

Bishops' Conference of Scotland

Pastoral Letter on Marriage, The Family and Life Issues

CARDINAL O'BRIEN – FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY 2003

(To be read or published at all Masses: Saturday 27 & Sunday 28 December 2003.)

My Dear People,

I write to you on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland with every blessing at this Christmastide and for the year which lies ahead. This will be a year in which the Bishops of Scotland in collaboration with our priests and Catholic laity consider how best to support marriage and the family and defend human life. These have been areas of increasing concern to my brother Bishops and myself in recent years. We see families as the building blocks of our society, and the foundation on which those building blocks are laid is marriage.

In a very real sense our future rests in the hands of today's parents as they mould and shape the next generation. We must ensure that they receive the support that they need in this dedicated apostolate.

At a recent meeting of the National Secretariat for the Laity of our Catholic Church, representatives of the main organizations, groups and movements in our Church, with a particular focus on working with families, spoke out about marriage and family life. Among other things they said the following:

"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."

In a recent Diocesan Pastoral Letter, Archbishop Conti rightly restated the view of the Church that marriage "resembles Christ's self-giving", adding "we need to ensure the careful preparation of couples for marriage". This is timely advice, reflecting the wider concerns of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland. As a Bishops' Conference we will continue to speak in support of marriage and family life.

Our concerns at this time also reflect the need to protect life and to empower and support all those who do.

With these thoughts in mind the Bishops' Conference of Scotland intend to release a number of key documents in 2004. On 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord a comprehensive statement on "Marriage and Family Life" will be released to all parishes. On 31 May, the Feast of the Visitation, the Catholic Church in Scotland will celebrate a "Day for Life 2004". A wide range of resources and supporting material coinciding with the UN's "Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family" will be made available throughout the Catholic community to coincide with these celebrations.

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. Consequently, 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.

With our renewed good wishes and blessing for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien

President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland