



# “The Heart of the Deepest Truth”

## Consultative Document: Marriage and the Family

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### Table of Contents

#### Marriage and the Family: A Consultative Document

##### Foreword

##### Introducing the Theme

##### 1. The Panorama

###### A. Economic Factors

###### B. Social Factors

###### C. Relationship Problems

##### 2. Some Aspects of the Church's Teaching on Marriage and the Family

###### A. Marriage

###### B. The Family

###### C. Particular Issues

##### 3. The Pastoral Response

###### A. The Family Apostolate

###### B. Needs Of The Family

###### C. Church Initiatives

### Foreword

In October 1980 the International Synod of Bishops will discuss family life. To prepare for that meeting the Synod has already published a preliminary working paper to discover the reactions of Bishops' Conferences throughout the world. Consequently the bishops have decided to seek the views, experience and findings of people in England and Wales, particularly those with experience of marriage, and of those clergy and laity who have made special study of the many aspects of marriage and family life today.

This, then, is not a teaching document; instead its modest purpose is to focus attention on the questions already proposed by the Synod's preparatory working paper. As it happens, many of these issues are already being discussed in preparation for the National Pastoral Congress in May 1980. The questions raised by the Synod are in some ways wider and more fundamental, and will, of course, prove to be of importance for the Congress itself. The bishops, however, have to respond to the Synod consultation by the end of this year, so the enquiry must be made now; the results will further the Congress discussions in the spring.

This consultative document on Marriage and the Family has been produced by a small committee of three

priests expressly mandated by the Standing Committee of the Bishops' Conference. The bishops have agreed to its publication. The document draws upon three existing papers: the Synod's preparatory working paper, "The Role of the Family in the Modern World"; a statement on Marriage and the Family, which is an unpublished paper by the Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland; and a Report on Marriage and Family Life prepared for the Archdiocese of Liverpool. The purposes of those three documents were quite different; they each drew upon different backgrounds, expertise and consultation. This present paper has kept the structure of the Synod document and some of its content, but has attempted to present material in a way that should prove more relevant to the national situation in England and Wales.

## Introducing the Theme

1. Home, family, weddings, children. For most people these are words which evoke images of warmth and security. People respond positively because most of them had parents who loved one another and their children; many people have grown up taking for granted affection and acceptance within the family circle; many, too, are still finding happiness with the person they married. Most people have their roots in marriage and a family; here they have learned to live, love and relate; here, too, people learn values and acquire attitudes which shape their lives.

2. Yet in Britain today many institutions, marriage included, are experiencing rapid change and face a considerable crisis. For instance, people are getting married with higher expectations of personal fulfilment than ever before. Many still confidently anticipate a greater standard of material comfort than previous generations could have imagined. Yet never before have married couples and families faced such an alliance of difficulties and influences which threaten the wellbeing and the very existence of family life. There are, however, signs of a reaction. Public concern about marriage is growing both in society at large and in the Church. People and governments are beginning to realise that the health and wellbeing of the family is directly related to the health and wellbeing of society as a whole.

3. The document is divided into three sections. The first begins with an attempt to build a picture of where marriage and the family stand today in our society. Without being a detailed sociological study, it tries to list some of the positive and some of the negative influences. It aims at encouraging people to contribute their understanding and experience of the present position. This is to help the Church to present its teaching mission more effectively and to establish pastoral priorities. The second sets out some aspects of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family. It puts forward an expression of the Christian vision and asks whether this provides sufficient inspiration at the present time. The third section looks at the responsibilities and opportunities for Christian families today and then asks what needs to be done to strengthen family life and to equip the members of every family to meet these responsibilities to each other and to society.

4. Although some questions are included in the body of the text, there are formal questions concluding each section. It would help the consultation to be truly effective if answers to these questions could be sent, before December 15th, 1979, to Mgr G.R. Leonard, The Synod Secretariat, Archbishop's House, Westminster. London SW1P 1QJ.

## 1. The Panorama

5. Ever since records have been kept, men and women have constantly complained about declining standards and prophesied the inevitable disintegration of society. Marriage and the family have not escaped this criticism. Yet a panorama of the actual situation in Britain today would reveal a range of exciting and enriching developments in marriage as well as the better-publicised negative factors.

6. A panorama of domestic life today would surely show an unprecedented rise in real living standards generally throughout society. Despite the uncertainties and the hardships caused by unemployment and a stagnant economy, it would still be possible to demonstrate such improvements by pointing to better housing in general, better health care, better sanitation, better clothing and furnishing, and to wider ownership of motor cars, of labour-saving domestic appliances, of televisions, radios and telephones. Most people now travel at home or abroad, have wider leisure pursuits, can enjoy - live or through every kind of mass medium - the finest music, drama and artistic expression. It is easier to gain access to information of all kinds. Civic amenities are more plentiful. There is greater awareness of the need to conserve our countryside and our environment and to offer it for public enjoyment and recreation. Schools are more modern, better-equipped. Social mobility

has been increased by the spread of higher education. Mothers-to-be can receive better pre-natal care; infant mortality has been reduced; the great plagues of childhood, like diphtheria, scarlet fever, polio and TB, have largely been conquered. People live longer and benefit from the enormous advances made in medicine. The social services, introduced after the Second World War, have secured for everyone protection against the worst hardships of poverty, Reforming legislation has improved industrial safety and conditions at work. There is more security of employment and more consumer protection.

7. It is also important to highlight the advances towards equality made by women; the improved understanding of human psychology and human sexuality; the deeper knowledge of the patterns of child development and care. These advances, still in progress, are changing the emotional texture of married and family life. There is greater companionship and equality and so less domination, increased understanding and more sensitivity in the complex of relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children. It is at least arguable that there is more tolerance and humanity in family life than was common before. It is important to remember that, despite all the difficulties which beset married life today, the majority of marriages in the country and within the Catholic community do not break down. Most people are dedicated to their partners and to their families and they gradually deepen their commitment and love. Most, too, enjoy the rich love and satisfaction of a happy married and family life. Their experience can be a great sustaining influence within the community; it can create an atmosphere of stability and be of immense service to young people embarking on married life and to those whose marriages have run into problems.

8. It is not difficult to point to disadvantages which offset these advances. There are also new and sometimes sinister influences at work, dedicated to the destruction of the family as we have known it and to the overthrow of Christian values. There is the less conscious but highly pervasive influence of modern materialism, consumerism and indifference to spiritual realities. So obvious are these factors and so powerful their combined impact that many claim to detect a major movement of influences hostile to the stability and happiness of marriage and family life. They can lead to disillusion among older people and to cynicism among the young. Perhaps they can be described under four headings: economic difficulties, social factors, relationship problems and religious difficulties.

## A. Economic Factors

9. Despite a general improvement in standards, housing provides particular problems for family life especially in urban areas. Often the quality of the housing makes it impossible for members of a family to maintain that minimum of 'private space' which human beings need. Private rented accommodation has become virtually unobtainable. Council housing estates, while offering the chance of reasonable standards, have never overcome major disadvantages. They allow little or no social mix; young people growing up there have to leave the area at the time of their marriages because they cannot qualify for the housing lists. Private ownership is prohibitively expensive everywhere and there are particular problems in the South East. Mortgages are available, but create their own problems for young couples. Faced with repayments on hire-purchase of furniture and domestic fittings, and burdened with a costly mortgage, many couples feel obliged to continue in full employment whenever they are able. Recent statistics show that 75% of couples marrying between the age of 20 and 24 in 1973 were childless after two years of marriage. Economic pressures must to some extent be responsible. And the same pressures would explain why so many young mothers return so quickly to work, sometimes to the detriment of their children. It will be helpful to hear from families what their experience has been; how their lives together have been changed for better or worse when both husband and wife are in full-time employment; what effect has this had on the children; and whether economic pressures have dominated their decisions about the size of their family. Lack of an adequate living wage, especially in public services, has serious consequences -people forced to work a lot of overtime with damage to family life and with pressure on wives to go out to work.

10. But the economic and industrial situation has other effects. The 1970s have seen a sharp rise in unemployment. This has affected some parts of the country more than others, and there are no signs that this is a passing hardship. Automation and new technology pose many questions; the social benefits are to some extent a matter of faith. Chronic unemployment for the less skilled seems likely, especially in areas where heavy industry once flourished. This will affect first the larger industries. More slowly small firms and offices will begin to make use of the new technology and the resulting unemployment may well be more

drastic and widespread than anyone has yet anticipated. Certainly the effects of the new technology will not be all negative; they will however change profoundly the way we live, the way we organise society. Inevitably they will affect human relationships but in ways that can be foreseen to some extent but not yet accurately evaluated. Much, however, is now known and documented about the effect of unemployment, especially on the young who find themselves unwanted and purposeless. It is essential to find out from the families in distress just what unemployment has meant to them, to husbands and wives and to children. The family must suffer both from restricted financial resources and from psychological tensions; but how is it coping and what help does it look for?

11. Inflation, too, has become an uncomfortable and ever-present feature of British life throughout the past decade. Wage-earners and salaried staff are to some extent shielded from its excesses, but the unemployed, the pensioners and those on fixed incomes live under constant threat. Families under such strain could perhaps describe how the erosion of money value has affected them and their dependants.

12. Modern methods of production in industry have had consequences for married people and for their families. Shift work and unsocial hours affect the balance of domestic life and are not compensated for by the improved pay. Here again, families can speak for themselves and provide examples, from experience, of benefits and problems.

## B. Social Factors

13. Recent consultations in some parts of the country have revealed that many Catholics today experience a sense of distance from hitherto supportive institutions, including the Church. People's values are changing dramatically. There seem to be few fixed points of reference. Individuals, couples and families apparently seek to put their own meaning on life, to establish their own standards of behaviour. There is considerable pluralism in our society and not a little confusion; all of it noticeably reinforced by the all-pervasive mass media which certainly reflect the present situation but also help to create it. Values in sexual relationships which are often in sharp contrast to the parents' best instincts are presented persuasively to young people. Financial greed, political and ideological motivation are often behind the vivid portrayal of an alternative society. One result for the sincere Catholic is apparently a sense of isolation from the Church. There is a distance between "theory" (hopes, expectations, the teaching of the Church) and the experience of daily life in the family exposed to "the wind of change." It is often said that the Church in its official statements and in its spokesmen and clergy "doesn't understand" life as it really is and does not spend enough time making contact with ordinary people, listening to what they say and building up a day-by-day understanding with them. Is this a general feeling? Is it new? What consequences does it have within marriage and family life?

14. The changing values of society affect everyone. This is particularly true on questions concerning marriage and the family. Marital breakdown has reached epidemic proportions in Britain. The likelihood of a Catholic meeting and wanting to marry a divorced person increases all the time. There seems to be no reliable evidence to show that marriages involving one or two Catholics are any less at risk than non-Catholic marriages. The effects of such unstable marriages obviously affect every member of the broken home.

15. Greater sexual freedom coupled with a decline in religious observance and commitment has led to changes in public tolerance of sexual activity outside marriage. Pre-marital sex seems to be increasing and more young people take it for granted that they will live together before getting married. In the minds of most people, the quality of a loving relationship counts for more than mere marital status. Socially, the use of contraception is widely accepted both outside and within marriage. Outside marriage it has led to greater liberty in heterosexual activity; within marriage it has led to a substantial decline in the birth-rate and has put into the hands of married couples a measure of control over the size and timing of their family with inevitable consequences for social attitudes towards marriage and the family.

16. Throughout the past decade, therapeutic abortion has been a legal method of ending unwanted pregnancies. Contrary to the expressed intention of the legislators, the practice since 1969 has amounted, in many parts of the country and certainly in the private sector, to the provision of abortion on demand. Many see a change in public attitudes towards the unborn child and particularly towards the potentially handicapped child. Some elements in the feminist movement, in particular, profess to see the whole question as nothing more than a matter of a woman's rights over her own body: "a woman's right to choose." The consequences

of this for marriage and the family are obvious and far-reaching. Again, it could be pastorally important to find out from members of the Church how far they have discovered any change in opinion among Catholics. This is not to subject Catholic principles to the test of popular acceptability but to assess the extent of the pastoral and educational programme that will have to be mounted by the Church.

17. There are other non-moral social factors which help change the way marriage and family are lived and experienced. Throughout most of the post-war era, there has been the almost universal phenomenon of the decline of the extended family, the loss of neighbourliness and the isolation of the family unit. Total isolation is comparatively rare but young families in new towns and new housing areas seem particularly vulnerable to this form of stress. Family life, too, is lived differently -and not all the consequences are negative. But there must be anxiety that such a proportion of mothers with pre-school children are reported to be receiving regular tranquillisers from their doctors. What is behind this? What attacks a family's stability and a mother's equilibrium most persistently?

18. Again, a social factor with wide-ranging consequences for marriage and the family is that of improved medical care for the elderly. People live longer and so are together for a longer period as husband and wife after their children have grown up and left home.

19. This has an effect on the growth of marital relationships and has produced situations with which previous generations have not had to cope. Greater longevity is also linked with a falling birth-rate and Britain will face, in the not too distant future, the prospect of a smaller working population supporting a larger retired population with consequences no one can yet foresee with any certainty.

Already, since the second World War, there has been a marked tendency to ignore the benefits of the extended family. Old people are frequently left in institutions by their married children, not always by free choice, but with the inevitable consequence of the further erosion of the family unit. Will the future hold more drastic solutions?

### C. Relationship Problems

20. Besides the isolation from institutions and the Church that many couples seem to feel, and besides the social isolation experienced by many young couples, there is a more hidden isolation within marriage itself which intensifies stress and loneliness. Often husband and wife have not learned to work as a team. Sometimes major decisions and whole areas of concern are left to one partner. Perhaps it is the care of the children, their schooling or their religious formation and upbringing. Perhaps it is finance or perhaps it is the immensely more difficult and sensitive area of birth regulation and responsible parenthood. In this way, an essential element in a successful marriage relationship is being lost.

21. Often a lack of communication which begins in one area of shared life spreads throughout the whole married relationship. It is clear that difficulties in expressing the sexual aspect of the marriage relationship have their origin in an initial breakdown in verbal communication. And once there is such a breakdown, partners seek, or return to, alternative sources of understanding. These can be many and some are illusory; drink and the companionship of the public house, bingo, over-involvement in other activities or a return to the parental home. Further, this breakdown of communications sometimes gives rise to marital violence -affecting both men and women. Such violence involves all levels of society, is verbal as well as physical and emotional, is complex in its origin and often hidden in its manifestations. It can cause harm to either parent or it can focus on a child.

22. Excessive drinking, gambling, and reckless unfaithfulness are not only morally evil, but they also reveal immaturity in the individual, an incapacity to accept the responsibilities and problems of daily living. Marriage and the demands of family place quite heavy burdens on the shoulders of people, sometimes unwilling, and sometimes incapable, of carrying them. It would be useful if people would describe from their own experience what are the principal obstacles to a growing relationship in marriage. It is important to stress the idea of growth in relationship. Married couples do not enter a static partnership when they marry. They agree to share their lives and, as life goes on, they each change in themselves and in their attitudes, needs and potential. Each stage of married life has its characteristics - the first period of adaption to each other, the joys and anxieties of early parenthood, the period, longer than ever before, when the couples are left to themselves as the children move away and marry. The emphasis today is on the quality of a couple's personal relationship and fulfilment.



## D. Religious Difficulties

23. In England and Wales the post-War years have seen a decline in religious prejudice, at least in its more virulent form. There is still, at popular level, a considerable amount of unacknowledged anti-Catholicism and this is most often encountered among those who have themselves no active church membership. There has been an erosion of church membership and churchgoing among the general public. Among committed Christians, there has been a remarkable growth of ecumenical friendship and co-operation; some claim that the point has now been reached when they are face to face with the more intractable problems of doctrinal incompatibility. Side by side with these developments has come the change in teaching methods in school which has in turn influenced the teaching of religion. These and many other elements are among those which are changing the religious atmosphere of marriage and the family. No doubt wider consultation will bring to light other factors.

24. There are many marriages between Catholics and those who belong to other churches or who are uncommitted. It would seem that a growing number of so called "mixed marriages" are to unbaptised people or to Christians whose link with the Church of their baptism is more or less nominal. This brings particular problems, not so much of bigotry but of indifference. The Catholic partner may, unfortunately, succumb to religious and spiritual apathy but, even with faith, determination and perseverance, has nearly always to take over single-handed the religious formation and education of the children. There are, of course, many examples of non-Catholics who have more than kept the letter of their marriage promises in the religious field, but the majority would seem to adopt an attitude that can best be described as polite neutrality.

25. In the rarer examples of marriage between committed Christian of different churches, the problems are more sensitive and complex and have been dealt with extensively in official reports.

26. Family religious life has been exposed to the changes in religious education in the schools. Many parents express concern and confusion at the methods of modern catechetics. To them, at least it would seem that old certainties, well-tried devotional practices and clear-cut moral attitudes are no longer handed on to their children. Competent teachers of religion naturally have answers and can point to enormous and welcome advances, but the fact of confusion persists. Here, yet again, it is important to know what is happening and how best the Church can adapt its strategy to build up a deeper understanding of religious education, better co-operation with families and a better service to parents who care profoundly about the spiritual growth of themselves and their children.

## QUESTIONS

*Nos. 1-3 are for married people or engaged couples.*

*Nos. 4-5 are for the married as well but the knowledge and experience of priests and other experts would be most helpful.*

*No. 6 is for everyone.*

- 1. What social, religious or economic factors have hindered or helped the working out of your marriage?*
- 2. In your marriage and family what have been the principal successes? joys? sorrows? frustrations?*
- 3. If you are not yet married, what preparations are you making or would you like to make to prepare for your eventual marriage?*
- 4. Can you identify special problems in developing healthy relationships within marriage and the family?*
- 5. How do you see marriage and the family generally in Britain today?*
- 6. What elements in the present situation of marriage and family life in Britain do you consider important enough for your bishops to bring to the Synod next year.?*

## 2. Some Aspects of the Church's Teaching on Marriage and the Family

27. Weddings still retain that special sense of occasion. In a world often cynical about romance a wedding can usually bring to some tears of joy, to most warmth and an attitude of goodwill and, to the couple themselves, an often unexpressed longing for a new beginning and a great hope for the future.

28. Although Christian marriages begin for the most part in a church, it is not always to the Church that people look to articulate for them their deepest hopes and aspirations. They believe they love each other and want to share their lives and have their family together. They tend to think of the Church more as guardian of marriage integrity and stern defender of marriage vows. But the Christian teaching on marriage, properly understood, gives meaning to their human experience and deepens their understanding of their often confused hopes and dreams. The Word of God and the wisdom of Christian tradition offer an interpretation of reality, or, better, a vision that explains and enriches human living and experience. Married people and families cannot, of course, live their lives consciously at this level of idealism and intensity. Most experience some disappointment in married life and would admit to partial failure and inadequacy. Yet forgiveness and healing are always possible. The Christian vision should continue to be the "ideal that inspires life-long effort by married people everywhere. It should never be dismissed as unrealistic.

### A. Marriage

29. The Church's teaching on marriage is still developing. Growth does not imply rejection of past doctrines but a deeper, wider understanding of them. This is not the place to set out the full teaching of the Church; all of it forms a background to our consultation. The purpose of this section is not to teach but to ask whether these or perhaps other aspects of theological thinking on marriage will prove particularly useful in developing a clearer and more authentic vision of Christian marriage and family among Catholics today. There are two ideas which can be explored to help people think about the teaching of the Church on marriage: the first is the idea of covenant, the second that of love. Naturally enough, the two are intimately linked.

#### *i) The Covenant*

30. People have always understood that they cannot survive without each other. Most of all, men and women need each other as partners and parents. They need to fulfil their deepest longings for love and they need a secure home in which to rear their children. And again people have always looked beyond their own immediate needs; they have always acknowledged the mystery of the infinite and, conscious of degradation and misery, have looked beyond for a redeemer, for a God who will save, guide and protect.

31. From the beginning of time people have realised that they are dependent on each other and on divine power and have looked for a whole series of alliances and relationships to secure their lives and to safeguard their welfare. For most of human history, writing was a rare and sacred skill, and solemn agreements and human pacts with God have been sealed by the spoken word. The word, once uttered, could not be unspoken or retracted. A covenant, then, was a solemn ritual agreement which served the function of a written contract. This is an important idea because it runs through the whole of the Bible and is used to describe the reality of marriage.

32. In the Old Testament, we constantly meet examples of covenants. Individuals and tribes entered covenants. The alliance of God with His people is always described in terms of covenant. It is an idea which has come down to the present day. At every Mass the priest at the Consecration over the chalice says: 'This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant.'

33. To enter a covenant is only a beginning. For the covenant to endure in any real sense people need a whole range of human qualities such as truthfulness, sincerity and trustworthiness. They also need to be psychologically mature people, capable of responsible commitment. The implications for all human relationships are obvious but are crucial for marriage.

34. The most important of all human relationships is the exclusive and definitive covenant that is made between a man and a woman to establish both marriage and a family. The Church uses the language of covenant to describe the reality of marriage. Its proposed Code of Canon Law says marriage is: "a covenant by which men and women establish a community of life and love, directed to the good of the spouses and to

the procreation and education of children.” The Second Vatican Council spoke of marriage as “rooted in the contract of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent” (Gaudium et Spes n. 48)

35. The longing for marriage and family is a universal human reality. At the root of this desire is human sexuality and the need that men and women have for each other in order to achieve completeness and fulfilment. From the beginning this was part of God’s plan for mankind. As Genesis clearly tells us: “God saw that it was good.” Sin brought disorientation into this human desire, but here too grace has more than repaired the damage. In the Christian scheme of things, human love, marriage and the family have become signs of grace. Marriage is a covenant sealed by free consent at the time of a wedding but lived increasingly throughout the duration of the marriage by renewed self-giving and by mutual acceptance. It is a covenant which establishes a new reality in the sight of God, of husband and wife and society. Through it a whole new complex of relationships comes into being as well as a new sharing. An essential element of marriage is the desire and the intention of entering from the start a permanent, irrevocable covenant.

36. The union which arises from a covenant is total; it pervades every aspect of human personality “through everything ... in spirit, in soul, in body” (1 Thess. 5. 23). It involves more than the couple because their love produces those sons and daughters who become part of that totality and who owe their lives to the covenanted union of their parents. Out of this totality comes a bond which cannot be severed by human decree or set aside by human choice. Any violation of this covenant not only destroys a pledge freely offered and accepted, but it wounds a partner who has built a life on trust in the other’s marriage vow. Married people struggle throughout life to make real this total union implicit in their covenant.

37. Throughout the whole history of salvation, the marriage covenant has been understood and explained first in the context of the covenant between God the creator and the People of Israel and then in the context of the covenant between Christ and his Church. This is no mere allegory; it is reality; it is communion and loving union between God and mankind.

## *ii) Love*

38. At the heart of the Christian understanding of creation is the truth that man is made “in the image and likeness of God” (Gen. 1). Human beings, more than any other part of creation, reflect the nature of God, for the mind and heart of each person is a created sharing in the divine intelligence and the divine will. When a person’s life is formed as fully as possible by a generous love, then Christians believe that the image of God is to be seen more fully in that person. A person, moved by love, will have a perception in judgement, a gentleness in manner and a generosity in action especially towards the loved one that will be recognised by those around as ‘inspired’. St Paul proclaims that the uniqueness of this quality in his great hymn to love in the first letter to the Corinthians. (Chapter 13. 1-13).

39. It is in Christ that the fullness of God is revealed. In Christ, love finds its full expression and God is perfectly present. As the Bible teaches us, Christ demonstrated the perfect love of God for His people by dying for us “while we were still sinners” (Rom. 5.8). He laid down his life for us, and this is the fullest expression of love for man (John 15.13). It is in the death of Christ, in His supreme sacrifice, that God is at work “reconciling all things to Himself” (Eph. 2. 14-15) proclaiming the power of love over all enemies (1 Cor. 15,26). It is this example of the perfect love of Christ that is constantly put before people as an inspiration and ideal for life. More explicitly, it is this self-giving love which Christ has for man which is the model for the love which must inspire every marriage. “Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her.” (Eph. 5.25) Nothing less than this total dedication and generosity would satisfy the full implications of St Paul’s vision of married love, for just as Christ loves his body, the Church, so must a man and wife love each other as one body, never hating it but feeding it and looking after it in every way. (Eph. 5. 29-32).

40. But Christian teaching does not stop there. Not only does it uphold the love of God in Christ as our model and inspiration, it also proclaims that in striving to love each other generously, husband and wife make real a love which is not merely their own but is the very love of God present and active in their lives. It is God who is the source of all life and love, and the Church teaches that when two baptised Christians commit themselves to each other as husband and wife, then we can be certain that it is God who is forming their love and it is He who will sustain it. Formed by this revelation of the true nature of love, the Church has come to look upon marriage not only as a secular reality but as a sacrament.



41. Christian married love, then, is a unique sharing in the life of God. A unique consecration becomes possible as the Christian married couple are made holy through their love for each other in Christ. The daily struggle to develop their relationship is an attempt not simply to make their love grow but also to make the love of God a living reality for each other, for their families and for those around them. The sanctification and salvation of each partner is part of the undertaking of marriage.

42. This growth in love is not something that happens automatically. It calls for real and sustained effort. It demands self-discipline, sensitivity and imagination. It needs an effort on both sides to understand the psychology, and strengths and the weakness of the other. It calls for an attentive listening and responding to the messages sent by the body, mind, feelings and spirit of one's partner. But in all this effort, Christians can be inspired by the vision that they are personally involved in the saving mystery of God's love and are aided by the real presence of God's grace at every moment.

43. It is certain that the presence of love transforms the meaning of sex into a language of generosity, care and commitment to the other person. The Catholic vision of marriage as a sacrament sees married love as an actual sharing in the love of God; it gives richer meaning to sexual love, revealing it to be one of the most powerful and noble ways of co-operating with the Creator and furthering the work of salvation.

44. The very nature of the love of Christian marriage makes many demands. Married love seen in this light knows nothing about half measures, about half-hearted commitment, about conditional giving. In marriage, each partner gives of his or her self to the other and accepts a similar gift of self from the other. This giving in love knows no limit of time, brooks no holding back. The Church teaches, therefore, that this love by its nature cries out for permanence, for a lifelong commitment. What the Second Vatican Council called "the plague of divorce" makes a mockery of the real nature of marriage.

45. The unconditional gift of self in married love demands an exclusive and faithful commitment to a single partner. The Church consistently teaches that these are the true qualities of married love. Fidelity in marriage is nothing less than an echo of God's faithfulness in love. Adultery is a betrayal, a distortion of married love; it is, at the same time, a profound injustice to those partners who have given all and been cheated of that love which is theirs by right.

46. Married love is essentially creative. When a couple love each other, they positively sustain, heal and cause the other to grow. But their shared love also leads to life, the new life of other individuals. Parenthood in marriage is God's gift. The Second Vatican Council tells us that "children are the supreme gift of marriage" and that "they are the crowning glory of married love" (*Gaudium et Spes* nn. 50, 48). Parenthood is a real, and privileged, sharing in God's creative love. It is a sacramental moment when human beings help fashion another individual of unlimited value and dignity, another child of God. To exclude positively any possibility of such a sharing is contrary to the nature of married love; it is another example of conditional love. It is false to the nature of true marriage.

## **B. The Family**

47. It is in marriage and the family that foundations are laid of life and of faith. The inner realities celebrated in all other sacraments are first experienced to some extent in the family: here new life is consecrated to God; here there is affirmation and daily confirmation; here there is forgiveness in failure; here there is prayer and care for the sick; here there is the dedication and consecration of life and home to God; here there is the care and faith that surround death. When the focus is on the family, then it must inevitably concern the children. The preceding part of this section concentrated on the love of husband and wife. Here it is necessary to expand the point made that married love of its nature is linked with the creation of new life.

48. Married love is not simply about generation; married love must bring a child to life in every sense of the word. In that love, husband and wife co-operate with God not only in procreation of new life but also in the education and formation of that young person throughout, roughly, the first two decades of life.

49. It is important that we should have a vision of parenthood as a sharing in the creativity of God. Parents -in the fullest sense -bring their child to life; they give birth but then they help their child progressively realise all its potential, awaking its sensitivities, gently bring it to God.

50. The family is the spring of holiness for children. Parents bring their children to the sacrament of baptism, thus making them children of God and members of the Church. Then, ideally, they receive from their parents a sense of being loved, the gradual awareness of beauty, of their own worth and the first glimmerings of the Gospel. They are helped as time passes to discover and pursue their own vocation in life and to take their place among God's people. Parents foster healthy growth in their children by creating an atmosphere in which there is love and devotion for God and towards other people.

51. Intimate family life provides many opportunities for recollection and communicating with God. The days that have to be accounted for before God begin and end within the family circle. The food given by God's bounty is eaten at the family table. Joys, sorrows, worries and plans are talked about and shared by the family. Everything can and should be referred to the glory of God either in prayers of thanksgiving or in prayers of petition. Within the family, children form their first idea of God's fatherhood, building their first relationship with Him. Within the family, too, parents share in the love of a caring Father and of a redeeming Christ and so continue to grow.

52. If the grace of the Spirit, promised in the sacrament of matrimony, is really present, then within the family all personal relationships can flourish. Parents, too, will grow as they also receive from their children new life and new depth.

53. If all of this sanctifying and grace-filled life of the family is fully appreciated, then there can be no surprise that the Second Vatican Council described the family as "the domestic Church". In a spontaneous, creative way God is truly present and at work in every activity of the family. In the family there is authentic worship; within the family, in the last analysis, every member is prepared for that ultimate triumph of Christian hope, the passage through death to life unending.

54. Traditionally, Christians have derived religious inspiration from the fact that Jesus Christ, God made man, was born into a human family and spent most of his life in Nazareth as the village carpenter, learning his trade from Joseph and living in so ordinary a way that neighbours and townspeople were scandalised when he embarked on the brief years of his public ministry. Christians have seen the intimate family relationship of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as preeminently the model for their own family life. It is possible to catch glimpses of the Holy Family in the Gospels. The Annunciation, Visitation, the journey to Bethlehem and the events surrounding Christ's birth there, his circumcision, his being found in the Temple when twelve years old, the wedding feast at Cana all these draw back the veil for tantalising moments. Perhaps, too, the domestic imagery of some of the parables draws on Jesus' childhood experiences. Certainly his last conscious thought was for his mother, when he handed her into the care of John, her adopted son; the family was to continue.

55. What is known of the Holy Family teaches Christians a great deal about the sanctity of ordinary things and of the daily round. It teaches humility, obedience, concern for the family, the spirit of service. It shows how the family can be the school of love. Surely the human qualities of Christ, his sensitivity, compassion and openness must have come to maturity within that ideal family circle. It was there that, as St Luke recalls: "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and men."

### C. Particular Issues

56. There are certain contemporary problems affecting marriage and the family. This is no place for a detailed and comprehensive treatment of them; they have been treated elsewhere but are included here in brief to round out the picture of the major elements of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family.

57. One of the responsibilities of parents is to decide together when they would wish to have children and how many. The decision is theirs but it must be taken seriously and before God. Responsible parenthood is founded on responsible love and on mutual respect for human dignity. The planning of one's family is good and praiseworthy. The Church's concern is to form an upright and mature conscience in husband and wife so that they can plan their family in a fully human and Christian manner.

58. But it is important to clear up some of the present confusion about the meaning of the word "conscience"; it is not to be confused with personal inclination, preference or with psychological states of unconcern or anxiety. A judgement can be warped by ignorance, haste, fear and other factors. We are always less likely to

choose what will cause hardship for ourselves or for others. A clear explanation of conscience was provided some years' ago when the Bishops of England and Wales published a "Statement concerning Moral Issues". This is what they said: "In particular instances the Christian must make his own responsible judgement. The more his life is modelled on the life of Christ the more likely he will be to make right judgements in the sight of God. Conscience implies the making of such a judgement. Like every other judgement, its correctness will depend on the information on which it is based and the objectivity with which it is made. It is our duty to follow conscience but it is equally our duty to make sure that conscience has the necessary information to guide us. That is what we mean by an informed conscience. A false conscience will lead us astray.

"What information has a man to go on when making a conscientious decision?"

"First: the example of Christ, the principles he gave, the life he led.

"Second: the experience of the Christian community from the time of Christ to the present day. We believe Christ is with his Church and never ceases to guide and enlighten it.

"Third: the guidance and authoritative teaching of the successors of the Apostles and especially of Peter.

"Insight into the teaching of Christ grows through time as members of his Church live the Christian life. We call this the development of doctrine. It is clear that human intelligence will start to work on any body of truth it receives, comparing, deducing, speculating, probing deeper and deeper. God gave us our intelligence. He gave us his revelation in Christ. It is God's will we should explore and develop it.

"But how can we guarantee that our conclusions are truly a development and not a distortion? Precisely to safeguard against distortion Christ gave particular teaching authority to his Apostles, to Peter and their successors: 'He that heareth you heareth me'; 'Feed my lambs, feed my sheep'; 'Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven'; 'Going, teach all nations ... I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world'. These words cannot be ignored."

59. The upright Christian conscience can happily accept the necessity of a responsible approach by a married couple to the question of the size of a family and the appropriate spacing of children. The agonising problem is over the morality of the means used by the couple to achieve their purpose. This is a delicate and deeply personal problem for many couples. It has caused serious and continuing suffering for some. At the heart of the difficulty is the fact that responsible parenthood -by definition - involves conscientious decisions by both husband and wife and disagreement at this point can call into question family unity, mutual tolerance and, at worst, the continued existence of the marriage. Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*, insisted that, whatever the difficulties, married people should not lose heart, but always keep in touch with God's grace, especially in the sacrament of Penance (H.V. no. 25). These delicate moral issues, touching on the most significant, sacred and creative moments of married love, are matters for discussion between husband and wife, for prudent advice, for quiet reflection on the Church's teaching and for prayer.

60. In the controversy that followed *Humanae Vitae*, the Pope's appeal to theologians, scientists and to doctors was often overlooked. It is necessary to explore further the field of human sexuality and to see how science and improved knowledge can help solve marriage problems.

61. It is clear that contraception by itself has not solved those problems in society at large nor has it led to happier, more stable, more fulfilled marriages. This may well be because many people today lack an integrated vision of sexuality and marriage, and so contraception can easily enable them to use their sexuality for short-term satisfaction and in temporary relationships. It is urgently necessary that Catholics fashion a deeper, more compelling vision of the place of human sexuality in the whole of life and that they intensify their efforts to discover healthy, moral and safe ways of planning their families.

62. It is crucial that Catholics do not trivialise the question by dismissing it as irrelevant; in fact it lies at the heart of family life. Nor should they think it to be unimportant; it is instead about the well-spring of human life; it is about human sharing in God's act of creation. Nor must it be thought of as morally indifferent; on the contrary it colours the attitude of people to each other; it is about human dignity and relationships.

63. A further special problem which affects marriage and family life in Britain today is that of therapeutic abortion. The Catholic Church is, and must always be, unyielding in its defence of the sanctity of human life from conception to the grave. There are Christians from other churches who do not share our conviction that a developing human being in the womb is precious from the start of its growth and enjoys a right to life that no other human being can revoke. The present legislation in this country is a disgrace and an affront to the conscience. It has nurtured a growing insensitivity to the absolute value of human life. Many see it as paving the way for another attack on human rights, as preparing public opinion for the introduction of voluntary euthanasia.

64. Both abortion and euthanasia are evil. They degrade the individual to the level of disposable object; they usurp the power of God over life and death. The Christian response should be to develop a consistent vision of the sanctity of all human life and a sensitivity towards every aspect of human dignity.

65. Thirdly, the Church's teaching on marriage and the family ought to offer consolation, strength and support for those who are bereaved or deserted - for those who suffer the loss of the loved one and face the prospect of loneliness and hardship. There is a deep and almost inevitable sense of loss that accompanies the rupture of an intimate relationship. When that loss is caused by death, the wound is deep but the grief is itself an expression of loving. Children may be deprived of father or mother, but again that sense of loss is softened by the thought that there was no rejection, no voluntary departure. There can and should be an abiding sense of relationship, of union. In a sense, the bereaved family can draw strength from the fact of the communion of saints, from the Catholic truth that its separated family is no divided family.

66. Those who have been deserted or who have felt that they had to leave an intolerable marriage will, perhaps, find it harder to react positively. Added to the sense of loss is the sense of rejection, perhaps of failure, perhaps of being treated cruelly and unjustly. In a sense this is the most bitter pain. But despite the agony, the deserted or abused spouse has a calling to witness to a value; in the Christian idea of the Covenant the word once spoken should never be unspoken or withdrawn. Love once given is a gift for ever. The lonely partner is still committed to a love that is no longer returned. Many have shown great heroism as they have struggled to witness to their belief in the indissolubility of marriage.

67. There are Catholics who have found it impossible to remain alone for the rest of their lives and have entered second marriages without the blessing of the Church. Some have made a stable and loving union; many have children; all have certain responsibilities towards their new partners. Catholics usually know the Church's teaching on divorce and re-marriage. Some suffer greatly from the sense that they are alienated from the Church.

68. In fact, of course, the Church cares about each individual with the unswerving love of Christ himself. Sometimes the marriage problem can be solved by the Church's tribunals. Catholics in marriage difficulties should always seek early advice and guidance from experts. Each case calls for compassionate and informed help. But there will be Catholics - either divorced themselves or married to people who have been divorced - who find themselves unable normally to seek absolution and receive Holy Communion because of their invalid union. Many interpret this as meaning that in every sense they are cut off from the Church. In fact the reverse is true. More than others they need devoted and constant pastoral care from the Church in their difficult situation. They may not normally be able to receive Holy Communion but many means of grace are still open to them and Christ can be present to them in a very real if non-sacramental way. They should be encouraged to take part in the celebration of the Mass each Sunday and Holyday: family prayer and the regular reading of the Scripture will help them to grow in knowledge and love of God. It is important for them to realise that so far as they can they are to live a good Christian life. The children should be sent to Catholic schools, parents being reminded that they still carry the responsibility of bringing up their children in the knowledge and practice of the faith. All in all, priests should remain in touch with Catholics in these situations and try never to lose heart. Certainly the sacraments may be given in danger of death, but that should be the climax of much untiring pastoral care and not a desperate last minute remedy.

69. Both bereavement and marital breakdown bring suffering and lead those who suffer into their own Gethsemane. The Cross is no logical solution. It is the mystery of absolute love; it is the key to everlasting life. When people accept the inevitable pain of their situation, faith and fidelity will bring them ultimately to the God of all consolation.

## QUESTIONS

Questions 5-6 will be of special importance for priests.

1. Have you ever thought of your marriage in the light of the Church's teaching as described in this section? When you were approaching marriage, how much did you know about the teaching of the Church on marriage and the family? Where did you learn of that teaching?
2. In approaching your wedding, did you -or do you -see that the Church's teaching has any relevance to you and your partner?
3. What aspects of the teaching of the Church have you found to be a help or a hindrance in your marriage?
4. Have you found that your religion has nourished your home and family life?
5. Has anything important been missed in this account of the Church's teaching on marriage and the family?
6. When your bishops go to the Synod, what aspects of the Church's teaching on marriage should they lay special stress on as being most helpful and enriching?

## 3. The Pastoral Response

70. The bishops of the Church said at the Second Vatican Council: "The Creator of all made the married state the beginning and the foundation of human society; by His grace he has made of it, too, a great mystery in Christ and in the Church (d. Eph. 5,32), and so the apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for both Church and civil society" (Decree on Laity n. 11).

71. In this section we look firstly at the ways in which a family exercises this apostolate. Secondly, after our general survey of some of the features of our present situation in Britain, we look at the needs a family has if it is to develop and if it is to carry out its apostolate. And thirdly we discuss some initiatives the Church can undertake to meet these needs. The section has deliberately been kept short. It is suggestive rather than exhaustive. It should stimulate local response.

### A. The Family Apostolate

72. Members of any family are usually unaware of the influence each has on the others and of how the family can relate more effectively beyond its inner circle and to society in general. In looking briefly at the role of the family, it may be useful to consider first parents and children, then the wider family and thirdly the role of the family in the local community.

#### *i. The nuclear family*

73. The Synod preparatory paper discusses the role of the family under three headings which may be unfamiliar. It suggests that the family, like the Church itself and like every baptised Christian, has a threefold mission - as prophet, priest and king. What does this mean? First, that every Christian family has a prophetic mission to its own members: - prophetic in the sense that it should seek to witness in word and action to the revealed truth about God and man. This is another way of saying that the family has to see to the total education of the children, awakening their intellect and sensibilities, leading them into a knowledge of God's revelation, helping them to form authentic values and ideals. Secondly, the family has a priestly or a sanctifying role - which is another way of saying that a family should help each member, whether parent or child, to achieve holiness and form a living relationship with God. Thirdly, the family has a kingly role which means that it should bring order and stability into the lives of its members so as to allow them the greatest possible scope for personal development and happiness.

74. The development of a happy family life through the relationships of husband, wife and children absorbs the greater part of married people's energies and emotions. It is then all the more important to see this as an apostolate in which God is already being served and his commandments fulfilled. In the tasks which make up the daily round of a home, people achieve their salvation and in fact lay the basis of a stable and hopeful society.



## *ii. The extended family*

75. For most people in Britain today, the word “family” has come to mean simply father, mother and one or two children. Tensions and problems are heightened when the drama is played out on such a confined stage. Restricted responsibilities have usually released resources to cater for every material need of these “chosen few”. It is very easy to become self-centred and demanding when brought up as the focus of such parental concern. It is difficult, in such circumstances, to learn the art and the discipline of community living, to be sensitive to the needs of a wider circle.

76. It is important for the family apostolate that its members widen their horizons and open their doors at least, at first, to the extended family. Less and less do grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins form an emotional and supportive environment in which children grow up at present. Physical nearness is largely out of the question in our society. Most houses are not big enough to offer a home even to a bereaved or ailing grandparent. But it is sometimes possible for generations of the same family to live in the same neighbourhood and for families to choose to live and work within easy reach of each other. This could be the modest start of a return to a more traditional way of family life.

77. For all sorts of reasons, this would seem to be pastorally desirable - families would find new support and strength, growing children would find a variety of emotional models, and the generation-gap would not be so painfully personal. It may well be that the future wellbeing of elderly relatives may depend upon the extended family in the near future as our society becomes increasingly aware of the problem of an ageing population.

78. In-laws and cousins could well provide the colour, the variety and - at the very least - that company which every family needs. The extended family could also more easily cope with the burden and pressures of caring for handicapped children or the emotionally disturbed or maladjusted. Families, though, to become aware of these possibilities and to do anything about them need help, encouragement and imaginative ideas from the community.

## *iii. Wider society*

79. We have earlier commented on the sense of isolation which has gripped many families. They live among strangers; they have little or no sense of belonging to a community; they are wrapped up in their own concerns. It has always been the minority who have been public spirited, who have worked unselfishly for others. Past experience is no reason for present apathy. Individuals and families can be stimulated to generosity and to selfless concern for others not by exhortation but by being asked personally for specific support. They need to be made aware that they are not helpless, that they can challenge and change the way things are done. And they can be made to realise that they are the community -and that the needs of the community are their needs, and that the quality of life within the community depends on their contribution as individuals and families.

80. They can, for instance, sponsor and work through “good neighbour” or street warden schemes. They can organise and support self-help groups for the many different sections of their neighbourhood. They can take part in house Mass groups or family groups to help improve the situation in which they live. School offers them opportunities for involvement with the wider community through Parent Teacher Associations -and the welfare of their children is usually motive enough for unaccustomed energy and participation.

81. Family involvement and family action is best suited to local and community initiatives. Experience, though, at street and school level can sometimes be the prelude to campaigning at district level and then on a larger scale. The parish is often the focus for this kind of family apostolate and always the values of the Kingdom must be kept in mind.

## **B. Needs Of The Family**

82. Married couples and their families have different needs at different stages of their lives together. Society in general and the Church in particular should be continually sensitive to these changing needs. The national situation was described earlier and each factor influences every family to a greater or lesser extent. They should be kept in mind as each stage of marriage and family life is reviewed.

### *i. Needs of married people*

83. People approaching marriage and those already married need to be helped in different ways.

84. Those preparing for marriage ought to be helped to understand each other better. They need to reflect on the implications and the consequences of their commitment to each other and of their choice of each other as partner. They need to help to clarify their expectations of marriage, and they need to prepare spiritually for their new life together.

85. Half of all marital breakdown occurs within the first ten years of marriage. The early years of marriage are therefore an extremely testing and critical time. Too often young couples are left to their own resources and yet their need of support at this time is very great. These are the years of adaptation and change and can bring confusion and distress to a young couple.

86. Later in marriage, too, couples find a profound need to renew and deepen their relationship and their spirituality; often they feel it necessary to find time to be together as a couple, away from the pressures of everyday life. They need help sometimes to come to terms with their changed relationship with each other when the children have left home, and there are new pressures and possibilities when the husband retires or when both leave full-time employment.

87. And, at every age, one or other partner may need to help to come to terms with bereavement or with desertion or infidelity.

### *ii. The needs of parents*

88. Parents always need considerable support; they need opportunities to share their anxieties and to resolve them together; they need sound information and practical training about how to handle their children and build up a relationship with them; they need encouragement and guidance to tackle their role as first teachers of the faith, especially in the reception of the sacraments.

89. Each stage of education presents its own possibilities and problems; there should be a coherent programme of support and help for parents. In pre-school years, the child relies almost entirely on the love, encouragement and stimulation it receives from its parents. What preparation and help is given, especially for young mothers? Parents of adolescent children have acute problems, for then tensions and anxieties are usually at their height. Parents, in special circumstances, might need constant and imaginative assistance - those with handicapped children and single parents are two obvious examples.

90. Especially in our society, and in certain sectors of it particularly, there is need to think hard about the role of the father in the family and how to help him fulfil that responsibility. He is often overlooked in current schemes, and he often feels increasingly insecure, especially about the proper exercise of authority in the family.

### *iii. The growing family*

91. The family as a group is often described as the Church in miniature. Families today need great encouragement in their efforts to create a way of life that reflects God's presence and their faith in His loving kindness. Families need many opportunities to deepen their spiritual life, to exercise a role or ministry together, to become a vital part of the Church's missionary work. Families need to know that the Church depends on them and is in reality as holy as they are.

### *iv. The family in stress*

92. A crisis or tension can be for a family either danger or opportunity. The outcome may sometimes depend on the personal resilience of the family, but it is more likely to depend on the support and guidance available at the right moment. The caring community needs to be constantly alert to the early signs of stress. Continuing pastoral care is usually needed long after the drama of a death, a break-up, a personal tragedy has faded.

93. Children of broken marriages have special needs because their experiences leave long-term effects and deep-seated suffering. There is need for co-operation with all the agencies charged with the care of children.

## C. Church Initiatives

94. It is important that in its pastoral concern the Church and its leaders should stimulate and animate and not impose uniform solutions and provide unvarying responses. Members of the People of God must contribute imagination, experience and expertise. In seeking to assist men and women in their development and growth, the Church seeks to serve God. The Church must be sensitive to the pattern of people's lives, for God is at work there, shaping, forming and developing their lives according to "His own purposes" (Eph. 1,5). Rather than list possible initiatives, it will be more helpful to indicate a few guiding principles. This consultation might alter these or suggest others.

95. i) The pastoral care of the married and families belongs to the whole community and should enjoy the highest priority. The preparation for marriage and the support of existing marriages should be carefully planned and conscientiously pursued. The work of the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council in this area should be harnessed to parish, deanery and diocesan efforts. Again, people who are themselves married and have families have a great deal to offer from their experience and dedication. The task of developing and promoting ways of enabling couples and families to minister to each other, so support and heal each other, is essential in this vision. Groups such as Marriage Encounter, F.S.A. have unrivalled experience in this field and can be extremely helpful in preparing couples for marriage and in deepening their commitment throughout their marriages.

96. ii) The role of the priest is essential to the effectiveness of any attempt to minister to the pastoral needs of marriage and the family. At certain times he has a unique contact with people -when preparing people for, and administering, the sacraments, when visiting homes, when attending the sick and dying, when consoling the bereaved and counselling the stricken. His responsibilities range from highly personal matters to liturgical, canonical and moral issues. In other cases, he is called upon to animate and direct the work of others and, without this support, the work will often fail to develop or last.

97. The diocese should give realistic support and help to the priest in every parish to enable him to carry out this work. This entails the establishment of appropriate training courses for the clergy, the provision of specialized counselling services, and of an efficient Tribunal and Chancery, and the necessary coordination of all these within the diocese.

98. iii) To stimulate deeper understanding and appreciation of marriage and to provide impetus for every area of this apostolate there must be a renewed liturgical celebration of marriage which goes beyond the wedding ceremony and becomes a regular feature of the parish liturgical cycle. Renewed pastoral care of marriages will have at its heart the consistent celebration of God's presence in marriages and families, prayerful reflection on our readiness to respond to Him and occasional renewal of marriage vows.

99. iv) In many of these areas of work, wherever possible, help for marriages and families ought to be organised on an ecumenical basis. Certainly the pastoral care of mixed marriages calls for joint pastoral activity. As the revised Directory on Mixed Marriages puts it: "In some places Catholics and non-Catholics combine in organising preparatory courses for those intending to marry. Joint witness to Christian principles of marriage before, at, and after the wedding, within the home and in public, is eminently desirable." (CTS Do 497 n.14)

100. It would be unrealistic to imagine that the Catholic community singlehanded could turn back the tides of social change. But we are not alone. There are Christians who share with us our sacramental vision of human love, marriage and the family. There are others whom we must persuade by the power of argument and example. And there are signs that society at large is at last waking up to the danger at our doors and within our homes. There have been Government reports; there is widespread concern; there are vigorous voluntary agencies; all of these are expressions of a concern which is sympathetic to our objectives while being unable to share the depth of our Christian convictions about marriage and the family. And we can tackle our pastoral projects, conscious of some professional and expert support, but, more profoundly, putting our trust in the grace of God which will surely sustain us.

## QUESTIONS

*Questions 3 and 4 will be of particular importance for priests.*

- 1. In what way can you see you and your family having an influence on those around you?*
- 2. As you have tried to live your ideals in marriage and family life, what help did you receive and what damage did you sustain a) from those around you? b) from the influence of the media? c) from local government action and Parliamentary legislation and policies?*
- 3. What particular initiatives to give support to marriage and the family have you had personal experience of or do you know about? What ideas and efforts would you like to see developed and extended?*
- 4. What special aspects of the pastoral care of marriage and the family should your bishops stress at the Synod for the bishops of the whole Church?*

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