

## Marriage best for families

In your extract from the speech of the chief executive of Marriage Care to Quest ("Coping with coupledness", 18 July), Terry Prendergast says that "... there is no evidence to suggest that children do best with heterosexual couples".

A mountain of evidence shows that children do best within marriage, better than unmarried heterosexual couples and far better than when raised by same-sex couples. I am happy to provide the sources but we know that within marriage parents will have better relations with their children; that within a healthy marriage children are more likely to have successful marriages themselves; being brought up within a marriage seems to lead to improved performance at school; there is less chance of alcohol or substance abuse for teenagers brought up by a married couple; children have lower rates of mental illness. If we seek the best for children we should do all we can to both support and promote stable marriages. To refer to steady, stable relationships is to miss the point that marriage has within it something different that, despite its present travails, still beats any other form of partnership hands down.

**(The Rev.) Jim Richards**

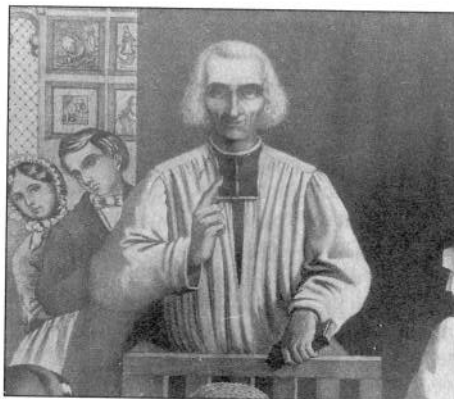
Chief Executive Officer, Catholic Children's Society (Westminster), London W10  
[JimR@cathchild.org.uk](mailto:JimR@cathchild.org.uk)

The plight of the children from separated families ("Family matters", 18 July) is well known to family lawyers. No one who has either been through, or acted for clients going through, the litigation model can believe it to be the best method of dispute resolution for couples and their families. As a result the mediation and collaborative models have seen an upsurge of interest from both couples and family lawyers. The collaborative model (only introduced into England in 2004) requires the couple and their lawyers to sign an agreement not to go to court. The lawyers work with rather than against each other and other collaboratively trained professionals are brought into the process as required.

The national association for family law specialist solicitors, Resolution, has been instrumental in introducing a programme to help separating parents continue to parent in their new circumstances. The programme, Parenting After Parting, launched earlier this year, is being trialled in six areas in the country including London, Newcastle and the West Midlands. The response has been very positive and it is hoped that the initiative will soon be rolled out countrywide.

(See [www.resolution.org.uk/parentevents](http://www.resolution.org.uk/parentevents).)

Resolution's research on collaboratively conducted cases has revealed that there is an average 85 per cent success rate. When, as happened in one of my collaborative cases, a father can say that his family has remained "intact"



**For inspiration, not emulation:  
 St John Vianney (1786-1859).  
 Photo: Bridgeman**

as a result of the process, then you know that something good is happening.

I share Terry Prendergast's view that, whatever the ideal, those involved in the business of relationship breakdown have to deal with the relationships in front of them. Family lawyers are doing a great deal to make things better for separating families. We undoubtedly have the support of the judiciary in this but we need the support of government too to help with the realities and not just the ideals.

**Gillian Bishop**

Solicitor, Collaborative Lawyer and Mediator  
 Family Law in Partnership, London WC2  
[gb@flip.co.uk](mailto:gb@flip.co.uk)

## Not for imitation

Of course we priests should not imitate the Curé d'Ars in the way John Cornwell (Letters, 11 July) implies is being suggested; cutting down our apple trees, flogging ourselves, and trying to survive on a few miserable potatoes each week! Nor should we imitate Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, or any other saint. Because saints are not for imitation but for inspiration. That is why St John Vianney is a perfectly good patron for us priests during this special year.

**(Fr) Alan J. Fudge**

London W1  
[oglestreet@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:oglestreet@rcdow.org.uk)

There is a more constructive line to be taken on the Pope's choice of John Vianney as a model of priesthood than that of John Cornwell. I have an English translation (1927, Burns, Oates and Washbourne) of "The Curé d'Ars", a compilation by Abbé Francis Trochu of Vianney's sermons with contemporary memoirs and the documents of the 1862-1865 beatification process. It often makes comical reading as, thanks largely to its subject's ironic sense of humour, the portentous hagiography is undermined. Vianney's intense personality magnified some peculiar features of his nineteenth-century French Roman Catholicism,

and added several excesses of his own. Although he may have attempted to preach a high theology of priesthood, theology was never one of his accomplishments. But his practice was much more down to earth.

He chose to live in radical poverty throughout his ministry. He also showed great determination to support the poor. Whatever was given to him personally, including the robes of a canon, was sold to fund the orphanage he set up or given to people he knew to be in need. He took a rather light-hearted view of important personages, while developing, as he matured, a profound and compassionate insight. This was why people, poor and rich, flocked to his confessional for a transformative word of wisdom. He demanded an adult spiritual life from lay women and lay men, and honoured this when he found it. Prayer being "I look at the good God and God looks at me" is not from Vianney himself, as usually quoted, but relayed to him by one of his peasant parishioners from another who used to spend time in church every morning before working in the fields (p. 184 above). My impression is that Vianney's enjoyment of splendid liturgy was of a piece with this pastoral generosity. Further investigation into Vianney's ministry would yield much material for models of priesthood in our time.

**Olive Powell**

Manchester  
[olivepowell803@hotmail.com](mailto:olivepowell803@hotmail.com)

## Advice and consent

Fr Dick Cremins SJ from Dublin asks me (Letters, 18 July) "why should the world listen to the Pope's views on economics if Catholics are free to reject his teaching about sexuality?" (with reference to contraception). The simple answer is because the Pope's views on economics make sense. That is surely because he asked for expert advice and heeded it. Enough said ...?

**Clifford Longley**

Orpington, Kent  
[clifford.longley@ntlworld.com](mailto:clifford.longley@ntlworld.com)

## Right-wing instincts

Are we returning to the bad old days in Latin America when the Catholic Church was only comfortable in the company of right-wing governments? Manuel Zelaya, who was elected President of Honduras on a right-wing ticket, had what might be described as a Pauline conversion during his first year in office and came into conflict with the conservative elements of Honduran society. His main sin was to become allied with the newly emerging left-wing governments of Latin America led by President Chavez of Venezuela. This was too much for powerful conservative elements; President Zelaya was kidnapped by the army and forcibly expelled from his country. This expulsion was internationally condemned but