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Catholic bishops in Vietnam have stressed traditional Christian marriage values, saying current social and cultural pressures were destroying young families.

"We would like to invite young families to uphold and encourage the values of Catholic marriage," the bishops said in a pastoral letter to Vietnamese Catholics.

The bishops said due to the current trend towards consumerism and hectic lifestyles, Catholic communities were increasingly having to deal with abortion, cohabitation, same sex relations and divorce.

They said such social and cultural trends "destroy traditional family values, go against the creator's will and leave serious consequences for young generations."

Despite the challenges, many young Catholic families endure great sacrifices to remain true to their marriage vows, and bravely refuse to have abortions, the letter said.

After a meeting from Oct. 9-13 at Thanh Hoa Bishop's House in Thanh Hoa, the bishops launched the

"Year of Journeying With Young Families" which starts this month.

The letter — signed by Archbishop Joseph Nguyen Chi Linh, president of the Vietnamese Catholic bishops' conference, and Bishop Peter Nguyen Van Kham, secretary general of the conference, — called for priests and Catholic communities to "journey with and support families to build happiness."

They said it is important to continue the journey with young Christian families as marriage is a long process during which spouses have to accept their partners for who they are.

As part of this education, priests should encourage families to pray together at home, attend retreats. Young families should receive guidance on reproduction, education of their children and how to best resolve marriages disputes and family conflicts.

The bishops said older Christian couples had a role to play by sharing their experiences of marriage and setting an example on how to achieve marital bliss.

"Dioceses should establish parish-based counselling groups that work with young couples facing problems of family and marriage," said Joseph Tran Van Dai, a Catholic from Ho Chi Minh City Archdiocese.

There were only a few church-run counselling offices in the city and they could not meet the increasing demands of troubled families, he added.

Dai said the new initiatives were needed "to give spiritual support to young families."

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