

CHILDREN FIND IDENTITY THROUGH PARENTS, SAYS POPE

Stresses Importance of Family Relationships

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 25, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is underlining the importance of the family and the need for children to grow and develop, discovering their identity through parental relationships.

The Pope stated this today in an address to members of the Scandinavian episcopal conference who are in Rome for their five-yearly visit.

The conference includes prelates from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, who oversee 12 dioceses and some 300,000 Catholics.

"Your flock is small in number, and scattered over a wide area," the Pontiff acknowledged. "Many have to travel great distances in order to find a Catholic community in which to worship."

He added, "It is most important for them to realize that every time they gather around the altar for the Eucharistic sacrifice, they are participating in an act of the universal Church, in communion with all their fellow Catholics throughout the world." He noted an upcoming conference on the family, scheduled to take place in May in Jonkoping, Sweden.

"One of the most important messages that the people of the Nordic lands need to hear from you is a reminder of the centrality of the family for the life of a healthy society," the Holy Father told the bishops.

He continued: "Sadly, recent years have seen a weakening of the commitment to the institution of marriage and the Christian understanding of human sexuality that for so long served as the foundation of personal and social relations in European society.

"Children have the right to be conceived and carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage: It is through the secure and recognized relationship to their own parents that they can discover their identity and achieve their proper human development."

Benedict XVI stated, "In societies with a noble tradition of defending the rights of all their members, one would expect this fundamental right of children to be given priority over any supposed right of adults to impose on them alternative models of family life and certainly over any supposed right to abortion."

"Since the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace," he pointed out, "the most reliable promoter of social cohesion and the best school of the virtues of good citizenship, it is in the interests of all, and especially of governments, to defend and promote stable family life."

Growing

"While the Catholic population of your territories constitutes only a small percentage of the total, it is nevertheless growing," the Pope affirmed.

In Denmark, Catholics represent 0.7% of the population, in Finland about 0.2%, in Iceland 2.6%, in Norway 1.3% and in Sweden about 2%.

"At the same time," he added, "a good number of others listen with respect and attention to what the Church has to say."

"In the Nordic lands," the Pontiff affirmed, "religion has an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing decisions on matters concerning the common good."

Thus, he urged the prelates "to continue to convey to the people of your respective countries the Church's teaching on social and ethical questions."

"The Nordic lands are also blessed with the presence of a number of the new ecclesial movements, which bring fresh dynamism to the Church's mission," the Holy Father noted.

"In view of this wide variety of charisms, there are many ways in which young people may be attracted to devote their lives to the service of the Church through a priestly or religious vocation," he said.

"As you carry out your responsibility to foster such vocations," Benedict XVI told the bishops, "be sure to address yourselves to both the native and the immigrant populations."

"From the heart of any healthy Catholic community, the Lord always calls men and women to serve him in this way," he affirmed.

Work of evangelization

On Wednesday, the president of the Scandinavian episcopal conference, Bishop Anders Arborelius of Stockholm, Sweden, told Vatican Radio that the role of the laity is significant in those countries.

"The majority of catechists are laymen," he said, pointing out, in regard to evangelization, that thanks to them "the Church and the faith can be more known and accepted by Catholics."

Speaking about the upcoming family congress, the bishop said, "For us the family is always the most important [element] of our society, where it is very weak, and we think that putting the family in the first place is also a work of evangelization."

He expressed the hope "that this congress will help our faithful to realize the value of the Christian view of the family and of the sacrament of marriage in a society so marked by an individualist ideology, and which has such diverse ideas in the concept of the family."

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On ZENIT's Web page:

Benedict XVI's address: <http://www.zenit.org/article-28751?l=english>