

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

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## SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF PRO-LIFE INITIATIVE ADDRESS BY CARDINAL THOMAS J. WINNING TO PRO-FAMILY, PRO-LIFE EVENT - ST. ALOYSIUS HALL

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all a very big thank you to all of you for coming out in such great numbers tonight. It's a strong testimony to your commitment to the family and to life itself that you have made the effort to come to listen to our two distinguished speakers.

Looking round at so many young couples I can only imagine that baby sitters throughout west central Scotland are doing good business tonight!

In issuing invitations we have attempted to ensure the presence of a complete cross-section of our Catholic community especially targeting those with a commitment to the family.

The title for this evening's event links together two areas of concern which really should be seen as one - Building the culture of life: The Challenge for the family.

Put simply tonight's event hammers home this point - to be pro life is to be pro-family. And I would go a bit further. To be pro-life and pro-family is simply doing what comes naturally: It is the natural instinct of every human being.

To some of you that might sound a fanciful viewpoint.

Certainly the media, the opinion formers and the liberal elite blast us with quite a different message - one that is neither pro-life nor pro-family. But my conviction is that deep down all of us value life in general and family life in particular.

I became even more convinced of this the other day when I spotted yet another jogger pounding the streets round my home in Glasgow. You can hardly turn a corner these days without bumping in to some panting, perspiring, purple-faced individual attractively trussed up in a lurid tracksuit and light-up trainers out on a bid to keep fit...

But have you ever asked yourselves why people go to such lengths? Why go to such extremes of discomfort, inconvenience and often expense?

The answer is quite simple. They are pro-life. They want to live.

They value life and want to hang on to it. Implicit though their sermon may be, they are really preaching a powerful message to the rest of us ... that life is special, unique, to be valued and cherished, but at the same time limited and in the end an elusive possession.

Exactly the same message - come to think of it - as those in the pro-life movement have been preaching for decades!

That is why I say that the pro-life message is written on the heart of every man and woman.

Natural law, instinct, common sense - call it what you will, but whatever you call it is vital to realise that every human being has at least the proclivity, the pre-disposition to be pro-life - even though they may not know it themselves.

But how do we leap from that to our assertion that everyone is basically pro-family?

By similar means.

Traditional family life seems to be collapsing. The UK has a horrific record in terms of births out of wedlock, divorce rates, abortion rates, teenage pregnancy rates and all the rest. To the statistician, the Christian family is on the way out.

But at the same time we see the pro-family instinct of human beings manifest itself in all sorts of contradictory ways.

The massive growth in *In Vitro* Fertilisation is not something the Church has viewed with enthusiasm. Indeed the mentality behind these procedures is quite mistaken - that people have a right to a child, as though children were some form of reward or commodity which should be available on request.

We have young girls wanting a child in order to have someone to love.

But what is interesting in this misguided behaviour on the part of some people is the implicit realisation that the family is something inherently good and important.

We read of other more bizarre and morally bankrupt ideas every day - homosexuals and lesbians artificially inseminating to produce children; single people doing the same; calls for cloning to be made legal and all the rest.

What these phenomena show is not the death of the Christian ideal of the family but the survival of the instinct for family even although it has been deformed, abused and attacked in so many ways.

The important thing for all of us here to realise is that we are not alone. We are not fighting a losing battle.

Nature is with us. Instinct is with us. Our task is to help people formulate and live out their pro-life and pro-family instincts in a way that is in conformity with the teaching of God and His Church.

Tonight's speakers will, I hope help us to do just that.

Fr John Fleming is one of that rare species - a medical doctor and also a priest. And an Australian into the bargain!

His work in bio-ethics is recognised and valued round the globe. As a consultor at the Pontifical Academy for Life he is at the cutting edge of the Church's battle with what Pope John Paul calls the "Culture of death". He will speak on the role of Catholic families in defending human life in the political sphere.

Fr Frank Pavone, our other speaker, is a priest of New York Archdiocese who has just completed his term at the Pontifical Council for the Family in Rome. He has worked extensively in promoting the pro-life and pro-family apostolate round the world, especially with priests through the Priests for Life movement. His talk will focus on putting the family at the heart of the pro-life struggle.

But before I pass you on to our guests tonight, can I just make one more appeal?

Two years ago today, I stood on a platform in Glasgow's Caledonian University to launch what became known as our pro-life initiative. Little did I know then that the impact would be so great.

To date 107 babies have been born whose very existence was under threat. 107 mothers have been helped to step back from making one of the biggest mistakes of their lives.

The critics have savaged the scheme over these last two years, but to no avail. And just last week, Germaine Greer, formerly one of the most outspoken, feminist, pro-abortion hard liners wrote of her admiration for a scheme that is in a very real sense - pro-choice. In other words a scheme that allows women the right to choose life as well as death.

In those two years much attention has focused on the material help offered to such women.

Tonight I would like to shift the emphasis a bit. While repeating the open-door invitation to any woman facing a crisis pregnancy to come to us for help, I also want to make a plea tonight to all those affected by abortion - women who have undergone the procedure, doctors and nurses who have co-operated in it, relatives who have counselled in favour of abortion.

To all of them I want to say ... The time has come to make peace with God and with yourselves. This is the hour of the great return

In around 250 days the great Jubilee or Holy Year will begin. What will that mean if not a great return - a wiping clean - a new start?

My message tonight to all those who have had an abortion is most eloquently expressed in the words of our Holy Father Pope John Paul. In his great pro-life charter, *Evangelium Vitae*, he saves some of his most touching and emotional words for a message to women who have had an abortion.

Tonight I would like to echo his words and speak directly to women who have had an abortion.

The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed.

Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance.

God is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Penance or confession. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord.

With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life.

Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life." (*cf Evangelium Vitae 99*)

That is my message which I would ask you to transmit to the wider community tonight.

Come home. Be reconciled. Recognise the reality that no matter what you have done or said, God can forgive you and use you in the great struggle to create a civilisation of life and love.

Say sorry and live!

Thank you very much.