

Archbishop Dermot Farrell's Statement / Message regarding the Referendums on March 8th

The Family (39th) and Care (40th) Amendments to the Constitution

Voting is a way to show that we care about making society better. In Catholic social teaching, it's important to take part in the democratic process. The Catholic Church says that everyone should vote responsibly for the common good. (*Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine*, 189). We need to think about our Catholic values when we vote and choose policies that respect human dignity, help everyone, and protect those who are vulnerable.

I would like to take this opportunity to share the church's ideas about marriage, family, and care. The church has a strong tradition of valuing families as the foundation of society. Families teach us about love, responsibility, and solidarity, which prepares us to be good members of the community. Families also support and care for each other through tough times and help everyone grow emotionally and spiritually. The Catechism says:

The family is the original cell of social life ... Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honour God, and make good use of freedom (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2207).

Marriage is a foundation stone of family. One of the goods of marriage is that it is a public commitment to the service of family. It is vital then to society that it supports and protects marital families. It should not be neglected and side-lined. At the same time, I recognise that all families should be helped in ways that especially supports the vulnerable, and those most need of care.

From the point of view of faith, it is families that in which values, teachings, and practices can be passed down through generations, creating a place of prayer, love, and moral development within the home. The family is a domestic church which says that faith is not just within the wider church community but is lived out in the intimate relationships and interactions of daily life.

I would strongly encourage you to read the statement of the Irish Episcopal Conference, which raises some legitimate concerns which it asks people to bear in mind. These reflections are offered to encourage people to vote and to bear these perspectives on the common good in mind when they do so.

It is clear that there are legitimate differences of view on the proposed referendums: some believe they will have little influence on policy and practice; others believe an opportunity has been lost to frame amendments which would have such impact; while others again argue that the impact of the proposed amendments are uncertain. It is the duty of citizens to consider and evaluate these arguments and to take the opportunity to inform themselves on the issues.

It is important that there should be an informed, dispassionate and respectful debate on the issues. Constitutional amendments are too important not to be a considered and evaluated on their own merits.

Whatever the outcome of the referendums, there will continue to be a moral obligation on governments and public policy to protect the institution of marriage and to support, vulnerable citizens and their families. The ongoing public discourse regarding policies and priorities will continue to need the active engagement of all citizens and a continuing focus on the common good, including the priority to be accorded to the needs of the most vulnerable.

The debates before the votes are a chance to talk sensibly about what values our society should follow and what rules we need to keep those values. I encourage you to inform yourself more about the issues involved and the values of the Catholic tradition as you vote.