On B.C. Family Day, Vancouver Archbishop calls on government to respect family's rights

VANCOUVER (Feb. 7, 2013) – Vancouver Archbishop J. Michael Miller released the following statement on the occasion of B.C.'s first Family Day, Feb. 11:

On the happy occasion of this first Family Day, we give thanks to God for the gift of Family, which continues to thrive in B.C. despite the challenges that confront it today.

As many enjoy this additional holiday, it is also an opportunity to celebrate the family as a community of persons that plays an integral role in the development of social and cultural life.

I note with pleasure that the Premier and Legislature have set family as a priority. By declaring this Family Day they implicitly acknowledge the words of Pope John Paul II, that "The future of humanity passes by way of the family."

The Church welcomes the role of government in recognizing the rights and dignity of the family. Society can play particularly helpful roles in assisting parents in making decisions about the education of children, intergenerational support, and promoting the family's responsibilities to society.

The family is "a community of life and love," the late Pope said, with the mission to communicate love, in a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity. It is within the family that virtues are taught and community values are learned. It is the family that truly embodies the intergenerational interconnectedness that we strive for in society.

We see in today's world opportunities for the family to play an irreplaceable role in the healing of our culture. In many ways the fabric of society, and indeed of the Church, can be healed only by means of the family.

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The tensions and conflicts which shake the modern world are caused by the "violent clash of various kinds of individualism and selfishness," said John Paul. Such individualism exalts the isolated person in an absolute way, leaving little or no place for openness to others and communion with them. The family is the primary antidote to this individualism.

While contemporary society becomes more depersonalized, and consumerism, efficiency, and technology are often emphasized more than persons, the family is well placed to stem this negative tide.

The family is society's life-giving nucleus. John Paul called it "the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society," since every social institution, every concern touching education, work, economics, culture, and politics, is connected with this vital social cell.

John Paul frequently urged families to take an active part in the political arena. He invited them to assume their responsibility for transforming society by becoming protagonists of a "family politics."

This task leads them to be "the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family."

As a way of protecting the family against incursions and of reminding the State of its duties, the Church drew up a [Charter of the Rights of the Family](), which was issued in 1983. The Archdiocese of Vancouver too is making the family the centre of its concerns and goals, and in coming months will be announcing new priorities that further emphasize the importance of the family.

We welcome government doing what it can to defend the family, which after all is more than a group of autonomous individuals who come together out of self-interest but rather a community of persons where each member exists for others, becoming a "gift" for them.

Observing a day dedicated to the family is an opportunity to recognize the inherent rights which flow from the family's natural state and its centrality to community and society.

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