people who would wake up very early in the morning—just to make a measly 50 pesos to cover the daily household expenses. It may be a difficult

kind of life, but the archbishop pointed out, “tinuturing nila na kayamanan ang pamilya at anak. Lahat kaya nila tiisin para sa anak.”

What these people need, the speakers reiterated, is not to be taught to look at their children as a burden, but to have opportunities to better their situation. They need good education, employment, compassion; and the government needs to put the taxes to work developing these things, not destroying the attitude of Filipinos towards children, women, and sex.

Preserve culture of life

The other speakers in the rally were ECFL Exec. Sec. Fr. Melvin Castro, ECFL Chairman Antipolo Bishop Gabriel V. Reyes, Exec. Director of Caritas and President of Radyo Veritas Fr. Anton Pascual, Raymond Ibarrientos of SFC-YFC, and Bro. Mike Velarde of El Shaddai. Holy



Diana Uichangco

Mass was celebrated, and the homily was given by Bishop Teodoro Bacani.

Many of the rally participants braved the rain and the distance of travelling (some even hailed as far as Sorogon) to help preserve the Filipino culture that loves life, cherishes children, respects women, and fosters a proper attitude towards sexuality. What Filipinos need are laws compatible to these things—as to what Filipinos want, the turnout speaks for itself. ■

Combating the Divorce Mentality by Mercedes B. Suleik

The Philippines has the distinction of being the last hold-out against divorce, after Malta succumbed to the move to legitimize divorce. Is this something to be ashamed of? Is being *kulelat* in the worldly malaise that divorce brings to families, to spousal fidelity, to the loving upbringing of children, to a state composed of unstable communities, and a society characterized by selfishness something that must be “updated”? So that we can bring our country out of the “dark ages” as one Congressional representative claims?

Love for the family is our own distinctive feature. Divorce is an “imported” practice that will wreak havoc on our identity. Instead of entertaining the idea of how to dissolve a marriage, why not focus on helping strengthen the family and the husband-wife relationship by finding out why they break apart? In many instances, poverty, unemployment, infidelity, cruelty, etc. are at the root of such breakdowns.

Likewise, the Philippines is distinctive in that its Constitution considers Marriage as an inviolable social institution, is the foundation of the family and shall be protected by the State. The State recognizes the sanctity of the family and is obliged to protect and strengthen it as a basic autonomous social institution.

It follows that legitimizing divorce legitimizes the destruction of the family even before couples contract marriage, making a mockery of matrimonial vows even before they are pronounced, and openly saying that any children born out of such a union will only have temporary parents, a gross injustice to children even before they are brought into this world. Another consequence would be the legalization of abortion, since such marriages which are not intended to be permanent would be highly unlikely to be open to having any children.

The history of divorce in the Western countries is replete with examples of the effect on children—the perils and social cost are unquantifiable: broken families, damaged relationships, destroyed children. Studies have shown the children of divorced parents have a higher probability to delinquency, drug abuse, immoral behaviour, and sometimes even manifestations of suicidal tendencies—all of which lead to a spiral of social disequilibrium.

Proponents of divorce claim that this is not an anti-marriage move, euphemistically claiming that what is being proposed is “*divorce, Pinoy style.*” They claim that they only wish to protect women from abusive spouses, to help them where there are irreconcilable differences, to help them avoid the stigma of being *hiwalay* (separated), the way the stigma of pregnancy due to out-of-wedlock sex seems to have disappeared. Tongue in cheek, they even avow that a divorce law “may even strengthen the sanctity of marriage. Now people will not take you for granted. People will be very conscious that there are vows to be maintained, there are obligations to be fulfilled.” But such obligations are already there, and giving them the option of divorce precisely provides them with an escape clause, and thus enter into the contract “with mental reservation and purpose of evasion.”

Love for the family is at the core of the cultural identity of the Filipino. The Filipino culture is renowned for its family- and children-orientation. The Holy Father himself said, when asked what the Filipino culture is noted for, “love for the family.” We see this through our extended families, and in the fact that, here, grandchildren and even in-laws sometimes live in the same house. We see this in the way parents make the supreme sacrifice of becoming overseas workers for the sake of their children’s future, entrusting the care of the children to grandparents, aunts and trusted relatives. We see this familial orientation of domestic employees abroad who care for their employer’s children as if these were their own.

Love for the family is our own distinctive feature. Divorce is an “imported” practice that will wreak havoc on our identity. Instead of entertaining the idea of how to dissolve a marriage, why not focus on helping strengthen the family and the husband-wife relationship by finding out why they break apart? In many instances, poverty, unemployment, infidelity, cruelty, etc. are at the root of such breakdowns.

If marriage is not forever, it is a sham. The family is the very foundation of society, and the divorce mentality undermines this permanence which leads to better communities imbued with the right values that redound to the benefit of the state

itself. Spousal fidelity ensures stable families, upright behaviour, and respect for the laws of the land. A report by two academicians known for their writings on family and marriage states that “Married couples create more economic assets on average than do... cohabiting couples.” Further, married couples live more frugally as opposed to two adults living as singles and they also save and invest more for the future. Men also tend to become more economically productive after marriage, earning between 10 percent and 40 percent more than do single men with similar education and job histories. The increase in divorce has also resulted in more inequality and poverty. Divorce means higher costs for governments due to such factors as welfare payments, increased juvenile delinquency and school drop-outs.

The divorce mentality is the result of secularization, individualism, and relativism... and these highfalutin’ words really mean selfishness and a “me first” attitude. In contrast, what we should try to achieve is a strong conviction that “the family be truly the place where a person is born, matures and is educated for life, and where parents, by loving their children tenderly, prepare them for healthy interpersonal relationships which embody moral and human values in the midst of a society so heavily marked by hedonism and religious indifference.”

While the preceding quote is from Pope Benedict XVI, I have intentionally foregone religious catechesis. I have based my arguments on the more “secular” findings about the over-all destruction of the family, of children who must be the nation’s future beneficiaries as well as contributors. I prefer to bring to the fore that the efforts to promote divorce do not really address the problems that cause marriage and family breakdown. We are not in the “dark ages.” Indeed, we are the enlightened ones. ■ merci.suleik@gmail.com



Seeing Red... *continued from p.1*

hardcore pro-life activists, it’s something abortion clinic managers (and former owners) attest to.

In the context of the deliberations on amendments to what is now called the “Responsible Parenthood Bill,” the points brought up in this film should make us think (or re-think) whether we, the Philippines, as a nation, are really treading the daang matuwid towards which the powers-that-be claim to be steering us.

First, science experts agree that life begins at conception – even in our grade school science, we didn’t question that. The baby is a member of the human race, distinct from his or her mother, and has a right to life, a right that is inherent to his or her dignity as a human being. Do we respect that dignity when we prescribe the use of chemicals and devices that end that life within a mother’s womb?

Second, the Constitution is above all courts of law. Its primary purpose, according to Dr. Alveda King, narrator of the film and kin to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “is to protect generations yet unborn and give them the blessing of liberty.” What generations would there be if few would be born? Where is that “power of the Constitution” when the legislators themselves are blind to what Sec. 12 of Article II (Declaration of Principles and State Policies) says?

Third, slavery has never been completely abolished – believe it or not. In her organizational magazine, Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, was reported as saying she wanted to “rid the world of human weeds”

and “breed a race of thoroughbreds” to get rid of the “inferior races.” Curiously, many abortion clinics are placed near minority neighborhoods, and more than 14 million African American babies have been aborted since 1973. Is not racism but a subtle form of slavery? Is not our yes to a foreign-funded population control program another side of the same coin? Is our proud Filipino race a threat to the white population?

Fourth, contraceptives are not effective in preventing births. Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood, admits that two out of three women who go through abortion use contraceptives. What people do not know is that contraceptives fail two million times a year. When it does, the partners consult “counselors” in abortion clinics, who would simply “sell” them abortion services. Pharmaceutical companies earn from manufacturing defective (they’re called “low-grade”) contraceptives; and abortion clinics earn more because those contraceptives failed. Would not the prescribed use of contraceptives that fail most of the time encourage the growth of fly-by-night abortion clinics in the Philippines? Couples didn’t want that baby in the first place – which is why they used contraceptives – so what’s to keep them from availing of a service that will “take care of the problem”? Some try to be careful about showing sonogram images, though. There have been cases when abortion clinic-clients-to-be changed their minds when they saw that the “blob of tissue” they thought they were going to get rid of is a “moving” (even “dancing”), “living being” inside their womb.

Lastly, the destruction of families is not an accidental by-product of population control. Carol Everett, a former independent abortion clinic owner says, “We have a whole plan to sell abortion and that is called sex education. Break down their [children’s] natural modesty. Separate them from their parents and their values and become the sex experts in their lives.” Will Filipino children survive this onslaught against family and values?

BloodMoney presents the horrors of abortion and contraception – where one is, there the other will be, too. But it also presents the compassion of the human heart and acknowledges weakness expressed through sorrow. After having abortion, some of these women echo in their heart Dr. King’s line: “The most promising choice is the decision that favors life.” ■

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Millennium Development Goals... *continued from p.2*

The chart clearly shows that the Maternal Death Rate is significantly reduced when expectant mothers have better access to, and better facilities and supplies for, maternal health care. Cong. Golez reported that the Regional per capita budgetary expenditures for Maternal Health Care Services correlate very strongly with the Maternal Death Rate per Region.

Thus we can readily conclude that the way to reduce Maternal Deaths is via an increase in budgetary expenditures for Maternal Health Care; and not by increasing contraceptives prevalence, as we will discuss in the following section.

Regions by Maternal Death Rate					Department of Helath, FHSIS, NEC		
	-annual number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births	TOTAL POPULATION	INFANT DEATH RATE	ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	PER CAPITA MEDIAN	POPULATION DENSITY	MATERNAL DEATH RATE
1	R IV A & B - SOUTHERN TAGALOG	11,793,655	18.5	3.72	25,000	251	1.3
2	AUTONOMOUS REGION IN MUSLIM MINDANAO	2,412,159	4.4	3.88	11,198	211	1.3
3	R V - BICOL	4,674,855	10.6	1.68	12,233	265	1.2
4	CARAGA	2,095,367	7.4	1.63	12,277	111	1.2
5	R XI - SOUTHERN MINDANAO	5,189,335	12.9	2.6	14,998	263	1
6	R VI - WESTERN VISAYAS	6,208,733	11.2	1.56	14,403	307	0.9
7	R VIII - EASTERN VISAYAS	3,610,355	11.5	1.51	12,183	173	0.9
8	R X - NORTHERN MINDANAO	2,747,585	8.2	2.19	13,996	196	0.7
9	R IX - WESTERN MINDANAO	3,091,208	8.9	2.18	11,593	193	0.7
10	R XII - CENTRAL MINDANAO	2,598,210	5.2	2.08	11,953	179	0.6
11	R II - CAGAYAN VALLEY	2,813,159	6.5	2.25	16,636	105	0.6
12	Cordillera Administrative Region	1,365,220	10.1	1.82	20,391	95	0.6
13	R VII - CENTRAL VISAYAS	5,701,064	6.7	2.79	13,936	381	0.5
14	National Capital Region	9,932,560	2.17	1.06	42,102	15,617	0.4
15	R I - ILOCOS	4,200,478	10.6	2.15	18,380	327	0.4
16	R III - CENTRAL LUZON	8,030,945	5.1	3.2	25,493	441	0.2

The mathematical impossibility of lowering MMR by 75 percent via population control through contraceptives

It can readily be seen in Table 1 that, in terms of trying to comply with the MDGs, we have zero accomplishment. The Maternal Death Rates have not moved a single percentage towards the 75 percent reduction from 1990 till 2015 targeted by MDGs. This is in spite of the increase in contraceptive prevalence rate to 50 percent (as reported by the NSO) and 73 percent of married women using a family planning method. This non-progress in MMR reduction is due to the non-increase in Regional per capita budgets for maternal health services; and is also due to the mathematical impossibility of reducing MMR via contraceptives prevalence.

Let us discuss this mathematical impossibility.

Firstly, MMR is defined as the ratio of pregnancy-related maternal deaths to the total number of live births (according to the definition in the MDG).

Secondly, the mere lowering of the total number of live births (the denominator in the ratio), via contraceptives prevalence/birth control, does not mean a one-for-one reduction in the number of maternal deaths (the numerator in the ratio). The number of maternal deaths will still be primarily determined by the availability of maternal health care services as shown in 1.0 above.

Based on the above, the MMR will mathematically not change (as we can see from Table 1, the MMR has not changed in 16 years) unless there is a change in the budgets for maternal health care service.

Conclusion

If the Philippine Government wishes to try to comply with its commitment to the No. 5 Point of the MDGs, on Maternal Mortality, it should:

Convince the Regionals/LGUs to increase their per capita budgets for maternal health care services to the levels spent in Central Luzon, Ilocos, and National Capital Region (please refer to Chart) because, at the maternal death rate levels of these three Regions, the Philippines will comply with its commitment.

Desist from agreeing with the contraceptives advocates that RH will reduce MMR. ■

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Four or MORE

By Rosie B. Luistro

Who was it who said that the world is as many times new as when there are children? When “modern” families “shrink” and parents are called “irresponsible” for having many children, then something has gone wrong in that society. Many countries now grapple with what to do with old parents with nowhere to go when their only child goes off to work in some distant place or if that sole child dies before them. Thankfully, there are still many Filipino families who buck the trend by having a large family.

To **Maria Luz-viminda (Malou) Monge-Kare** and **Rene Victor (RV) San Andres-Kare** who have been married for 13 years, parenthood brings happiness and fulfillment. Their children are, Malou says, “our extraordinary blessings from God, our most precious legacy.” If they cherish their living children, it could be because they have known the grief of losing a child. **Monica Isabel** was eight months in the womb when Malou miscarried. Two more miscarriages resulted before and after their youngest child.

Malou, a grade school teacher and RV, a freelance recruiter (a headhunter) and a graduate of Community Development, have a family of four young children. That there were and are many challenges in their family life are evident in the way they speak about the times they went out of their comfort zones.



The family started out with two helpers. Then they let go of one. And the other, they eventually had to let go of, too. Having no helpers, they had to do all the house chores themselves on top of being employed full time. It may sound impossible but this plucky couple has adopted the proven strategy of giving each one a chore to do.

Nothing is perfect, of course, and there are always adjustments to be made with this approach. For example, with a budget that was not enough to pay for a school service, they had to make choices based on priorities. Megan, the youngest child then, could not go home right after nursery school for lunch even if their house was nearby. She had to wait till after her mother’s job was over before she could be picked up. She learned patience and, in so many other ways, the other kids learned

to cope with their simple life. They might lack luxuries but not childhood joy or the incomparable love found only among siblings growing up together in a strong and intact home life.

The children—**Therese**, 12, **Josef**, 10, **Megan**, 8 and **Pauline**, 6 — have been taught to study hard and care for one another. As a result, everyone is doing well in his/her studies, all being awardees in their respective grade levels and a source of great pride to their parents. Happy par-

ents mean happy kids, and a cohesive family life provides the security and confidence that children need to thrive and be successful.

Although attentive to their growing brood, Malou and RV often plan time together without the children. Malou says, “to stay deeply and meaningfully connected, we strive for constant communication, even sending each other messages everyday that say ‘I love You’ and in many different ways.” She adds that “when we are a bit discouraged or when things are really difficult to bear, we remind each other that each one is God’s precious gift.”

Time-offs together as husband and wife are often facilitated by ever willing in-laws who take over the care of their grandchildren. Indeed, this closeness of interfamily ties is another blessing of our Filipino culture. While every couple struggles to be independent from their in-laws, they also find that grandparents are indispensable in looking after their children when needed.

When “modern” families “shrink” and parents are called “irresponsible” for having many children, then something has gone wrong in that society.

RV speaks about playing, going out and telling stories and jokes together as a family. He underscores the importance of teaching his children to help others, especially those who have less, and of improving the lives of others. Because their love for God is what keeps their family together, he taught his children from a very young age to pray. Hence, family prayers are regularly done without forcing anyone to join.

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see,” said author Neil Postman in his book: *The Disappearance of Childhood*. In the same vein, RV concludes, “We look at our children for strength to go on and we wish there could be more of them.”

There is no one-size-fits-all formula for families but for the **Kare** family, they choose to live life in a quiet metamorphosis realizing that “true generosity does not begin when you are able to give, but when you have nothing in you trying to take.” ■ rb luistro@gmail.com

Maternal mortality rate (number of deaths per 100,000 or MMR) dropped by 81% in the Philippines between 1980 and 2008, as found by a study in 181 countries by a group of researchers mostly from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation of the University of Washington in Seattle. The results indicate that the Philippines did a better job of reducing maternal deaths than richer countries like Germany, Russia and Israel where abortions are legal. Moreover, our own National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) found a similar trend. In the period 1990 to 2010, the daily MMR declined by 21%.

The local government units (LGUs) have been made the principal implementers of the AO. The national government has forgotten that the Local Government Code has devolved the delivery of basic health services, including family planning to the LGUs. Therefore, the AO cannot direct the LGUs to implement programs that may not be aligned with or may run counter to the directions they have set for themselves. Also, the “complementary allocations” (funding) for the family planning programs that the LGUs are directed to provide will unnecessarily deplete and redirect local funds, to the prejudice of their constituencies, the poor, among them.

There is no denying – the AO implements and provides the comprehensive guidelines for the implementation of the RH BILL. The AO thus serves as the Implementing Rules and Regulations of a controversial measure whose future is still in the hands of the Legislature. But the Executive, through the DOH, has obviously grown impatient and arrogated unto itself the legislative function that rightfully and legally belongs to the Legislature.

Somebody is either unmindful of the law or is simply ignorant of the law. In either case, this is an affront to the Constitution and to the democratic principles that we, as a people, uphold. – MCSNoche

RH = AO... continued from p.2

clear, and the subsequent motion for nominal voting, the session was adjourned for lack of quorum.

On August 15, 2012, Rep. Roilo Golez delivered a privilege speech on Habagat and thereafter moved that the House of Representatives defer discussion of the amendments to the RH Bill until the needs of the victims could be adequately addressed. Rep. Rufus Rodriguez seconded the motion. The session was later adjourned until August 28, 2012.

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In the meantime, Senator Vicente Sotto III delivered at the Senate parts I and II of his turno en contra on August 13 and 15, 2012, respectively. Part III is expected in the coming week.

While the legislative process is ongoing, the Department of Health issued on June 27, 2012 Administrative Order No. 2012- 0009 (the “AO”). This is a bold intervention by the government to address supposedly the “unmet need for modern Family Planning” or UMFP, defined as “the number of women who are fecund and sexually active but are not using any modern method of contraception, and report not wanting any more children (limiting) or wanting to delay the birth of their next child (spacing).”

The AO aims to attain by 2015 the health-related goals under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specifically by “reducing by two-thirds the maternal mortality.” This is part of the Aquino government’s health agenda referred to as Kalusugan Pangkalahatan.

Under the AO, the Family Planning program shall be implemented at the national and local levels through the financial and manpower resources from both public and private sectors to ensure its success. The DOH, LGUs, POPCOM (which is specially tasked to ensure “increased demand for FP goods and services”), DSWD, Philhealth, and community health teams are expected to coordinate closely to ensure widespread and complete implementation of the program.

Is there need for the AO?

Rather than contraception, the poor need food on their table and medicine for common ailments like pneumonia, tuberculosis and hypertension; rather than condoms, the poor need clean water, electricity and sanitation; rather than ligation, the poor mothers need good pre- and post-natal care; rather than vasectomy, indigent fathers need jobs. These are the real unmet needs.

Baby boomer(ang) – not

by Maita Abesa

“I’m moving out.”



More often than not, these words cause some kind of synapse failure in the brains of Filipino parents. The statement simply doesn’t compute easily. Old school values (at least the ones that have been drilled into me) hold that unless a child is getting married or being torn away by the demands of his or her education or career, living with one’s parents is the proper thing to do. The Western concept of “boomerang kids” – that is, kids that end up moving back home after college – is an alien one. Of course children are supposed to move back in after college, if they ever left at all.

I moved to California when I was eighteen, so I never found myself in the position of being in the Philippines and deciding whether or not I should move out of my parents’ house. Would it even have been a question? Would it simply have been assumed that I was sticking around until I got married and prepared to have kids of my own? Would I have complied, or would I have struck out on my own, defying all expectations?

Pointless questions. Unless someone has a DeLorean handy, I can’t tell you what I would have done.

What I can tell you, though, is that I’m currently 25 years old, a seven-year resident of California, a proud holder of a bachelor’s degree, a true blue tax-paying breadwinner, and... still living with my parents and two sisters.

Forget being a boomerang kid. This is what some of my college friends would call a failure to launch. The obvious question: why?

It’s a good question. I imagine most if not all my friends from the Philippines – and even my American/Mexican/Salvadoran/German/insert-nationality-here friends who happen to know Filipinos – would respond that this is simply the way of Filipino families. That’s just what they do.

Well, I can tell you this: I reject that answer. If that is the Filipino way, then I guess I do not subscribe to it.

I stick with them because I choose to – because Dad asked me to, because I enjoy family dinners over Mom’s cooking, because I can’t imagine myself without the daily company of my sisters, because I know that my presence here helps the family as a whole.

Wait – read before you judge!

I haven’t been a subscriber to “the traditional Filipino way” in a long time, I think. I’ve been in California for seven years, after all. “But wait a minute,” you say. “What’s seven years abroad compared to eighteen in the Philippines?”

Numerically, 18 trumps seven any day. But the years be-

tween 18 and 25 are big years. I went to college here. I lived in a dorm and later a student apartment here – my first time flying solo. I got my first job here. I anticipated and feared, shied and ventured, failed and succeeded more in the last seven years than I did in the first 18 of my life – and I did it in a cultural environment that, while not necessarily hostile to traditional Filipino values, certainly does not readily support them either.

Experiences like that teach you, sometimes in very stark ways, what you are and what you are not. And what I am not, apparently, is a good traditional Filipino child.

My political opinions (and I have some very strongly-held ones, being a political science major) differ vastly from most of my family’s. We certainly differ on some things that seem trivial (for example, whether or not it is necessary for me to inform someone if I’m going to be home an hour or two later than usual, or whether skipping the mano po is an abominable gesture of disrespect or simply a sign of modern times) but are really quite significant when you have to live with those differences every day.

On some days, those differences seem more than enough to finally move out over. Forget economies of scale. I’ve survived being broke before, and I’m making more money now than I was then. I can support myself enough to move out. Why stay?

I certainly don’t do it because I’m compelled by the traditional belief of children being cleaved to their parents until marriage. I don’t believe in that concept, nor will I be bound by it – and I know that’s okay.

I stick with my crazy, maddening, funny, frustrating,

lovable family not out of any sense of cultural tradition or social compulsion or even religious obligation. I stick with them because I choose to – because Dad asked me to, because I enjoy family dinners over Mom’s cooking, because I can’t imagine myself without the daily company of my sisters, because I know that my presence here helps the family as a whole. I stick around because I’ve decided that our differences don’t matter as much as that bizarre, inexplicable harmony only families can achieve when they get their act right.

Someday, probably sooner than anyone would expect, I’ll move out – maybe because I’m going to school out of state or maybe because my career calls for it. Maybe I’ll even move out for the simple reason that I need it for my own personal development. But for now, I’m here because I choose to be.

The freedom to exercise that choice – along with the freedom to disagree over politics and social policy, to pursue individual interests and passions, to make major life decisions without bringing them to committee – is important to me, as I imagine it is for any Filipino child who came of age in the fiercely independent and individualistic American culture. It’s how we know that these values are ours rather than “society’s,” and it’s what gives meaning to anything we do.

This assertiveness is a definite deviation from tradition. But I think it’s a truer test of my values, a truer test of the character of this Filipino individual and its life’s influences. It is a more honest confession of its flaws, and a more powerful expression of its strengths.

I am ready to be judged.

What’s wrong with moving back in (or not leaving) after college?

A glimpse into a demographic phenomenon

A report released on March 15, 2012 by the Pew Research Center examines the boomerang phenomenon for different demographic groups.

Titled “The Boomerang Generation: Feeling OK about Living with Mom and Dad,” the study* included a survey of 2,048 adults across the US conducted Dec. 6 to Dec. 19, 2011. Some of the results were:

- Among adults ages 18 to 29, 42% of those who have graduated college live with their parents.
- Among adults ages 25 to 29 with or without a college degree, 41% either live with or moved back in with their parents.
- Among adults ages 18 to 34, 24% moved back in with their parents in recent years after living on their own, due to economic conditions.

This group of young adults has been labeled the “boomerang generation” for its proclivity to move out of the family home for a time and then boomerang right back. The Pew Research claims the recession in the US seems to have accelerated this tendency.

What does this tell us?

Sharing of family finances in maintaining a household benefits both parents and the “boomerang kids”: 89% reported they have helped with family expenses; 48% claimed they paid rent to their parents. But that’s according to a survey among Americans.

Anecdotal evidence for the Philippine case doesn’t show adult children (still staying with their parents) paying rent – some would say that would be unthinkable. In the case of the young adult Americans, employments status is correlated with living arrangements: Nearly half (48%) of adults ages 18 to 34 who are not employed either live with their parents or moved back in with them temporarily because of

financial constraints. On the other hand, it is not unusual for already-employed Filipino sons or daughters to be expected to help send younger siblings to school, which might mean not being able to move out of their parents’ place until the next brother or sister graduates and starts earning.

The Pew report shows modest support for a trend of grads moving back home. It found that in 2010, almost 22% of adults ages 25 to 34 lived in a multigenerational household up from about 16% in 2000; of these, the vast majority were living with their parents. Aside from the recession, demographic forces such as delayed marriage and a wave of immigration have contributed to the increase. The increase, from 46.5 million to 51.4 million was the largest increase in modern history.

That fancy label “multigenerational household” is something Philippine society has always been familiar with. It is called “extended family”. Overall, the median income for multi-generational households is higher than the income for other types of households. The reason is obvious: there are more potential breadwinners in the former. While they may not provide higher incomes, they do appear to serve as an economic safety net. In an extended family, one is assured of a roof over one’s head; and in an extended family, nobody goes hungry.

To be sure, there are drawbacks to the setup, but as long as the mutual help does not become an excuse for dependency, what Filipino families have always believed a good arrangement might just be recognized by Western economies.

**The general public survey is based on interviews conducted from December 6 to 19, 2011, with a nationally representative sample of 2,048 adults ages 18 and older living in the continental United States, including an oversample of 346 adults ages 18 to 34. Survey interviews were conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International.*

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