News



People attend Mass at Knock Shrine in Ireland Aug. 21. The Mass launched the one-year countdown to the 2018 World Meeting of Families in Ireland. (CNS/courtesy John McElroy)



Sarah Mac Donald

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

KNOCK, Ireland — August 24, 2017
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The president of the 2018 World Meeting of Families stressed that "there is no such thing as the ideal family" but that "there is an ideal of family," which is what the church is seeking to promote through the international gathering of families in Ireland.

In his homily delivered to a packed basilica at Knock Shrine in County Mayo, Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said while there is no family that is ideal, there are "families who struggle, at times heroically."

He also asked, "How do we help our young people to encounter the path of faithful love as the only truth path toward human happiness? How do we teach fidelity in a world where everything is disposable?"

Speaking to media at the launch of the yearlong lead-in program of catechesis on "Amoris Laetitia," Pope Francis' postsynodal apostolic exhortation on the family, Martin said the program was about long-term renewal, and that the international gathering, which up to 5,000 families from overseas are expected to attend, would not be "a seven-day wonder." The meeting is scheduled Aug. 21-26, 2018.

On the challenge of speaking to young people about lifelong fidelity, he commented, "They may say I'm getting married for life, but their understanding of for life maybe very different. It is one of the big challenges that we face, and there is no magic answer."

He said the church must witness within society to what fidelity means and "show young people that long-term fidelity leads to a deep fulfillment, and that there is real value in that." He also mentioned a theme of families and technology.

Referring to Pope Francis' gestures of loving care and constant talk of God's mercy he said, "There are even some who feel that he is in danger of reducing the significance of God's law. Pope Francis is certainly not betraying God's law, but he is reminding us that we — as individuals and as church — can only be messengers of God's law if we reflect God's love and mercy."

Asked by Catholic News Service why he felt it was necessary to state that Pope Francis was not betraying God's law, the Dublin archbishop said, "Because some people say he has." He would not elaborate.

Fr. Timothy Bartlett, secretary-general of the 2018 World Meeting of Families, told CNS it was "critically important" for people to understand that "none of the truths of the church, the ideals of the church or the Gospel in which it is rooted, have changed" in "Amoris Laetitia."

He said he hoped families would use the preparation program to become familiar with what Pope Francis is saying about "the joys and challenges of being a family in the world today."

"If I had one fundamental hope for this World Meeting of Families and its preparations, it would be precisely those families who feel burdened by all of the pressures of life, feel distant from the church, either through sheer distraction, or through anger and hurt with the church or disillusionment -- that they would hear us say that this is also about you," he said.

During the ceremony in Knock basilica, Martin unveiled and blessed a specially commissioned icon of the Holy Family by Romanian icon writer Mihai Cucu, with the assistance of the Redemptoristine Sisters in Dublin. The icon will be taken around the Irish church's 26 dioceses to raise awareness of "Amoris Laetitia" and World Meeting of Families.

Advertisement

Of Pope Francis' visit to Ireland for the closing Mass Aug. 26, 2018, Martin said the Argentine pontiff had told him of his wish to come to Dublin for the gathering, which has the theme, "The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World."

But he stressed that the visit would be very different from when St. John Paul II came to Ireland as pope in 1979.

"Pope John Paul came to Ireland when he was 60; when Pope Francis comes, he will be over 80. So, I think we have to look at a very different style and scale." He also stressed that Pope Francis "will come to a very different Ireland than Pope John Paul."

Anne Griffin, general manager of World Meeting of Families 2018, said the event was aiming for a minimum daily participation of at least 15,000 people. Though registrations had opened just a few weeks ago, there were already double the number of registrations for the International Eucharistic Congress in 2012 at the same stage.

"We have a lot of interest from large groups that are coming from North America and from Europe," she said.

Organizers also announced there will be no entry fee for people under the age of 18.

This story appears in the **World Meeting of Families 2018** feature series. View the full series.