

# **‘Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it’**

## **Statement of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference**

Within weeks the people of Ireland will be asked to vote in a referendum that will change the meaning of marriage in the *Constitution of Ireland*.

Marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society - all of us need to reflect deeply before changing it. We ask the people of Ireland to consider very carefully the profound implications which this constitutional amendment would have on the family environment and on our understanding of parenthood.

We respect the views of people who think differently to us, trusting that our sincerely held views, grounded in faith, will also be heard and respected.

We come to this debate believing that the union of a man and a woman in marriage, open to the procreation of children, is a gift from God who created us 'male and female'. Reason also points to the truth about human sexuality that makes the relationship between a man and a woman unique. Mothers and fathers bring different, yet complementary gifts and strengths into a child's life.



Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and Archbishop Eamon Martin speaking to the media in Maynooth about the Bishops’ Conference statement on marriage.

We cannot support an amendment to the Constitution which redefines marriage and effectively places the union of two men, or two women, on a par with the marriage relationship between a husband and wife which is open to the procreation of children.



We are concerned that, should the amendment be passed, it will become increasingly difficult to speak any longer in public about marriage as being between a man and a woman. What will we be expected to teach children in school about marriage? Will those who sincerely

continue to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman be forced to act against their conscience? Can a way be found to protect the civil rights of gay people without undermining the fundamental meaning of marriage as commonly understood across cultures, faiths and down the ages?

Already, in *The Children and Family Relationships Bill*, it is proposed to remove mention of mothers and fathers from a whole raft of previous legislation.

We encourage everyone to think about these issues and to vote on May 22nd. The effects of this proposed amendment will be far-reaching for this and for future generations. We say to all voters: Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it.

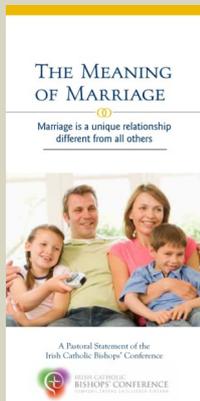
We invite people of faith to bring this decision to prayer. In the coming weeks, and particularly in May, the month of Mary, we call for prayer for Marriage and the Family.

***Statement from the Spring General Meeting  
of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference  
10 March 2015***

For more information see [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)



# The Meaning of Marriage Newsletter



## God's plan for Our Marriage and Family

As we answer God's call in our vocation in the Sacrament of Marriage to follow Christ and to serve the kingdom of God in our married life, we ask, in and through the concreteness of events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, that God will come to us, guiding us and enlightening us as we share Christ's love with one another, in our family life, at work, in our neighbourhood, in our contributions to society and in the life and worship of our parish.

Inspired by Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (51) from *The Family Prayer Book*.

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

## Bishops' Pastoral Statement *The Meaning of Marriage*

The Catholic Bishops' pastoral statement *The Meaning of Marriage* advises the faithful that "to redefine the nature of marriage would be to undermine it as the fundamental building block of our society. The Church seeks with others to reaffirm ... that marriage should be reserved for the unique and complementary relationship between a woman and a man from which the generation and upbringing of children is uniquely possible." Please read *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

## Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it

Marriage is important, and we should reflect deeply about it especially between now and May. The effects of the proposed amendment will be far-reaching for this and for future generations. We should consider these questions:

- should the amendment be passed, will it become increasingly difficult to speak in public about marriage as being between a man and a woman?
- what will we be expected to teach children in school about marriage?
- will those who sincerely continue to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman be forced to act against their conscience?
- can a way be found to protect the civil rights of people who are gay without undermining the fundamental meaning of marriage as commonly understood across cultures, faiths and down the ages?



## Protecting marriage is a matter of justice

Marriage means the union of a man and woman. A husband is a man who has a wife; a wife is a woman who has a husband. A same sex couple cannot be husband and wife. A same sex couple cannot procreate a child through the sexual act which expresses married love. Often those who call for legal recognition of same sex marriage see it as a matter of fairness, equality and civil rights. The Church holds that basic human rights must be afforded to all people. This can and should be done without sacrificing the institution of marriage and family and the fundamental role they play in society. This is not about denying civil rights but protecting and upholding the meaning of marriage.

It is a grave injustice if the State ignores the uniqueness of the role of husbands and wives, the importance of mothers and fathers in our society. Children, as they grow and mature, deserve from society a clear understanding of the importance of marriage. Without protection and support for the unique place of marriage in society, the State could, in effect, deprive children of the right to a mother and father.

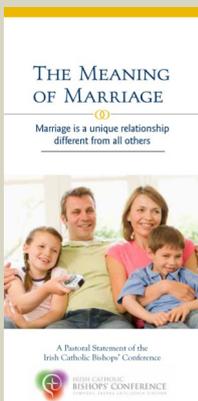
(Excerpt from *The Meaning of Marriage* pastoral statement)



"The family is the greatest treasure of any country. Let us all work to protect and strengthen this, the cornerstone of society." - Pope Francis.



# The Meaning of Marriage Newsletter



## Prayer for Married Couples

We thank you, O God, for the love you have implanted in our hearts.

May it inspire us to be kind in our words, considerate of feelings and concerned with each other's feelings and wishes.

Help us to be understanding and forgiving of human weakness and failings.

Bless our marriage, O God, with peace and happiness, and make our love fruitful for your glory and our joy both here and in eternity.

Amen

Prayer by Stephen Cummins from *The Family Prayer Book*



Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie).

## Bishops' Pastoral Statement *The Meaning of Marriage*

"As Catholics, it is not sufficient for us to talk about the importance of family. We also have a responsibility to do all that we can do to offer practical support for marriage and family in our parish communities, in our liturgies and our pastoral action and as individual members of society, through our social and political actions. In seeking to reaffirm the unique value to children and society of the mutual and complementary roles of a mother and father, we ask that the principle of equality not be undermined by applying it inappropriately to two fundamentally different types of relationship. Marriage is a unique relationship different from all others for a reason."

Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

## Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it

Marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society – all of us need to reflect deeply before changing it. Ahead of the referendum in May, bishops ask the faithful to carefully consider:

- that the union of a man and a woman in marriage, open to the procreation of children, is a gift from God who created us male and female.
- that reason points to the truth about human sexuality that makes the relationship between a man and a woman unique.
- that mothers and fathers bring different, yet complementary gifts and strengths into a child's life.
- the profound implications which this constitutional amendment would have on the family environment and on our understanding of parenthood.

## Protecting marriage is a matter of justice

"Religious and non-religious people alike have long acknowledged and know from their experience that the family, based on the marriage of a woman and a man, is the best and ideal place for children. It is a fundamental building block of society which makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the common good. It is therefore deserving of special recognition and promotion by the State.



Proposals to change the meaning of marriage effectively say to parents, children and society that the State should not, and will not, promote any normative or ideal family environment for raising children. It therefore implies that the biological bond and natural ties between a child and its mother and father have no intrinsic value for the child or for society."

(Excerpt from *The Meaning of Marriage* pastoral statement)



"We must reaffirm the right of children to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity." - Pope Francis.

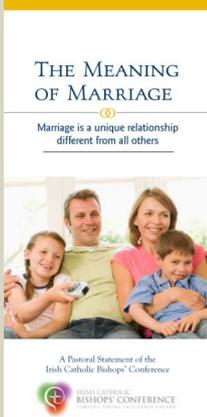


# The Meaning of Marriage

## Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 4 - Sunday 12 April 2015, Divine Mercy Sunday

### Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [catholicbishops.ie](http://catholicbishops.ie).

“The human couple has been blessed by God since the beginning to form a community of love and life, to whom the mission of procreation has been entrusted. Christian couples, by celebrating the sacrament of Marriage, indicate they are willing to honour this blessing, with the grace of Christ, for all their life.” – Pope Francis

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

### Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
In you we contemplate  
The splendour of true love,  
We turn to you with confidence.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
Make our families, also,  
Places of communion and cenacles  
of prayer,  
Authentic schools of the Gospel,  
And little domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth  
May our families never more experience  
Violence, isolation, and division:  
May anyone who was wounded or  
scandalised  
Rapidly experience consolation and  
healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
May the upcoming Synod of Bishops  
Re-awaken in all an awareness  
Of the sacred character and inviolability  
of the family,  
Its beauty in the project of God.  
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
Hear and answer our prayer.

Amen.



### Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it



Marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society - all of us need to reflect deeply before changing it. Ahead of the referendum on 22 May, bishops ask the faithful to carefully consider that:

- Married love is a unique form of love between a man and woman which has a special benefit for the whole of society.
- Our understanding of marriage is deeply rooted in all cultures: it is not intended to exclude or disadvantage anyone.
- To seek to re-define the nature of marriage would undermine it as the fundamental building block of our society.
- Marriage should be reserved for the unique and complementary relationship between a woman and a man from which the generation and upbringing of children is uniquely possible.

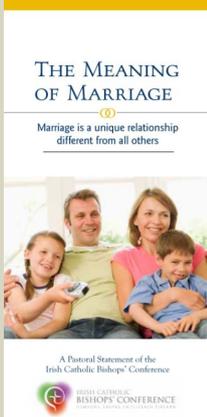


# The Meaning of Marriage

Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 5 - Sunday 19 April 2015

## Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [catholicbishops.ie](http://catholicbishops.ie).

“The family is the greatest treasure of any country. Let us all work to protect and strengthen this, the cornerstone of society.”

**Pope Francis**



Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

## Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
May the upcoming Synod of Bishops  
Re-awaken in all an awareness  
Of the sacred character and inviolability  
of the family,  
Its beauty in the project of God.  
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
Hear and answer our prayer.  
Amen.

## Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it

Marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society - all of us need to reflect deeply before changing it. Ahead of the referendum on 22 May, bishops ask the faithful to carefully consider that:

- A woman and man united in marriage are witness to God's plan for both life and love in a way unlike any other relationship of human persons.
- Central to the current debate on marriage is the very nature of marriage of itself and the importance that society places on the role of mothers and fathers in bringing up children.
- The union of marriage provides for the continuation of the human race and the development of human society.
- The proposed amendment would radically change the current protection offered to marriage by the *Constitution of Ireland* – the foundation stone of society.

## The Teaching of the Church on Marriage Today



On 19 March last Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, spoke on *The Teaching of the Church on Marriage Today*, saying, “There is something irreplaceable in that relationship between a man and a woman who commit to each other in love and who remain open to the transmission and the nurturing of human life, within an intergenerational framework which contributes to the stability of society.

“It is also true that no person exists who is not the fruit of a male and a female. Even if it were possible to clone a child, that child would still bear the genetic imprint of a male and a female. Genetic parentage is not irrelevant. Some people sadly have to spend their entire lives seeking their genetic parents: not just out of a natural emotional desire; knowledge of one's genetic make-up is important – and indeed it can be vital when planning to have children.

“We are all children of a male and a female and this must have relevance to our understanding of the way children should be nurtured and educated.”

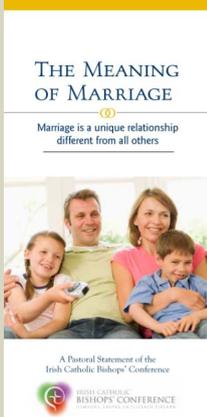


# The Meaning of Marriage

## Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 6 for 26 April 2015 – Vocations Sunday

### Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [catholicbishops.ie](http://catholicbishops.ie).

"The difference between man and woman is not for opposition, or subordination, but for communion and creation, always in the image and likeness of God."

**Pope Francis speaks at his General Audience, 15 April**

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

### Extract from the Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and  
prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic Churches. Amen.

### The procreation of children is a gift from God

Last month, after their Spring General Meeting which took place in Maynooth, the bishops of Ireland said:

We come to this debate believing that the union of a man and a woman in marriage, open to the procreation of children, is a gift from God who created us 'male and female'. Reason also points to the truth about human sexuality that makes the relationship between a man and a woman unique. Mothers and fathers bring different, yet complementary gifts and strengths into a child's life.

We cannot support an amendment to the Constitution which redefines marriage and effectively places the union of two men, or two women, on a par with the marriage relationship between a husband and wife which is open to the procreation of children.

We respect the views of people who think differently to us, trusting that our sincerely held views, grounded in faith, will also be heard and respected.

### Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it



The effects of the referendum of 22 May will be far reaching for this and for future generations. Catholic bishops are concerned that, should the amendment be passed, it will become increasingly difficult:

- to speak any longer in public about marriage as being between a man and a woman;
- to teach children in school about marriage;
- for those who sincerely continue to believe that marriage is between a man and a woman as they may be forced to act against their conscience.

Can a way be found to protect the civil rights of gay people without undermining the fundamental meaning of marriage as commonly understood across cultures, faiths and down the ages?

**For more detail please see [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie)**

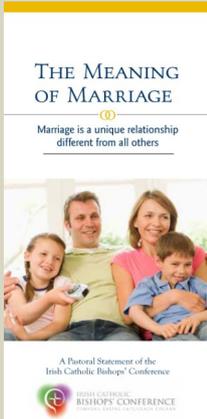


# The Meaning of Marriage

Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 7 for Sunday 3 May 2015, Fifth Sunday of Easter

## Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [catholicbishops.ie](http://catholicbishops.ie).



“The most effective witness to the blessing of

marriage is the good life of Christian spouses and their families.”

**Pope Francis,  
29 April 2015**

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

## Extract from the Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Homily Family of Nazareth

May our families never more experience

Violence, isolation and division:

May anyone who was wounded  
or scandalised

Rapidly experience consolation  
and healing. **Amen**

## Why is marriage so important?

In marriage, a woman and man promise love and fidelity to each other, for the rest of their lives. Not knowing what lies ahead they nevertheless make a commitment that they will continue to love each other whatever comes. While we know that their commitment may break down and know also the sorrow that this can bring, we also recognise that many couples live that marital commitment faithfully.

Married love provides a stable and nurturing environment, where children receive the most important and lasting education of all: how to be a member of a family and of society.

Any proposal to redefine the meaning and purpose of marriage on which the family is founded, by enabling the relationship of a same sex couple to also become a marriage, is based on the assumption that marriage - which has always been recognised as the natural, primary and fundamental unit group of society - has nothing unique about it, and on the assumption that marriage can be stripped of that social standing without obscuring its irreplaceable social role.

**From *The Meaning of Marriage* pastoral statement, see full text on [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie)**

## Marriage is important - Reflect before you change it



The following points are taken from *Marriage is important – Reflect before you change it*, the pastoral statement from the bishops of Ireland which was published after their Spring 2015 general meeting:

- We respect the views of people who think differently to us, trusting that our sincerely held views, grounded in faith, will also be heard and respected.
- Mothers and fathers bring different, yet complementary gifts and strengths into a child's life.
- We ask the people of Ireland to consider very carefully the profound implications which this constitutional amendment would have on the family environment and on our understanding of parenthood.

**For further information:**  
Online: [meaningofmarriage.ie](http://meaningofmarriage.ie)  
Twitter: @marriagesmatter  
Fb: Meaning of Marriage

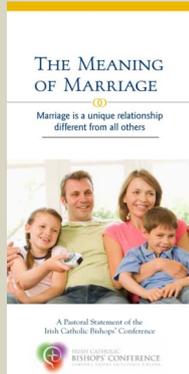


# The Meaning of Marriage

Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 8 for Sunday 10 May 2015, Sixth Sunday of Easter

## Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [meaningofmarriage.ie](http://meaningofmarriage.ie)



‘Marriage has been inscribed in creation’s design by God, and, by his grace, countless Christian men and women have lived married life fully. Marriage is an act of faith in God’s plan for humanity and an act of selfless love.’

**Pope Francis**  
**6 May 2015**

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

## Extract from the Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Holy Family of Nazareth, may the approaching Synod of Bishops make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God’s plan.  
Amen.

## Marriage is a total communion of life and of love with God of the married couple in their family life

Women and men find companionship in marriage, where they complement each other, not because they are the same but because they are different.

Their marriage is not just for themselves or for the children they may have. The family is the church in the home. The bride and groom are consecrated, and as a married couple living their vocation, they enrich the whole community, building up the Church with their love as husband and wife. In procreating and rearing children, they live the beauty of love, fatherhood and motherhood and they have the dignity of participating in God’s creative work.

As Catholics, it is not sufficient for us to talk about the importance of family. We also have a responsibility to do all that we can do to offer practical support for marriage and family in our parish communities, in our liturgies and our pastoral action and as individual members of society, through our social and political actions.

**From *The Meaning of Marriage* pastoral statement, see the full text on [meaningofmarriage.ie](http://meaningofmarriage.ie)**

Website: [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie)  
Twitter: @marriagesmatter and on FB.

## ‘Care for the Covenant of marriage’ - Archbishop Eamon Martin

How have we got ourselves into the situation that when people stand up to guard the dignity of difference between a man and woman, and speak for the traditional definition of marriage, they are often portrayed as being against freedom, or against equality? How is it that many people won’t even raise these issues in their families and workplaces for fear of being ridiculed or condemned as homophobic? Could we not expect at least some of our legislators to engage in public discussion on both sides?

**Message on the Marriage Referendum, 2 May 2015.**



## ‘Marriage in the Constitution is linked with the family’ - Archbishop Diarmuid Martin

You cannot take one article of the Constitution in isolation. Marriage is not simply about a wedding ceremony or about two people being in love with each other. Marriage, in the Constitution, is linked with the family and with a concept of family and to the mutuality of man and women which is the fundamental foundation for the family as it exists in the constitution today.

**Address to Diocesan Communications Officers, 6 May 2015.**

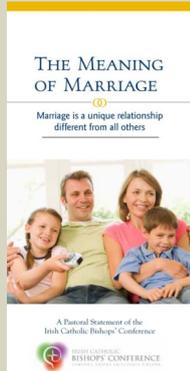


# The Meaning of Marriage

## Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Issue 9, Sunday 17 May 2015, The Ascension of the Lord and World Communications Day

### Bishops' pastoral statement: *The Meaning of Marriage*



Please read the full text of *The Meaning of Marriage* which is available in English, Irish and Polish on [meaningofmarriage.ie](http://meaningofmarriage.ie)



“The family must always be defended as the main source of fraternity, respect for others and the primary path of peace.”

**Pope Francis**  
9 May 2015

Produced by the Catholic Communications Office of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. See [www.catholicbishops.ie](http://www.catholicbishops.ie)

### Bishops' guidance on the marriage referendum

**Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference:** Marriage is of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society – all of us need to reflect deeply before changing it. We ask the people of Ireland to consider very carefully the profound implications which this constitutional amendment would have on the family environment and on our understanding of parenthood.

**Archbishop Eamon Martin:** The Church's vision for marriage and the family is based on faith and reason and it is shared by many people of all faith traditions and none. Since time immemorial, Church and State have recognised marriage to be of fundamental importance for children, mothers and fathers, and society. To interfere with the definition of marriage is not a simple or a trivial matter.

**Archbishop Diarmuid Martin:** Marriage is not simply about “two individuals who are in love”. The Christian teaching about marriage stresses the complementary relationship between male and female, which is not just a social construction. Marriage is also about a stable and loving relationship where children are generated and educated. Family is also an intergenerational reality. The stability of marriage contributes in a unique way to the stability of society. It is important in our discussions about marriage and the family in these days that people should stop for a moment and reflect carefully on what marriage and the family mean within society and on what a change in our understanding of marriage across society would entail.

For full list of bishops' statements see [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie)

**Archbishop Michael Neary:** “Are we going to be the first generation in human history to say that mothers and fathers don't matter any more in the upbringing of children?”

**Bishop Leo O'Reilly:** “I ask you to think of the wider consequences of this referendum passing. I have serious concerns about the blunt refusal to give any real guarantees regarding freedom of religion in relation to the referendum.”

**Bishop John Kirby:** “Marriage should be reserved for the unique and complementary relationship between a man and a woman from which the generation and upbringing of children is uniquely possible.”

**Bishop Ray Browne:** “The future of humanity passes by way of marriage and family”. This phrase has its origins in words spoken by Pope John Paul II. Is there anything more vital to the wellbeing of society than ‘marriage and family’?”

**Bishop Brendan Leahy:** The forthcoming Referendum is a call to Christians to rediscover the deep foundations of marriage based on the union of a man and a woman who are created to complement each other and, where possible, bring new life into the world.

**Bishop Phonsie Cullinan:** “Will the terms ‘father’ and ‘mother’ have any real meaning in the future? “

Website: [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie) Twitter: @marriagesmatter and on FB.



# The Meaning of Marriage

## Newsletter for dioceses and parishes

Family Prayers for Parish and the Home

### Prayer by Pope Francis for the Synod on the Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, In you  
we contemplate  
The splendour of true love, We  
turn to you with confidence.

Holy Family of Nazareth, Make  
our families, also, Places of  
communion and cenacles of  
prayer, Authentic schools of the  
Gospel,  
And little domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth  
May our families never more experience  
Violence, isolation, and division:  
May anyone who was wounded or scandalised  
Rapidly experience consolation and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,  
May the upcoming Synod of Bishops  
Re-awaken in all an awareness  
Of the sacred character and inviolability of the  
family, Its beauty in the project of God.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Hear and answer our  
prayer. Amen.



### Prayers of the Faithful

1. We pray for families; that they may, in the words of Pope Francis, communicate by their witness the beauty and the richness of the relationship between men and women, and between parents and children.
2. We pray for families; may they be places full of love, where all members are respected and where parents and children grow in love for one another.

Source: *Intercom* magazine

### Prayer for the Family Blessed Louis and Zélie Martin

Father in Heaven  
You called Louis and Zélie Martin to holiness  
through their married life.  
You gave them as Mother and Father to  
St. Therese of Lisieux.  
Through their intercession,  
we ask you to bless the married couples of our  
diocese/parish and those who are preparing for  
marriage.

Bless our children and our grandchildren.  
Guide us by your Holy Spirit to bear witness in  
our lives to the beauty of the Sacrament of  
Marriage.

Guide us as citizens to make the kind of decisions  
that will support family life, protect marriage  
and respect the dignity of children.

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### God's plan for our marriage and family

As we answer God's call in  
our vocation in the  
Sacrament of Marriage to  
follow Christ and to  
serve the kingdom of God in our married  
life, we ask, in and through the concreteness  
of events, problems, difficulties and  
circumstances of everyday life, that God will  
come to us, guiding us and enlightening us as  
we share Christ's love with one another, in our  
family life, at work, in our neighbourhood, in  
our contributions to society and in the life and  
worship of our parish.

AMEN

Inspired by John Paul II, *Familiaris  
Consortio* (51), from *The Family Prayer Book*



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the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.  
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