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The Catholic Family and the Bicentennial

Following are excerpts from a statement issued by the Diocesan Family Life Directors on the occasion of Holy Family Sunday, Dec. 28.

The bicentennial commemoration of the United States of America is a particularly appropriate occasion to pay tribute to the American family.

History and experience have shown that the continuing vitality of a nation is closely related to the vitality of family life among its citizens. The family is the indispensable transmitter of the distinctive beliefs, values, and attitudes characterizing a nation and underlying the aspirations and commitments of its individual members. In this regard, there is no viable substitute for the family!

With this in mind, it is

especially opportune for American Catholics to assess the role and function of the family in the formation of our nation and our Church community, since it was concern for their families and the quality of family life that led many of our forefathers to leave native homelands to conquer the forbidding wilderness and gradually to shape a new nation.

American families have been very dynamic, hardy and adaptable. In 1776 only a few colonial families were living along the western border of eastern seaboard colonies. Within little more than a century, owing to one of the most amazing mass movements in history, the country was settled from coast to coast.

During the past century, American families have moved from primarily rural areas and small towns to live in densely populated metropolitan areas.

However, one might ask who these settlers were. The answer could indeed be put in the words of the celebrated American poet Walt Whitman: "America is a nation of nations." All major races and nationalities have been involved in its formation, with Europe furnishing the majority during the country's earlier, formative years.

Many of these immigrants were Catholic families. In 1776 Catholics numbered only about 35 to 40 thousand. However, the Louisiana purchase and the annexations following the Mexican War added several hundred thousand more, mostly of French and Spanish extraction.

Major growth of the Catholic population resulted from a heavy flood of immigrants, coming at first from Ireland and Germany after 1830 and later from central and southern Europe and the Americas, chiefly after 1880.

Most Catholic immigrants were from peasant or working class backgrounds and started near the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. They initially formed relatively close ethnic enclaves bound together by mutually supportive national, linguistic and religious ties.

The Church, in her ministry to these new Americans, helped in many ways, especially by allowing for ethnic parishes and providing for elementary and secondary education for large

numbers of children of immigrant families.

Today, American Catholic families are highly mobile both socially (through education and income) and spatially (going out of cities to suburbs and to newly developing industrialized areas).

Thus, Catholic families are now moving toward full participation in American society and are experiencing the multi-faceted impact of a dominant culture that is increasingly secularized and no longer primarily influenced by Protestant religious belief.

Despite the great diversity of Old World backgrounds and New World experiences, American families generally, and Catholic families in particular, are growing more and more alike in size, structure and general patterning of activities throughout the life cycle.

Through the force of the industrialized urban environment and associated demographic transition, families feel greater pressure to adjust to smaller family size.

In this climate of technological pressure and growing secularization, American Catholic families are called to work out major adjustments in ways that are consonant with their faith. They no longer can count on much support from an externally religious culture for

their distinctive family attitudes, values and beliefs.

Our secular society is less and less capable of adequately preparing young people for stable marriages or of supporting traditionally accepted family ideals. Pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations, are subject to less sanctions and disapproval. Moreover, since 1968, divorces have been increasing annually by seven or eight percent and have now passed the one million mark this year.

Further indication of the rejection of Catholic, as well as general Christian, family ideals are a decreasing rate of marriages, increased cohabitation without formal marriage, aggressive advocacy of "open marriage" and homosexuality, a commonly accepted contraceptive mentality, and general tolerance of various forms of hard-core pornography. One might also add the apparent widespread incidence of child abuse and the acceptance of abortion and sterilization by married couples.

The danger is that even Christian families will be influenced to compromise their ideals and no longer view sexual relations, marriage and parenthood from a moral perspective founded on Gospel values.

As Family Life Directors,

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Willebrands Named To Dutch Post

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul has named Cardinal Jan Willebrands, the Vatican's top expert on ecumenism, to succeed the retired Cardinal Bernard Alfrink as Archbishop of Utrecht and Roman Catholic Primate of the Netherlands.

In announcing the appointment of the 66-year-old Cardinal Willebrands, who has served since 1969 as President of the Vatican's Secretariat for Christian Unity, the Vatican said the Pope has acceded to the desire of Cardinal Alfrink and "relieved him for health reasons from the pastoral governing of the Archdiocese of Utrecht."

(According to a Dutch prelate, Cardinal Willebrands, who is expected to take up residence in Utrecht in January, will stay on as president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. The Dutch

bishop said that Spanish Bishop Ramon Torrella Cascante, who is vice president of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, has been named vice president of the Unity secretariat.)

Cardinal Alfrink, known generally as a moderately "liberal and progressive" bishop, tendered his resignation last July 5, when he turned 75, in accord with Vatican rules promulgated by Pope Paul that require bishops of that age to submit their resignations. The Pope could either accept the resignation or invite the prelate to stay in office.

At a press conference here, Cardinal Willebrands told newsmen he would work "to mend the longstanding divisions between so-called progressives and conservatives in the Dutch Roman Catholic Church."

Recognize Palestinians, Pope Urges Israel

Vatican City [RNS] — Pope Paul, in a plea for the creation of an "atmosphere" favorable to peace in the Middle East, urged Israelis to "recognize the legitimate rights" of Palestinians.

The appeal came during an address the Pope made to the College of Cardinals at a

traditional meeting with the cardinals resident in or visiting Rome, who assemble to offer the pontiff their Christmas greetings.

"We are aware of the tragedies that have pushed the Jewish people to seek a secure and protected area that (would be) their own sovereign and independent state

"Knowing this, we want to invite the sons of these people to recognize the legitimate rights of another people who have also suffered long, the Palestinian people."



Highlights of 1975

Upper Left — In September, Elizabeth Ann Seton became the first native-born American saint when she was canonized at the Vatican. This tapestry was hung on St. Peter's Basilica during the ceremonies. Mother Seton's Anglican upbringing gave her canonization an ecumenical aspect.

Upper Center — Pope Paul greets a group of nuns from Algeria — just some of the millions of Holy Year pilgrims visiting Rome — during a general audience in St. Peter's Square.

Upper Right — Thousands march in Philadelphia to voice opposition to the U.S.

Supreme Court decisions striking down tax-supported auxiliary services to children attending non-public schools in Pennsylvania.

Lower Left — Pope Paul [right] shakes hands with Father Pedro Arrupe, head of the Society of Jesus, at the start of the Jesuit order's general congregation in late 1974. The three-month-long meeting concluded in early 1975, but a move toward democratizing the order was disapproved by the pontiff.

Lower Center — A new Rite of Penance allowing face-to-face contact with priests was introduced. The new rite,

which stresses the "communal and ecclesial" aspects of reconciliation with God, is divided into three forms — individual reconciliation, communal reconciliation with individual confession and absolution, and communal reconciliation with general confession and absolution.

Lower Right — Protests and calls for a constitutional amendment against abortion continued, and Catholic bishops launched a campaign to work for such an amendment. Here, members of the New York State Right to Life Committee demonstrate in favor of pro-life legislation in the New York State Capital at Albany. [RNS]

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The 1974-75 Diocesan Financial Review is included in this edition in a pullout section in the center of the newspaper.