NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Teaching morality contributes to better family, civic life, pope says

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Apr. 25, 2014 The Francis Chronicles
Vatican City

Catholic bishops and priests, "always with great compassion," must continue to teach men and women how to live moral lives according to the Gospel, Pope Francis told bishops from southern Africa.

Declining birth rates, abortion, leaving the Catholic church for "other groups who seem to promise something better," divorce and "violence against women and children" all "threaten the sanctity of marriage, the stability of life in the home and consequently the life of society as a whole," the pope said in a message to the bishops.

Meeting Friday with the bishops from South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland, Pope Francis praised the missionaries who brought the Gospel to southern Africa and the bishops, priests, religious and laypeople who keep it alive in "flourishing parishes, thriving often against very great odds."

In countries where most people "can identify at once with Jesus who was poor and marginalized," the pope said, Catholics provide loving service to "God's most vulnerable sons and daughters: widows, single mothers, the divorced, children at risk and especially the several million AIDS orphans, many of whom head households in rural areas."

Meeting each of the bishops, who were in Rome for their *ad limina* visits to report on the status of their dioceses, Pope Francis said common pastoral challenges were mentioned.

"Catholic families have fewer children, with repercussions on the number of vocations to the priesthood and religious life," he said. "Abortion compounds the grief of many women who now carry with them deep physical and spiritual wounds after succumbing to the pressures of a secular culture which devalues God's gift of sexuality and the right to life of the unborn."

The high rate of separation and divorce in southern Africa means "children frequently do not grow up in a stable home environment," he said.

In response to those problems, he said, "we bishops and priests must give a consistent witness to the moral teaching of the Gospel. I am confident that you will not weaken in your resolve to teach the truth 'in season and out of season,' sustained by prayer and discernment, and always with great compassion."

Pope Francis urged the bishops to encourage Catholics to rediscover the sacrament of reconciliation "as a fundamental dimension of the life of grace," and he praised their marriage preparation programs, which draw on Blessed John Paul II's teaching about love and sexuality as self-giving.

"Christian matrimony is a lifelong covenant of love between one man and one woman," he said. "It entails real sacrifices in order to turn away from illusory notions of sexual freedom and in order to foster conjugal fidelity."

Source URL (retrieved on *12/01/2015 - 21:01*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/teaching-morality-contributes-better-family-civic-life-pope-says