



American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

April 28, 1987

C. Everett Koop, M.D., Sc.D.
Surgeon General of the United States
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 716-G
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Dr. Koop:

Please let me introduce myself. I am Steven Preister, a Catholic priest of the diocese of Lafayette, Indiana, assigned by my bishop to work at the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) here in Washington, DC to help the AAMFT promote a family perspective in federal policymaking and in human services. I had the honor of meeting you two years ago when I was the director of the Catholic University of America's National Center for Family Studies. The Family Impact Seminar, which is the policy education unit of the Center, published a booklet, with your help, Hospitalized Children: The Family's Role in Care and Treatment, and you were kind enough to attend the press conference co-sponsored by Children's Hospital. While at Catholic University, I also worked closely with Eleanor Biscoe, who is a personal friend of yours.

I am writing you to personally urge you to accept AAMFT's invitation to receive the AAMFT Distinguished Leadership to Families Award for 1987. Please let me explain why I believe this is an important opportunity.

All Americans are aware of the pressures and changes families face in the 1980s. These cause concern, because families are the basic unit of society, and because they have a unique mission in our society. They teach fundamental values of bonding, belonging and caring. They socialize their members across the lifecycle. And they perform essential responsibilities--shared with social institutions--but responsibilities which cannot be replicated solely by institutions without an insurmountable social and financial cost: economic support and basic welfare, health and mental health care, education and socialization, social control, recreation, reproduction, identity, affection and caring. Can we even imagine a society where families did not provide these basic functions? For this reason alone, it is in our best interest as a society to support families so they can fulfill these responsibilities.

It is AAMFT's belief that the primary goal of much social policy and human services should be the support of families. We believe this

because family systems are the key social unit, and because focusing on families is generally the best way to promote the well-being of individuals. Families are the key for improving the educational success of children; they are crucial for planning and delivering care for the frail elderly; they are essential resources in attempting to help youth in trouble. When families are working well, they carry out responsibilities essential for the functioning of society. When they are in trouble, the government must act in their place. Yet the government generally fails to address ways of supporting and strengthening family systems. Instead, it establishes remedial programs for individuals in trouble, when this trouble could perhaps been avoided if we consistently attempted to support families or developed services for individuals that took families into account. Thus we believe that the government has every reason to promote the well-being of families.

I personally believe that 1987 could be the Year of the Family in Washington. For the first time in a decade, there is an emerging middle ground between conservatives and liberals, one which holds the potential for the government becoming a better advocate for our nation's families. In 1987, it may be possible to put the family's agenda at the front of the federal policymaking process. But I believe leadership from reasoned and courageous individuals is needed if that potential is to be realized.

One example of this emerging philosophy is the work of Gary L. Bauer, and President Reagan's Working Group on the Family. Bauer's report proposes that that a series of family impact questions be "rigorously applied to all government initiatives." I have been working with Mr. Bauer to promote this agenda (see attached COFO Memo), and assisting his staff in organizing a meeting of family advocates in Washington to discuss this issue.

Further, many specific family issues are moving steadily toward the front of the nation's social policy agenda:

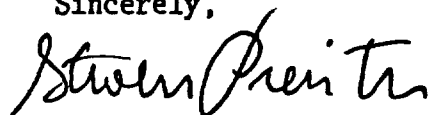
- * In 1986, tax reform proposals were widely hailed as being pro-family.
- * Current discussions about welfare reform show a growing awareness that family issues are central both to the causes of welfare dependency and to proposals to alleviate such dependency.
- * Adolescent pregnancy is no longer viewed as a private dilemma but is now clearly recognized as causing a crisis for public policy.
- * The issue of how to support family members' role in caring for family dependents, particularly the frail elderly, the catastrophically ill, the chronically ill, AIDS' victims, the homeless, the disabled, and children, is more often addressed in policy research and debate.

These are the reasons we want to present the AAMFT Distinguished Leadership to Families Award to you, and to have you address the issue of family life in the life of our nation. As a leading pediatrician, you were a pioneer in efforts to include parents as partners in the care of their ill children. You have not only been a courageous leader in calling the attention of the nation to the seriousness of AIDS, but you have been one of the few persons who has focused on the family issues and family ramifications of AIDS. You have been an advocate for the nation to face the serious issue of family violence--whether child, spouse, or elder abuse. (Our 1987 Conference will focus on these three--and many other--family issues.) We believe you are a leader who can help move the nation closer to a legitimate family agenda, an agenda that is acceptable to the different political factions.

Finally, I thought you might want to know something about the AAMFT membership. Our 13,000 members are psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, clinical nurses, and pastoral counselors from every state in the nation. They are front-line workers--human service providers and pastors--delivering services to families. Your message can help them in their work, and they can help get your vital family message out to the nation.

I hope you will consider our genuine invitation to present you with our Award.

Sincerely,



Steven Preister
Deputy Executive Director

cc: Eleanor Biscoe
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Potomac, MD 20854