

# Editorial

## Celebrating Family and Defending Life: a Match Made in Heaven

Fr Chris Hayden  
Editor



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### Editor

Fr Chris Hayden

Email [intercom@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:intercom@catholicbishops.ie)

### Assistant to the Editor

David Macken

Email [dmacken@catholicbishops.ie](mailto:dmacken@catholicbishops.ie)

Catholic Communications Office,  
Columba Centre, Maynooth,  
Co Kildare, Ireland

Tel +353 (0) 1 505 3055

Fax +353 (0) 1 601 6401

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Colette Dower, Veritas Publications

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Subscriptions and change of address notifications should be sent to:

Ross Delmar (Membership Secretary)

7/8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

Email [ross.delmar@veritas.ie](mailto:ross.delmar@veritas.ie)

Tel +353 (0) 1 878 8177

Fax +353 (0) 1 878 6507

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### Advertising enquiries to

[intercomadvertising@veritas.ie](mailto:intercomadvertising@veritas.ie)

Notices for Gazette to Ross Delmar

Email [intercomgazette@veritas.ie](mailto:intercomgazette@veritas.ie)

7/8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

Tel +353 (0) 1 878 8177

Fax +353 (0) 1 878 6507



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If the Irish Church has a focus for 2018, it is surely the family. This is the 'Irish Year of the Family' in all but name, as we prepare for the World Meeting of Families this coming August. The months of preparation and the event itself offer us a wonderful opportunity for catechesis and renewal. There's nothing automatic about such matters, of course: we need to seize the moment, to take advantage of the various resources that are being provided for pastoral and catechetical use, and of the sense of occasion which, God willing, will be greatly heightened by the visit of Pope Francis.

A further opportunity for affirming the value of family and family life may present itself during the coming months, in the form of a referendum on the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland. If we believe at all in Providence, then perhaps we should not be too quick to write this off as a coincidence! There is a powerful link between the family and the *Gospel of Life*. St John Paul II wrote, in his encyclical of that name: 'the *Gospel of life* is to be celebrated above all in *daily living*, which should be filled with self-giving love for others. In this way, our lives will become a genuine and responsible acceptance of the gift of life...' (par. 86).

The focus on family witnesses to the fact that the Gospel of life is not some narrow, quasi-political platform that is appealed to only in the face of specific threats. The Church's interest in life is broader than the specific issue of unborn life, yet the latter is absolutely foundational. It is surely a double blessing that the World Meeting of Families provides us with an opportunity to witness to life at exactly this crucial time in our history.

We would, I think, miss the point, if we were too concerned about the World Meeting of Families becoming merely a platform in the ongoing campaign for the right to life of the unborn. The point is that what we will be celebrating next August is precisely *life*: life as we find it in families, with their joys and hopes, their struggles and anxieties. Pro-life advocacy in the narrower sense is finally directed towards life in this broader sense. So perhaps, far from a coincidence, we should be seeing a match made in heaven!

It would, in any case, be naïve not to recognize that the pursuit of legalized abortion is very often just one aspect of a broader trend, one which has its own clear views on family. If those on the other side of this cultural drama can take a 'whole-cloth' approach, then perhaps we too should be willing to join the dots, and see the coming year's great tasks as inter-related and mutually supporting.

To celebrate the family is to celebrate life. To advocate for life is to advocate for the family. May our preparations and our celebrations be consistent, coherent and wise.

Chris Hayden