

## International Year of the Child

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The fact that the United Nations Organisation had declared 1979 “The International Year of the Child” is a very good thing. It directs our attention to the children in our midst and compels us to reflect on our attitude towards them. It prompts us to recall Christ’s attitude to children - the loving care and concern he had for them. We recall how when people brought little children to him, for him to lay his hands on them “the disciples turned them away, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs,’ and then he laid his hands on them and blessed them”.

The “International Year of the Child” challenges us to examine our consciences, both individually and collectively, on our attitude to children. We ask ourselves what we in the Church are doing for them, particularly in this year which is especially theirs. Various agencies in our Church are working closely with the “Hong Kong International Year of the Child Commission”, both in the provision of entertainment and in other activities to celebrate the Year of the Child. We are also participating in the Commission’s long-term programme “to review existing provisions for child welfare and development in Hong Kong and to make recommendations for improving the existing situation.”

We are also organising programmes which are more

pastorally-oriented. We recognize the important role of the parish in children's religious formation. It is in their parish church that by baptism children become members of the Christian community; through the reception of the sacraments and hearing the word of God they nourish the life of Christ in them.

For the child, the basic community is the family, and it is in the family that the wider relationship with other people in the Church is first shared. It is in the family that we hand on not only the faith, but an awareness of belonging to the People of God. We know how much children are influenced by their environment and what lasting effects their earliest years have on their whole lives. The loving kindness and goodness of their parents will lead children to their first awareness of a loving, kind and forgiving Heavenly Father. The happy, cheerful atmosphere of a good Christian family will help to give the child a sense of belonging and give direction to his life; it will make him aware of God's presence in the family and in his own life. Parents are in the privileged position of taking the place of God himself as they exercise their duties as heads of the family. They have the responsibility and the privilege of moulding their children during their most impressionable years.

When children move out from the protection of the home their first contacts are with teachers and with other pupils in school. We all realize what a tremendous influence teachers have on their pupils and I would like teachers to reflect on their responsibilities during these formative and receptive years. May our teachers impart to their pupils a sense of personal and moral

responsibility and help them not only to get somewhere in life, but to become someone so that they will eventually contribute their share to building up a better society.

Finally, let us all make sure that the witness of our lives bears a close resemblance to what we preach, lest we leave ourselves open to the accusation that what we say is far removed from what we do.

Praying God's blessing on you all,

**+ John Baptist Wu**

**The Bishop of Hong Kong**

**Pentecost Sunday 1979**