

# Catholic Media Office Press Release

**28<sup>th</sup> January 2004**

## **Catholic Bishops issue comprehensive statement on Marriage and the Family.**

Quarter of a million (250,000) leaflets containing the text of a comprehensive statement on Marriage and the Family will be distributed to Scotland's Catholic community this weekend (31 Jan & 1 Feb).

The widely-distributed statement follows a pledge given by Cardinal Keith O'Brien in December of last year when he promised that Scotland's Catholic Bishops intended to make 2004 a year in support of "Life and the Family".

In his December 2003 letter, Cardinal O'Brien said; "It is in the best interests of Scottish society, and is therefore a duty incumbent on all who are active in public life, to respect and foster family life. All legislative and fiscal policy must take account of the effect that it will have on this core institution of our society and ensure that it is strengthened and not undermined."

Referring to the leaflet being distributed this weekend, he added; "I hope you will use this material as the focal point of debate, discussion and initiatives in your homes, parishes, schools and workplaces, aimed at supporting marriage and the family and building a Culture of Life'. I assure you that my brother bishops and I are fully aware of our responsibilities to you and to the society in which we live, it is our desire, especially at this time to ensure that there exists a proper Christian environment in our homes and in our communities for yourselves and for your children."

Note to Editors:

There are 450 Catholic Parishes in Scotland  
The full text of the A5 leaflet is shown below

**ENDS**

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## **Marriage and the Family Bishops' Conference of Scotland Feast of the Presentation \_ 2 February 2004**

The Feast of the Presentation records the visit to Jerusalem of Mary and Joseph who presented the infant Jesus in the Temple. They thanked God for the gift of life as so many parents continue to do; they recognise in their child someone made in the image and likeness of God. Mary's child was unique. He was the son of God, but in his humanity he was like us in all things \_ but sin. In the Holy Family we have a unique model for the Christian family.

Marriage is a unique institution, a gift from God to his creation. It has been respected, honoured and supported by most civilisations at most times in human history. The three great monotheistic religions \_ Judaism, Christianity and Islam - honour marriage between a man and a woman as the foundation of the family, the building block of society. They attach supreme value to its function of providing a stable environment for the expression of human love and for the education of children.

Marriage is the committed partnership of two people, a man and a woman, equal in dignity, created in the image and likeness of God. They are called to be united in heart, mind and body - two in one flesh. They complement each other through their communion of life, expressed and nourished, in their conjugal love. Marriage binds them to be faithful to each other and to be open to sharing in God's work of creation.

In Catholic teaching marriage is an exclusive, lifelong union of husband and wife. Between baptised persons, according to Catholic teaching, marriage is given the dignity of a sacrament. Joined by God in marriage, a man and a woman become a sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Their union cannot be dissolved by any purely human authority.

Since it is given by God, the Church upholds the sacredness of human sexuality. The intimate embrace of husband and wife consummates their love for each other, expresses their complete commitment to each other and the earnest desire that their love should bear fruit in the birth of children. The Church strives to protect the dual purpose of sexual intimacy which binds husband and wife to each other and allows them to share with God in bringing children into the world.

The Church is concerned whenever the gift of sexual expression is demeaned. In the Apostolic Tradition any use of the sexual faculty outwith marriage is sinful and dishonest, for of its nature it can only find true expression within the covenant of marriage. Likewise the contraceptive mentality prevents the gift of love between husband and wife from being true and complete by deliberately seeking to exclude conception.

While upholding marriage as the basis for family life and a stable society, the Church compassionately acknowledges those who through bereavement or desertion are suffering and feel a deep sense of loss. Alone they labour heroically and with great dignity to bring up their children, provide for their needs and educate them in the knowledge and the love of God. The generous support of others, often members of the extended family, is a cause of great admiration.

The Church is deeply saddened when some marriages, for various reasons, fail. The Church in Scotland provides sensitive and compassionate pastoral care for people who find themselves in difficult marriage or family situations and is committed to encouraging their participation in the life and mission of the Church, in the first place through involvement in their own parishes.

Those intending to marry deserve a high standard of preparation for marriage and for all that family life involves. The Catholic community has much to offer in the area of education about the authentic meaning of marriage, the family, love and sexuality. What the Church offers should not be restricted to the time of immediate preparation for marriage. It should begin in secondary school and continue throughout a couple's life together, giving special support at important moments, such as the birth of children or illness in the family.

We give thanks for the beautiful gift of married love and family life, for the witness of so many married couples in our country, also for the witness of those who have been widowed, for those whose marriage despite their best efforts has failed and for those who despite the hurtful experience of a broken marriage, live out their faith as fully as possible in the various, sometimes painful circumstances in which they find themselves.

Together we all make up the family of God and we pray that God will help us to celebrate our joys, face our troubles with courage and continue to be faithful to the will of the One who "created (us) in his own image and likeness, male and female." (Genesis 1:27)