

SUPPORT OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

143. Marriage and family life need support all the more as the point of marriage is less well appreciated and the basic family unit is more fragile. It therefore seems unwise to grant cohabiting couples the privileges and benefits given to married couples. A couple's unwillingness to declare their commitment publicly must raise some doubt about the level of that commitment. For this reason, the call for the law to treat unmarried couples as though they were married would send a wrong signal to society and this in turn could further undermine the stability of marriage, of the family and ultimately of society. As we said in *The Common Good*, a well-constructed society will be one that gives priority to the integrity, stability and health of family life' (paragraph 21). At the same time, the human reality of marriage is never simple or tidy. Couples are often all too conscious of the gap between the ideals of marriage and the reality of their daily lives.

144. Similarly, the diverse forms of family that are becoming more widespread should not be ignored or unfairly disadvantaged. Children now are often brought up by one parent or in a mixed family with children from previous relationships. Wherever and however parents take responsibility, as best they can, for their children's upbringing, they should be affirmed in this. In particular, those who manage on their own and on very limited resources to give children a good upbringing and education deserve all the help they can get. Employers should be flexible so as to attract and keep workers who are lone parents, but governments should not coerce parents with sole responsibility for small children to take up further paid work. Mothers who have chosen the path of life and love by keeping their child deserve financial help from government and practical help from the Church. Volunteers who raise money to help women in these situations are a powerful witness to the Christian way of life.

146. Education for sexual integration is an on-going process. Its aim is to nurture the virtue of chastity, that is, of moral maturity in the area of sexual desire. It is extremely difficult for parents, to help their children to develop the virtue of chastity, but it is a vitally important task. Key to this process of personal growth is the establishment of self-respect and the ability to form relationships of trust. The many children who do develop to moral maturity and self-possession owe not a little to their relationships with their parents and the example of their parents' relationship with one another.

QUESTIONS

In recent times many states have granted legal status to same gender people who want to enter civil partnerships or get married. Does this undermine marriage as we know it or is it a step in the right direction? Discuss

Consider that most couples co-habit before marriage, should we no longer be using such language as 'living in sin' when referring to them? Discuss

Sex education in catholic and other schools is, according to their prospectus, to help the pupils 'make informed' choices. Could this lead some pupils to make informed but bad choices?

Are Catholics free to make their own decisions, informed or not, when it comes to obeying church teaching on lots of moral issues especially in the area of sexual morality? Discuss