

**PASTORAL LETTER**  
**OF THE DIOCESE OF BETHLEHEM**  
**ON FAMILY LIFE (MARCH 1983)**

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

Huge problems face marriage and family life in our day. Often the sacrament of marriage is not understood at all or not highly valued.

Many couples just live together, without receiving the sacrament, and are therefore barred from receiving the Holy Eucharist.

Many husbands and wives live separated from each other and in some cases have divorced each other; sometimes one or both of these partners have since become remarried or simply entered into a loose union with some other partner.

There are also those married people gravely neglect their duty *vis-a-vis* their partner in marriage and their children. Often the reason for this is the excessive use of drink and illicit relationships with other men and women.

In all this a poor example is given to our youth, especially to those who themselves are approaching marriageable age. Youth is given very little positive guidance, if any, towards their entry into married life and about sacrament of marriage.

General illegitimacy is on the increase and hardly ever any stigma is attached to it when it happens. As a corollary, artificial artificial birth control, euphemistically called family planning, is widely accepted without question. Indeed many parents seem to welcome it because it promises to spare them the embarrassment of unwanted pregnancies among their unmarried daughters. It needs no stressing that the resultant promiscuity hardly promises more suitable marriages for the future.

Indeed the danger is that the next generation will be even worse than the present one. History teaches that a people can die out if it allows the disorders, which we listed to go rampant.

In 1983, a year of reconciliation and prayer for divided or broken families, we must thank God the Father for all the good families we have in our diocese, families that are not divided among themselves and have not broken up.

But as has been stressed with many other families in our diocese, we must start from scratch. They need healing through repentance, that is, returned to God-willed order, through reconciliation. Our whole society is sick because so many of our families are sick. Let us go to the doctor who can give us the healing, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and saviour! During this year, let us make vigorous efforts in each of our parishes to heal what is broken, and to bring together what is divided.

Throughout this special year of grace, all priests will put great emphasis on the Church's teaching on Christian family life and the sacrament of marriage. Without

any doubt also those families, which through the mercy of God are in a healthy state can derive great benefit from this teaching.

You should enter into this the Year of Reconciliation and Prayer' heart and *hand*. Do give a hand where help is needed:

Find the couples and families in need of spiritual help in order to achieve their reconciliation among each other;

Prepare our youth for married life; and

Get all our families into the habit of regularly praying together.

Happily, the 'Year of Reconciliation and Prayer' for families that are divided or broken, coincides with the jubilee year proclaimed by Pope John Paul II in memory of Jesus Christ's saving death and resurrection, 1 950 years ago.

Through this jubilee year, the Holy Father hopes for a spiritual renewal of the whole People of God, individuals, families, parishes, dioceses, and religious communities through repentance and conversion. He looks for a "fresh commitment by each person to the service of reconciliation and to the service of peace among all people", and he stresses; that "every Catholic is to leave nothing undone to remain in the life of grace and to do everything to avoid falling into sin".

In our diocese we will endeavour to bring repentance, reconciliation and healing to married people and their families.

I put this year under the special protection of Mary, the Mother of the Church and Queen of Peace. May peace and unity be restored in our families in the Diocese of Bethlehem through her intercession under whose special protection the Holy Father has put the Jubilee Year.

"I implore Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Redeemer and Mother of the Church, to intercede for us and to obtain for us the grace of a fruitful celebration of the Jubilee Year, 20 years after Vatican Council II. May she 'show again to the whole Church, indeed to all humanity, the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus, who is the redeemer of each and everyone.' Into her hands and to her maternal heart I commend the success of this jubilee celebration.

"Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for all the people in the Diocese of Bethlehem; bless our families and make them one in Jesus Christ your son and our Lord."

Yours sincerely in the Lord,  
HUBERT BUCHER  
Bishop of Bethlehem