

Catholic Review Column: 2015, A Big Year for Families

Happy New Year! I pray this column, my first of 2015, finds you well, dear readers, and having enjoyed a happy and restful Christmas season.

One of the great benefits of Christmas is that it provides many of us an opportunity to spend more time with our families. Too often during the year we fail to make time with our loved ones. Christmas offers us the welcome reason to do just that.

The importance of a loving and supportive family cannot be overstated. It is important to our own personal growth and happiness as individuals – most especially to young children. Our families are the first and ultimate support system for each of us – as intended by God, the author of all human life. Indeed it is our parents who bring us into existence and on whom we rely for every basic necessity from the moment of our birth. Our parents, grandparents and other family members help to guide, form and nurture us through childhood and adolescence. And though the role of caretaker and supporter may alternate as parents advance in age and become more reliant on their adult children for emotional and physical care, the importance of the family unit to the stability, happiness, and wellbeing of each of its members is no less critical.

The health and stability of the family is also important to the wider community, for families are indeed the foundation of society. I spoke about this on two occasions over the Christmas and New Year's holidays. At both a prayer vigil sponsored by Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and an interfaith prayer service held New Year's Eve at St. Ignatius in Baltimore, I suggested that the role of the family is integral to the moral development of children.

“The family is where values can be taught and virtues learned; it's where children's dignity is affirmed and their sights raised higher,” I said.

The importance of stable families to the stability of the wider community is clearly visible in the following statistic gleaned from the 2010 U.S. Census: fewer than 10

percent of households in Baltimore City – 8.6 percent to be precise – consists of married couples and their children. This figure is both staggering and understandable when you consider the challenges so many neighborhoods in Baltimore City face. And though the statewide and nationwide average is considerably higher at 23 percent, it points to the impact of a gradual erosion of support for the institution of marriage and thus an erosion of the family.

The Catholic Church, like many other institutions, continues to lift up and support marriage, married couples and the family. This occurs at the grassroots level in our parishes, where many ministries exist to counsel and support those preparing for marriage as well as those who are already married and who wish to strengthen their lifelong bonds. And it is in our parishes where our priests and deacons openly affirm the vocation of marriage for the gift that it is to the church, to children and families, and to all of society.

Beyond our parishes, Pope Francis is leading the global conversation about how the church can better support families and married couples and the Holy Father regularly calls on the worldwide community to rededicate itself to the important work of preserving the family unit, while also warning about the impact of failing to do so.

“There is growing evidence that the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with an increase in poverty and a host of many other social problems that disproportionately affect women, children, and the elderly,” the pope said.

I pray this discussion about the importance of acting on behalf of marriage and the family I pray will continue to inspire our words and actions here in our own archdiocese, especially as we prepare for this fall’s World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia and the Synod on the Family. Through the archdiocesan website, the Catholic Review and the parishes of the archdiocese, we will continue to share information and communicate about both of these events so that your voice may be heard on this critically important issue for the good of our church, our families, and for all of society.