



NEWSLETTER

No 112

September 2026

Family Solidarity

Postal Address: 8 Ely Place, Dublin 2

Web page: <https://familysolidarity.org/>Email: familysolidarityireland@gmail.comTwitter: <https://twitter.com/FamSolidarity>**EDITORIAL**

Dear Friends, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to attend two important events that Family Solidarity is organising in the coming weeks.

First, to mark the Franciscan Year, and on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, Dr Ben Hazard will give an online paper on this much-loved saint. Ben is a historian, the

author of a recent book on Luke Wadding, and also a member of our Executive Board. His talk will be an opportunity to reflect on Saint Francis, the Franciscan tradition, and its continuing relevance for us today.

Later in the autumn, our Annual General Meeting will take place in Ely House. Last year, we were honoured to have the Apostolic Nuncio as our guest speaker. This year, we have invited Sinead Strong, founder and leader of Catholic Mothers Ireland. Sinead has done excellent work in bringing Catholic mothers together for mutual support, formation and friendship, and we are very pleased that she has accepted our invitation. Details of both events can be found at the end of this newsletter.

In this issue, as usual, you will find a number of articles on matters close to the heart of Family Solidarity. These include the rejection of assisted suicide in England, the importance of marriage as one of the most effective ways of reducing poverty, and an account of the different causes of low fertility rates.

You will also hear from the international networks with which we are affiliated or in contact: One of Us, the European Federation of pro-life organisations; FAFCE, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe; and

the Casablanca Declaration, which campaigns for the abolition of surrogacy.

We also include news of activities and events attended by our representatives in recent months. Family Solidarity remains a small organisation, but we are increasingly connected with others in Ireland and abroad who share our concern for marriage, family, life and the dignity of every human person.

As always, we are grateful for your support, encouragement and prayers.

Angelo Bottone

IN THIS ISSUE:

- The Catholic Family Support Network
- Farewell to the Nuncio
- 2026 Malta Summer course
- Good news as the House of Commons votes against 'assisted dying'
- How marriage helps combat poverty
- The multiple causes of falling fertility rates
- A message from the president of FAFCE
- Casablanca declaration letter to the UN
- Webinar on Saint Francis
- Notice of the 2026 AGM

THE CATHOLIC FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK

Family Solidarity has recently helped to establish a new Catholic Family Support Network, bringing together Catholic organisations working in the area of marriage, family and life issues. The organisations currently involved are *Family Solidarity*, *Catholic Mothers*, *Marriage Encounter*, and *Equipes Notre-Dame*.

The network is intended to be a light and practical forum, rather than a new organisation or federation. Each group remains fully independent, but the network will allow us to share information, avoid clashes between events, support each other's initiatives, and exchange experience on matters such as volunteers, communications, fundraising and compliance.

The first meetings have been very positive, and we hope this cooperation will bear fruit in the months ahead.

FAREWELL TO THE NUNCIO

Family Solidarity was invited to the farewell reception for the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor, held at the Apostolic Nunciature on 31st July. The reception brought together representatives of the Church, diplomatic corps and Catholic organisations. It was a good opportunity to thank Archbishop Montemayor

for his service in Ireland and to acknowledge his kindness and encouragement towards Family Solidarity. We wish him every blessing in his future mission.

2026 MALTA SUMMER COURSE



The European pro-life federation 'One Of Us', of which Family Solidarity is affiliated, held its inaugural summer course in Malta on 30 July – 2 August. The course was aimed at young people, aged 18-35. The One Of Us network has 50 affiliated non-governmental organisations in 18 member states which contribute to its work at an EU-level. Its president is former Maltese senior cabinet minister and European Commissioner, Dr Tonio Borg. Family Solidarity member Jack Traynor attended the summer course in Malta on behalf of FS.

There are many parallels between Malta and Ireland, both historically and in contemporary politics. Malta achieved self-government from Britain in 1922, the same year that saw the establishment of the Irish Free State. A Catholic country, Malta has maintained, to date, some of the most impactful pro-life laws in the Western world. Ireland shared in that proud distinction until 2018. And just as Ireland's pro-life constitutional amendment was slowly chipped away at from the moment it was inserted into our constitution in 1983 by popular referendum, Malta's pro-life policy has continually been under siege by abortion advocates – in particular international organisations like Planned Parenthood.

During the One Of Us summer course in Malta, which was made up of approximately 30 participants from across Europe, we had the opportunity to discuss the problems facing our respective countries. We also had the chance to listen and ask questions to speakers including Tonio Borg, formerly an EU Commissioner, and Peter Agius, a Member of the European Parliament. Dr Borg is particularly attuned to parallels between Ireland and Malta, explaining the pressure he witnessed on pro-life Irish EPP politicians during his time as a senior EU politician.

Most participants in the course are primarily involved in politics, policy and other forms of pro-life activism

through their home organisations. But we also had a valuable opportunity to visit a pro-life pregnancy support centre in the Maltese city of Mosta, where we listened to two counsellors who spoke about their volunteer work. They have been actively involved in helping women in unplanned pregnancies, offering them practical supports and even a place to live, enabling women to continue their pregnancies and saving lives in the process. They also have been involved in saving the lives of up to 50 babies by providing access to the life-saving abortion reversal pill for women who took the first abortion pill and immediately regretted their decision. Initiatives like this, often underfunded and reliant on private donations, are very encouraging and underline the importance of grassroots pro-life work.

Participation in the course was also a good opportunity to meet others involved in likeminded organisations linked to Family Solidarity through our mutual involvement in One Of Us. For example, the pro-life educational work aimed at children and students by the *Fundacja Małych Stópek* (Tiny Feet Foundation) based in Stettin, Poland was particularly impressive.

Family Solidarity will continue to work with One Of Us going forward, and it is intended that a joint event can be held in Ireland before the end of this year. The president

of One Of Us is Dr Tonio Borg and its Executive Director is Dr Ségolène du Closel from France. Its website is www.oneofus.eu.

GOOD NEWS AS THE HOUSE OF COMMONS VOTES AGAINST 'ASSISTED DYING'



In some excellent news, on the 11th September the House of Commons has voted against a new attempt to legalise assisted suicide. This is a huge victory for right-to-life campaigners, and interestingly lots of Labour MPs, who ardently believe in a 'right' to abortion, voted against recognising a 'right to die', mostly because they fear such a law would discriminate against vulnerable people, in practice. The vote was 286 against, and 270 in favour. Sponsored by Labour MP Lauren Edwards, the bill would have allowed terminally-ill adults to avail of assisted suicide, with the approval of two doctors and a multidisciplinary review panel. The patient would have to

administer the substance themselves, after a 14-day reflection period.

In June last year, the exact same bill passed its final Commons vote by a majority of 23. It then went to the House of Lords, where it underwent lengthy scrutiny but failed to complete all its parliamentary stages before the 2024–26 session ended in April this year.

Under the Parliament Acts, if the Commons passes essentially the same Bill in two successive parliamentary sessions, and the Lords rejects it or fails to pass it on both occasions, the Bill can ultimately become law without the Lords' consent. Fortunately, it does not have to go before the Lords now given what happens in the Commons.

The Government was officially neutral, but many members of the Labour party voted against it. Ashley Dalton, a Labour MP, is herself terminally ill with cancer and said that “assisted dying” crossed her own mind after her diagnosis, but she intends to vote against the Bill: “There can be no meaningful choice if people’s [only] options are continued suffering or an assisted death.”

Dr Zubir Ahmed, another Labour MP, as well as a transplant and vascular surgeon and former health minister also voted against the Bill, arguing that Parliament should first improve palliative and social care.

“A choice between death without adequate care and a death prematurely self-induced is not a real choice.”

The new Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, was officially neutral on the matter and abstained in today's vote. Personally, he has supported assisted suicide in principle but lately he expressed reservations, if palliative care is not improved. The previous Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, instead, voted in favour of the bill last year, even if his Government was officially neutral.

Opposed to the Bill were also prominent medical organisations such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists, The British Geriatrics Society and the Association of Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland.

The British Geriatrics Society warned that older people will constitute the population most affected but that the Bill contained insufficient protection against abuse, coercion and the feeling of being a burden. It said: “The bill also lacked specific provisions to recognise the complex health and social care needs of older people living with multiple long-term conditions, frailty or dementia, nor did it include requirements for a comprehensive needs assessment”, they said.

This issue has gone on to the backburner in Ireland for now, and hopefully what happened today in the House of Commons will keep it here for longer.

HOW MARRIAGE HELPS COMBAT POVERTY



Family stability should be recognised as a core component of any child poverty strategy, according to a new report from the UK Centre for Social Justice. The reason? Stable relationships provide a platform for economic progress. Governments usually approach child poverty as a problem of insufficient income, the report by Dr Harry Benson argues. The standard responses are higher benefits, better childcare, employment programmes and greater investment in education. All of these may have a role, but the report, titled *The Stability Advantage: Marriage, Family Breakdown and Poverty in the UK*, argues that one

crucial factor is too often ignored: whether a child's parents remain together.

The report draws on the Millennium Cohort Study, following more than 3,000 couples through the first fourteen years of parenthood. Its most interesting finding is that married parents in the poorest fifth of households were less likely to separate than unmarried parents in the richest fifth, even after the research controlled for a wide range of social, economic and demographic differences.

This challenges the common argument that married couples are more stable only because they tend to be richer, older or better educated. Those selection effects certainly matter, but the report maintains that they do not explain most of the difference. Earlier studies, it argues, often excluded respondents with missing information. Because missing data were especially common among unmarried couples and those who later separated, this approach may have understated instability among unmarried parents. When the full sample is analysed, marriage remained strongly associated with a lower risk of separation across income groups.

The economic consequences are substantial. Parents who stayed together throughout the fourteen-year period under examination were twice as likely to move up the income distribution as those who separated. Those who

broke up were twice as likely to move down. Among families who began in the lowest income group, 53 pc of intact couples moved upwards, compared with only 29 pc of those who separated.

This should not surprise us. Couples who remain together can share their earnings, housing and childcare costs, support one another through unemployment or illness. Separation divides resources and often creates additional housing and childcare costs. Family breakdown is therefore not merely a consequence of poverty; it can be one of its causes. Marriage matters because it turns commitment into something explicit and public. Through marriage, couples align their long-term intentions, accept responsibilities before family and community, and separation becomes more difficult legally, socially and psychologically. The wedding ceremony is not simply a celebration of affection. It is a solemn promise that encourages spouses to hold themselves accountable to one another.

Public policy should stop pretending that all family structures produce identical outcomes, the report argues. It recommends that the tax and social welfare system should not penalise low-income couples for marrying because it can push them off benefits. For example, if a lone mother on benefits marries a man earning say,

£20,000, she would lose her welfare payment and is therefore better off not marrying him.

The report also proposes financial support during the first three years of a child's life, when families face intense pressures and relationships are particularly vulnerable. The main message of the report is that strengthening marriage helps in numerous ways, including financially. Any child-poverty strategy that ignores family stability addresses the symptoms while neglecting one of the most important causes.

THE MULTIPLE CAUSES OF FALLING FERTILITY RATES



An important new study explores the causes of falling birth rates and unsurprisingly finds multiple causes but with the decline of marriage and intimate relationships playing a big part. The author, Tomáš Sobotka, is deputy

director of the Vienna Institute of Demography and an internationally recognised expert on fertility and family change. He describes the present fall in fertility as unusually widespread, deep and persistent. He says the fall has been deeper and faster than anticipated. Ireland's fertility rate is now 1.5, well below replacement level.

There is no single cause. Instead, several economic, social and cultural trends are working together. One of the most important is the growing number of young adults who are not marrying or forming intimate relationships. This "relationship recession" is contributing directly to fewer births.

Growing numbers of people in their twenties, thirties and forties are not in a romantic relationship or married. Since most children are born within stable relationships, this inevitably affects birth rates. Deliberately choosing not to have kids has also become more common and socially acceptable. The traditional expectation that most people will eventually be parents is weakening, while more young adults are uncertain whether they want children at all.

Postponing parenthood creates a further difficulty. As more couples delay trying for a child until their mid-thirties or later, more will experience age-related

infertility. Assisted reproduction cannot fully compensate for the loss of the reproductive years.

Digital technology may also be changing relationships. Studies suggest that increased internet use is associated with less face-to-face socialising and fewer intimate relationships. Sobotka warns that the wider adoption of AI may bring further disruption to employment, social relations and family life. One recent analysis cited in the paper points to young people's "crushing sense that the future is too uncertain" for the lifelong commitment of parenthood.

Economic uncertainty is also part of the fertility decline. People who are worried about employment or income are more likely to postpone major life decisions, including marriage and parenthood. Yet economics cannot explain everything: birth rates have often failed to recover even during periods of economic growth and falling unemployment.

Housing costs also matter, although their effects are not always straightforward. High rents and unaffordable homes can delay family formation. On the other hand, rising property values may encourage births among homeowners by making them feel wealthier and more financially secure.

Expectations about the future are equally important. Anxiety about war, political instability, inequality or climate change can reduce both the desire and the intention to have children. The study describes a broader crisis of confidence among young adults, many of whom doubt that their children would enjoy a better life than they have.

Fertility also tends to fall when women, especially those who are educated and employed, experience inequality within the home, according to the paper. If women have the same responsibilities as men at work but continue to perform most childcare and household tasks, marriage and motherhood can become less attractive.

Sobotka's study is therefore sceptical about policies designed to increase fertility. Financial incentives may help at the margins, but they cannot by themselves provide affordable housing, secure employment, equal relationships or a suitable partner with whom to start a family.

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF FAFCE, THE FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY ORGANISATIONS IN EUROPE

Dear friends of FAFCE, I need to share with you the difficult times that the Federation of Catholic Family

Associations in Europe (FAFCE) is living at this moment. Due to the refusal of the European Commission to fund all our projects, as they allegedly “may contravene EU equality”, our budget is in dire need of help. We are at a crossroads. We can only continue to our level of activity and expand our mission for the family with your support.

During the last few months, FAFCE was active in the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the United Nations-related NGO community, while also trying to strengthen its internal budget.

April began with FAFCE’s advocacy on the protection of children online. We welcomed the European Commission’s work on an EU age-verification system and particularly highlighted the principle that parents, rather than digital platforms, have the primary responsibility for raising and educating their children.

FAFCE also achieved an important institutional presence within the Council of Europe’s civil-society structures: our Advocacy Director, Teresa Gerns, was elected Co-chair of the Women’s Rights Committee of the Conference of NGOs of the Council of Europe (CINGO). The committee works on gender equality and women’s rights, policy proposals and advocacy, giving FAFCE an additional

channel through which to contribute to Council of Europe discussions.

A major focus in April was Ukraine. FAFCE organised, together with L'Œuvre d'Orient and with the participation of MEP General Christophe Gomart, the European Parliament conference "Peace Actors in Ukraine: Families Paving the Way to Peace", held on 22 April. FAFCE presented families not only as vulnerable groups requiring protection in wartime, but also as actors of resilience, reconciliation and future peace-building. Speakers included representatives coming directly from Ukraine, like Bishop Radoslaw Zmitrowicz, a Ukrainian refugee mother and representatives of *Équipes Notre-Dame* in Ukraine.

At the Council of Europe, FAFCE was also following the Parliamentary Assembly's April session in Strasbourg and engaging with parliamentarians on questions including freedom of religion, discrimination, the Istanbul Convention and the culture of consent.

The peak of our Federation life was the Spring Board Meeting in South Tyrol, held from 5 to 7 May in Bolzano. Members from across Europe met to review their activities, discuss the Federation's work at European and UN level, and establish strategic priorities for the months

ahead. The meeting also included participation in a conference marking 60 years of family policy in South Tyrol.

The Board adopted the resolution “The family as source of hope: Lighthouses of Hope – Christian virtues as a way of life.” The resolution presents families as sources of stability, solidarity, social awareness, peace and joy in a context marked by war, demographic crisis, loneliness, problematic uses of digital technologies and consumerism. It also reiterates FAFCE’s understanding of intergenerational and family-to-family solidarity as a foundation from which political actors can learn.

On 25 May, I had the privilege to attend a significant meeting at the Vatican when Pope Leo XIV received members of the European Parliament’s Demography Intergroup. I subsequently spoke at a conference on family and demographics, emphasising the role of family networks in responding to loneliness and explaining why family policies should be understood as an investment rather than a cost.

In June, Maria Waszkiewicz took part in the Warsaw conference “Motherhood in the 21st Century – Support and Protection Policies in the Face of Challenges and Threats.” The event brought together politicians,

academics, lawyers and NGOs and examined motherhood and parenthood, family support policies and surrogacy, including its legal, psychological and ethical dimensions. Another important strand of FAFCE's June work concerned children's safety online. Following the European Parliament's 17 June debate on children's safety and mental health in relation to social media, FAFCE emphasised the risks posed by harmful online content and particularly the exposure of children to pornography. The Federation linked this issue to its wider work through the European Child SHIELD Platform and to the need for stronger protection of minors.

FAFCE's Council of Europe advocacy continued during the Parliamentary Assembly's June session, with particular attention to the report "Violent pornography: a test for human rights" voted on 25 June. In its July assessment, FAFCE welcomed the political consensus around protecting children from pornography and the recognition of its potential impact on children's mental health and development. At the same time, FAFCE expressed reservations about elements of the resolution, particularly the insufficient emphasis on the rights of parents as primary educators.

The most recent major item published by FAFCE concerns the EU's demographic policy. On 14 July, FAFCE was invited to the European Commission's presentation of

its third demographic strategy. The Federation welcomed the announcement of a European Demography Forum, expected to convene for the first time in March 2027, seeing it as a positive step toward more structured European-level discussion of demographic issues.

First, demographic renewal is still a central strategic concern. FAFCE has consistently argued that Europe's demographic decline cannot be addressed simply through labour-market measures: policies must recognise marriage, parenthood, children, intergenerational solidarity and unpaid family care as fundamental social goods. Our Spring Board Resolution, participation in the Vatican meeting on demography and response to the European Commission's new demographic strategy all point in the same direction.

Secondly, FAFCE has significantly developed its advocacy for children and parents in the digital environment. Its interventions on age verification, social media and pornography consistently emphasise child protection, while defending the primary role of parents in education and upbringing.

I do hope that you will consider helping us in order to make those projects into real achievements.

Donations can be made through the FAFCE website:
<https://www.fafce.org/support-us/>

Yours faithfully,
Vincenzo Bassi
FAFCE President

160 civil society organisations call on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding surrogacy and the sale of children

On 14th September, the Group of Experts of the Declaration of Casablanca for the Universal Abolition of Surrogacy, together with 160 civil society organisations from around the world, including Family Solidarity, addressed a letter to the members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, asking them to explicitly recognise that remunerated surrogacy, whether directly or indirectly remunerated, constitutes the sale of children within the meaning of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This initiative is based in particular on the definition of the sale of children contained in the Optional Protocol and on positions already expressed by several United Nations bodies. The Committee on the Rights of the Child itself stated, in its 2019 guidelines on the implementation of the Optional

Protocol, that surrogacy “may also constitute sale of children”.

The letter now calls on the Committee to take a further step by clearly affirming that remunerated surrogacy, whether directly or indirectly remunerated, constitutes by definition the sale of children. The 160 signatory civil society organisations recall that all forms of surrogacy, whether remunerated or not, entail serious violations of children’s rights as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Remunerated surrogacy, whether directly or indirectly remunerated, additionally constitutes the sale of children and further aggravates the situation suffered by the child. The specific classification of remunerated surrogacy as the sale of children must in no way be interpreted as a validation, even implicitly, of non-remunerated surrogacy, whose violations of children’s rights remain unchanged.

The signatory organisations therefore call on the Committee to:

- affirm that remunerated surrogacy, whether directly or indirectly remunerated, constitutes the sale of children within the meaning of the Optional Protocol;
- call on States parties to adopt legislative measures to protect children from surrogacy;

- encourage the development of an international instrument aimed at the worldwide abolition of this practice.

“The question we are putting to the Committee is a legal one: when a child is handed over to commissioning parties in exchange for direct or indirect payment, can we continue to refuse to legally name what is taking place? We are asking the Committee on the Rights of the Child to place the rights of the child at the centre of this analysis and to provide a clear response.”

Olivia Maurel, Executive Director of the Declaration of Casablanca Association.

The letter also recalls the conclusions of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, Reem Alsalem, who called on States to take steps towards eradicating surrogacy in all its forms and to work towards the adoption of an international legally binding instrument prohibiting all forms of surrogacy.

It further recalls that the Committee on the Rights of the Child has, on several occasions, expressed concern in its recommendations to States regarding the link between surrogacy and the sale of children.

Through this international mobilisation, the 160 signatory civil society organisations are now calling on the Committee to clarify its position and explicitly recognise

that remunerated surrogacy, whether directly or indirectly remunerated, falls within the definition of the sale of children under applicable international law.

WEBINAR ON SAINT FRANCIS

We are organising an online webinar on Saint Francis of Assisi on Sunday 4th October at 6.30pm, during the Franciscan Year, which marks the eighth centenary of his death. In January 2026, the Church began a rare commemoration: 800 years since the passing of Saint Francis of Assisi. Known as the *Transitus*, the saint's death on October 3, 1226, now anchors a Franciscan Jubilee Year running from January 10, 2026, through January 10, 2027.

This jubilee is not devotional shorthand. It is a formally proclaimed Jubilee Year, established by decree of the Vatican's Apostolic Penitentiary, which grants a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions.

The talk will be given by Dr. Ben Hazard, historian and author of a recent book on Luke Wadding. Ben will speak about Saint Francis, with particular reference to Luke Wadding's work on the writings of Saint Francis and the Franciscan tradition.

To register and receive the Zoom link for the Saint Francis webinar, please email us at **familysolidarityireland@gmail.com**

Thank you for your generous donations. They are the lifeline of Family Solidarity, and our sole source of funding.

We have included a return envelope and subscription slip with every copy of the newsletter, as it is simpler than trying to identify those from whom we have not received a response.

You may wish to pay by bank transfer to IBAN IE65 AIBK 9310 5527 3380 29

Please ensure that you include your name on your instruction to your bank so that we know whose subscription or donation it is.

The P.O. Box service has been discontinued. To ensure smooth correspondence, please use the following address instead: Ely House, 8 Ely Place, Dublin 2.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The next Annual General Meeting of Family Solidarity will take place on Saturday 28th November in Ely House, 8 Ely Place, Dublin 2.

The AGM will follow the same structure as last year. We will begin at 10.00 am with Mass for present and deceased members.

Mass will be followed by a guest talk. This year's speaker will be Sinead Strong, founder of Catholic Mothers Ireland. After lunch, which will be provided, the formal business of the meeting will take place.

Members and supporters are warmly encouraged to attend. Those who cannot attend in person and want to follow us online, can request a Zoom link at familysolidarityireland@gmail.com