

# ON A RING AND A PRAYER

The See of Liverpool is no soft option. But then  
**JAMES JONES** is no soft bishop

**T**HE Church House canteen is awash with talk and paper plates. The General Synod of The Church of England has put into harbour after a morning's navigation around the assorted shoals and reefs of clerical legislation and now canons, rural deans, vicars, chaplains and elected laymen and women can cheep away, unrestricted by the intimidating glow of the chairman's five minute red warning beacon.

James Jones, enthroned as Bishop of Liverpool eleven days ago, edges a chair into a gap at one end of a crowded table, and opens a plastic packet of sandwiches. He greets my opening question with refreshing honesty. 'Marriage? Well I believe it's still a vibrant institution in our society. Marriage is still the social norm. The vast majority of people still get married, even couples who have lived together previously. There is still a widespread recognition that the best context for raising children is marriage.'

And the importance of raising children within a sound family background is a recurring message from this 50-year-old former RE teacher and audio-visual producer who was catapulted from the challenging bishopric of Hull to the even more challenging bishopric of Liverpool on the personal recommendation of Tony Blair.



## FAMILY VALUES

In an enthronement sermon which expertly wove social conscience with pastoral responsibility and Millennium evangelism, he quickly came to the

issue for which he has become well known.

*'With others I welcome the Prime Minister's determination to tackle social*

*exclusion and the priority he's giving to supporting the institution of the family as a means of strengthening the community. The publication of the Government's Green Paper on the family merits the most serious attention and debate. The seeds of social exclusion are sown very early in a person's life.*

*'The pattern of social exclusion and the behaviour that leads to it begin when children first feel alienated from their parents. With others I encourage the Prime Minister to take the Government's policies about the family to their logical and moral conclusion and to lay historic new foundations for the institution of the family in the tax and benefit system.*

*'For too long over the last 30 years under previous governments this system has discriminated against the family by more than doubling the tax burden on married couples with children. ... We need a tax and benefit system that truly strengthens the bond between parent and child. ... To ignore all the studies which make it clear that children brought up in secure and stable relationships are more likely to flourish and less likely to offend against society while*