

PASTORAL LETTER

Welcome Home!

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Christmas is a time of homecoming – a season when our hearts and minds turn towards those whom we love. We warmly embrace those who travel home to be with us and we reach out across the miles to those who are away – relatives and friends – our own who live in the many and varied places of this increasingly connected world which we call 'the global family'.

In our local parish churches this Christmas time, we the priests of the Diocese of Ferns say a particular word of 'Welcome' and indeed 'Welcome Home!' to you our local congregations. We are delighted that you are here to welcome the Christ child with us. At this special time of Christmas, as always, you are a beloved son and daughter, in the Family of God – the Church.

Family

Family is the essence of who our God is. God is a family, a community of togetherness, a communion of love – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a community that reaches outwards and towards us, as the pilgrim path of our shared lives unfold.

Amoris
Let's talk Family! Let's be Family!

From the very beginning, God created and gathered together families and communities. Such families and communities are not perfect. Yet, despite their imperfections and flaws – this is where He reveals his love and goodness, his compassion and kindness, for every member of the human family.



The Family of Jesus

Ultimately, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born into a human family. Jesus – the Son of Mary – grew up under the watchful guidance of St Joseph. He prepared himself for this mission by living, for thirty years, in the loving intimacy of his own home in Nazareth, with Mary His Mother and St Joseph, his foster-father. It is here that he learned his calling "to gather into unity the scattered children of God."

(John 11:52).

Family Life

Family life is at the very heart of the Christian Faith. The Gospel is "joy to be shared by all the people" (Luke 2:10). It is announced to call people together, so that we will stand, united with one another in the joy of love, the awareness of ourselves as beloved children of God – loved with a "Love Beyond All Telling".

World Meeting of Families

Every three years, the Universal Church gathers, in a given place, to celebrate the gift of being family. The next such gathering - World Meeting of Families - will take place from 21st to 26th August 2018 in Dublin. World Meeting of Families promotes the pastoral care of **families**, protects their rights and dignity in the Church and in civil society, so that they may ever be more able to fulfil their duties.



The Logo

Take a look at the logo of the World Meeting of Families 2018: you see people represented at all stages of life – the great family of humanity – no one is excluded; they are standing on the earth – the common home of the human family; the dome and the Cross enfold the families and nations of the earth – the Church of Jesus Christ gathers us all together under the Cross which is symbol of Jesus' Love that is sacrificial, other-centred and life-giving. The letter 'o' in 'World' is an ancient Celtic symbol for the Most Holy Trinity – for our human families are intended, by God, to be images of the loving togetherness in God's own Inner Life, as the Communion of the Blessed Trinity.

What Might We Do?

This Christmas 2017, I invite you to begin preparation for this unique event in our life as a Church and nation. Here are some suggestions:

1. Organise a special family meal or gathering this coming year;
2. Recite the WMOF prayer each day;
3. Learn the WMOF hymn and use it in our parish;
4. Contact one adrift from the fold;
5. Forgive a hurt;
6. Help a family in need;
7. Reach out to new families in the parish, especially immigrant families or families that have particular needs or challenges;
8. Take time to thank God for the gift of the family I have;
9. Commit to my role in my own family and in the wider families of the Church and the world.
10. Come to Dublin for one or more of the WMOF days on the days of 22nd to 26th August 2018. Bring a picnic and make it a special family trip! Invite a neighbour!



Pope Francis

I leave you with the words of Pope Francis on family *"God always knocks at the door of hearts. He likes to do this. It comes from His heart. But, do you know what He likes best? To knock on the doors of families and find families that are united, to find families that love each other, to find the families that bring up their children and educate them and help them to keep going forward and that create a society of goodness, of truth, and of beauty."*



Gratitude and Blessing

Finally, I wish to thank the diocesan committee who are responsible for organising preparations and participation in WMOF2018 in the diocese of Ferns.

May this World Meeting of Families, which our Church in Ireland is hosting, deepen, in all of us, the joy of being loved, of being God's beloved child - a joy to be shared by all the peoples - the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

With every kind wish and blessing this Christmas.

+ *Dennis*

Bishop of Ferns

The Visit of the Icon

A specially commissioned icon of the Holy Family was unveiled and anointed on 21 August 2017 in Knock. The icon was written by the Redemptoristine Contemplative Community in Drumcondra as part of their ongoing prayer for families. The icon is meant to encourage both reflection and prayer as part of the journey of preparations to World Meeting of Families 2018. Following the official unveiling at the National Novena in Knock, the icon has been travelling to each diocese in Ireland. The icon will arrive at St. Aidan's Cathedral on 29th January for the Feast of St. Aidan on 30th January 2018.



Funding World Meeting of Families

There will be two national Church collections in 2018 to offset costs associated with hosting the World Meeting of Families. These will be held on 24th / 25th February and the 16th / 17th June 2018.

Prayer for World Meeting of Families 2018

God, our Father,
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,
One family, in the Spirit of your love.
Bless us with the joy of love.
Make us patient and kind,
gentle and generous,
welcoming to those in need.
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.
Protect all families with your loving care,
Especially those for whom we now pray:

[We pause and remember family members and others by name].

Increase our faith,
Strengthen our hope,
Keep us safe in your love,
Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share.
This we ask, through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

*Mary, mother and guide, pray for us.
Saint Joseph, father and protector, pray for us.
Saints Joachim and Anne, pray for us.
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us.*

