

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

Focus on Marriage and Family

Bedrock of Society

This fall, the Church will focus on the foundation of society worldwide: marriage and the family. The attention will span international, national and local gatherings both in celebration of these life-giving institutions as well as efforts to strengthen them in the face of contemporary challenges which threaten their moorings.

World Meeting of Families

This event which gathers every three years will be held for the first time in the United States in Philadelphia, Sept. 22-27. The theme is: “Love is our Mission: The Family Fully Alive.”

Pope Francis has been dedicating his talks at the weekly public audience to this topic. He has emphasized the notion that was highlighted at the Second Vatican Council of the Family as the Domestic Church. Here, the spouses joined in mutual love for one another and with God participate in the ongoing work of creation giving birth to children as the fruit of their love.

In these conferences, the Holy Father has held up the vital role of relationships within the broader family experience. He has described how important grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and in-laws are to establishing the strength of love and support that transmits values and faith from generation to generation. Within this construct, comes the sense of belonging and the natural outlet for the inbred convictions of caring, compassion, forgiveness and healing.

The climax of the World Meeting will be on Sunday, Sept. 27 when an expected throng of one million people will come together with Pope Francis outside the Philadelphia Art Museum for the closing Mass. Over 100 representatives from the Diocese of Des Moines will be participating in the Mass. The Des Moines pilgrims will arrive by plane, bus tour and private car – they will be young, old and embrace both Hispanic and Caucasian families. Let us pray that the World Meeting of Families will inject renewed enthusiasm and dedication to the indispensable gift of family.

Ordinary Synod of Bishops, Oct. 4-25

Pope Francis has called for the Ordinary Synod of Bishops to take place in Rome this October dedicated to the theme: “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world.” The Holy Father convened an Extraordinary Synod last fall to attend to the groundwork in preparation for this year’s event.

Synods are an outcome of the Second Vatican Council whereby the Pope arranges a gathering of representative bishops from throughout the world to deliberate on a specific topic of importance

in Church life. Synod means “Accompanying or traveling with” and underlines the coming together of leadership and other experts on a defined subject to provide direction for the Church community as it winds its way through history.

Beginning with last year’s Extraordinary Synod, the Pope introduced a world-wide consultation phase to solicit input from all members of the Church seeking their take on the strengths and weaknesses of marriage and family as well as proposed action to address the needs identified.

The Synod will attempt to bolster family and marriage upholding the classical values and teachings that have sustained them over the centuries. Reaching out with pastoral sensitivity, it is anticipated that topics such as the status in the Church of divorced and remarried persons, the phenomenon of couples living together before marriage as well as never getting married and same sex unions which have emerged in Western society will be reflected upon. The question will surface: What is the pastoral role of the Church in these situations?

Conclusion of the Year of Marriage and Family, Diocese of Des Moines, Sunday, October 11th.

Under the leadership of Adam Storey, director of the Office of Marriage and Family, along with an outstanding committee, our diocesan community has held a year dedicated to the theme of marriage and family life. It particularly concentrated on bolstering and strengthening married and family life through enrichment opportunities in parish and regional settings. Thanks are extended to Adam and his associates for fruit bearing efforts. Many of these activities will continue as regular events on parish calendars.

The diocesan year will conclude on Sunday, Oct. 11 at St. Boniface Parish in Waukee. I will be privileged to celebrate the Mass for all of us coming together at 1 p.m. The Mass will be followed by a stimulating presentation by national speakers and authors, John and Teri Bosio, entitled “The Family is a School of Virtue.” Childcare will be provided and the day will conclude with a family meal. Plan to join us as we thank God for the many blessings of the year!

We rejoice at the remarkable gifts of marriage and family that we count among God’s greatest blessings to the human family. May the events of this fall help us to cherish these institutions and do all under the guidance of the Spirit to strengthen and sustain them.