

**social institution:** the organized way a society develops to meet its basic needs; for example, people develop armies for the defence of themselves and their nation

## The Basic Institutions

Social scientists have found that all societies develop at least five basic **social institutions**.

### 1. Families

- ◆ help society's members replace themselves
- ◆ provide protection for the next generation
- ◆ socialize the young

### 2. Economic institutions

- ◆ help society's members meet their physical needs
- ◆ range from the basic hunting/gathering groups to giant multi-national corporations
- ◆ include farms, banks, businesses, and so on

### 3. Political institutions

- ◆ assist members in group decision making
- ◆ empower individuals
- ◆ require that all members agree to the decisions made

### 4. Educational institutions

- ◆ organize the way society passes on its culture, knowledge, and values from one generation to another

### 5. Religious institutions

- ◆ help people find an ultimate purpose in their lives
- ◆ aid in developing the spiritual side of society
- ◆ provide guidelines for personal behaviour and social interaction