

SHARING IN THE *Joy*
OF *Love*
IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

A PASTORAL PLAN
TO IMPLEMENT
AMORIS LÆTITIA



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PRAYER TO THE HOLY FAMILY





“Every family should look to the icon of the

Holy Family of Nazareth.

Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares... Like Mary, they (today’s families) are asked to face their family’s challenges with courage and serenity, in good times and bad, and to keep in their heart the great things which God has done (cf. Luke 2:19,51).”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 30

PREFACE

Pope Francis' post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*) is rich in teaching on marriage and love. It also offers pastoral perspectives on how to live this beautiful message.

Many collaborators have worked to provide elements of a pastoral plan to implement this expression of the Papal Magisterium that follows on two gatherings of bishops, the 2014 Synod on the Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization and the 2015 Synod on the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World. As a prelude to the many facets of the plan, I want to begin with these observations.



REFLECTIONS

The scene is the great Upper Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The occasion is the celebration of wedding anniversaries involving hundreds of couples. The moment is the offertory procession.

Leading the couples down the aisle to present the gifts is a man and woman celebrating their 74th wedding anniversary. Following them is their son and his wife celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary and immediately behind them is their granddaughter and her spouse celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. The tableau is a visible proclamation of what Pope Francis announces at the very beginning of *Amoris Laetitia*: “The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church” (1).

The desire to love and to be loved is a deep, enduring part of our human experience. God has written onto each human heart the desire for self-giving love, reflected in the divine plan for marriage and family. That plan offers a profound “yes” to true joy in love. It gives us an invitation to experience Christian hope in the love of God that never ends.

The Church recognizes and rejoices in this human desire for love, marked by generosity and sacrifice, in the young adult discerning his or her life’s vocation, in a young couple preparing joyfully for marriage, in a middle-aged couple raising children amid the pressures of family life, and in an elderly couple celebrating golden years of marriage with children and grandchildren.

Not every marriage, however, goes forward with “they lived happily ever after.” In fact, for many, in our heavily secular culture today, there is little understanding of the true nature of love, marriage, commitment, and self-giving which are all part of the Catholic vision of love. Yet, while their lives and experiences may have drawn many far away from the Church’s message, we are all the more called to reach out to them, to invite and accompany them on the journey that should help bring them to the joy of love that is also the joy of the Church.

With humility and compassion, the Church also wishes to encounter, to listen to, and to accompany those whose experience of human love is marked by disappointment, pain, and obstacles. As an instrument of salvation, the Church offers the love and mercy of God as the sure path to fulfill the human desire for love, and walks with those who bear and try to overcome the trials and difficulties that too often mark marriage and family as they do life in general.

Everyone is part of a family, however strong or tenuous his or her lived experience of family bonds might be. All the faithful, by virtue of the grace of Baptism, are members of the Body of Christ, adopted sons and daughters of God, and brothers and sisters to one another in the Church experienced as a family of families. *Amoris Laetitia* seeks to present both an “invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and family and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience... (and) to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy” (AL, 5).

“The Church is a

family of families...

The safeguarding of

the Lord’s gift in the

sacrament of matrimony

is a concern not only

of individual families but

of the *entire Christian*

community.”

POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA* 87

Reflecting on the implementation of *Amoris Laetitia* in the Archdiocese of Washington, we begin first with the richness of the Church’s perennial teaching on love, marriage, family, faith and mercy. Here we need to look at a significant teaching of the exhortation, namely, the understanding of the family as the site of God’s revelation lived out in practice.

Secondly, we need to remember that our task is not complete if we only limit ourselves to faith statements. The goal is the salvation of souls and it is a far more complex effort than simply restating Church doctrine. For this reason, it is essential to recognize that our teaching is received by individuals according to their own situation, experience and life. Whatever is received is received according to the ability of the receiver, to paraphrase Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas. This is our starting point for pastoral ministry.

Pope Francis has a way of bringing together both the teaching of the Church and the lived experience of that teaching. Both are aspects of ecclesial life and ministry. The interaction between the proclamation of doctrine and what we learn from the lived experience of it was one of the ecclesial actions highlighted in the two recent synods.

There is a sense in which the right understanding of the work of both the 2014 and 2015 synods and their fruit, *Amoris Laetitia*, depends upon the recognition of this interactive dynamic between teaching, experiencing the teaching, and the living out of the teaching in light of how it is understood

and able to be received. This recognition is perhaps the most challenging aspect of *Amoris Laetitia*. It calls for a conversion of heart. The minister is called to recognize that beyond the assurance of doctrinal statements he has to encounter the people entrusted to his care in the concrete situations they live and to accompany them on a journey of growth in the faith.

Faithful to the Church's long pastoral tradition, also highlighted in *Amoris Laetitia*, is the significant role of conscience in moral judgment. "Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1796).

A third aspect of this pastoral plan includes the effort to delineate some of the ways of accompaniment followed with a special emphasis on the family as the vehicle of the revelation of God's plan. We will then consider some areas of implementing *Amoris Laetitia* to engage and pastorally accompany all the faithful, to equip them with pastoral resources, and to build a "culture of accompaniment."

The final section of this pastoral plan is a collection of resources available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Archdiocese of Washington, and other websites and sources.





"The family is also a sign of Christ.

It manifests the closeness of God who is a part of every human life, since he became one with us through his incarnation, death and resurrection."

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 161

PART I

AMORIS LAETITIA'S TEACHING

The Holy Father's post-synodal apostolic exhortation is nourished by the rich fruit of two synods on the family, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and the Papal Magisterium of Blessed Paul VI, Saint John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI. For inspiration, we look to the Holy Trinity, the Holy Family of Nazareth, biblical figures who experienced the joys and struggles of human love, the holiness of the saints, and those ordinary, and often heroic, witnesses to marriage and family that surround us each day. In these witnesses to the joy of self-giving love, we discover that the Christian ideal of marriage and family is, with God's grace, attainable as a path to genuine human fulfillment.

“GOD IS LOVE” (I JOHN 4:8)

The teaching, “God is love,” is central to all forms of preaching, pastoral care, evangelization and catechesis. Divine love also stands at the heart of marriage and family given to us by God who is the unity of divine Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis notes that, “The word of God tells us that the family is entrusted to a man, a woman, and their children, so that they may become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Begetting and raising children, for its part, mirrors God's creative work. The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells” (AL, 29).

To believe that God is love is a gift of faith. For God's love is not an abstract idea but an invitation. For “by the grace of Baptism ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’ we are called to share in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light” (CCC, 265).

In the opening chapters of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis discusses God's creation and plan for marriage and family as revealed in Scripture, and how it contrasts with the concrete experiences of the family in the human condition and the practical issues that families, and those who wish to form families, face in the world today. Particularly challenging is an individualism that is concerned only with one's desires, as well as the throwaway culture that sweeps away marriage and family whenever they prove inconvenient or tiresome.

Against this dominant culture is needed a greater effort to help couples and families respond more fully to the grace that God offers them. Here the Holy Father calls us to help families and their members in their faith development so that they can fulfill their call to be agents of the family apostolate.

The Holy Father then reminds us of the vocation of the human family which is revealed in the infinite love of the Lord who was made incarnate in a human family, and who gave himself for our sake and continues to dwell in our midst. The icon of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, with their share of joys and difficulties, strengthens families as they face challenges with courage and serenity, in good times and bad, and keep in their hearts always the great things which God has done. (cf. Luke 2:19). Quoting extensively from Scripture and Church teaching, Pope Francis affirms that the common life of husband, wife and children can be steeped in and strengthened by sacramental grace. For those in irregular situations, continues the Pope, Christ inspires the Church to turn to them with love and affection to assist them in overcoming the trials they face.

Offering counsel to couples, family members, and all of us while reflecting on Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Pope Francis explains that authentic love is patient and merciful. Love is at the service of others and is marked by generosity and humility; it is neither rude nor resentful, and it rejoices with others in hope and fruitfulness. Love surmounts even the worst barriers and always brings new life. Furthermore, he emphasizes, dialogue, quality time, valuing the other person

and keeping an open mind are essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life. Sadly, this is not always the experience of people.

STEP BY STEP

In the second half of his exhortation, Pope Francis provides some pastoral perspectives, saying that the Church wishes with humility and compassion to reach out to these people and families and help them through discernment, dialogue and prayerful support and understanding to overcome obstacles. Following the "logic of pastoral mercy" and gradualness in pastoral care, Pope Francis encourages pastoral discernment. Here he tells us: "As for the way of dealing with different 'irregular situations' the Synod Fathers reached a general consensus, which I support: 'In considering a pastoral approach toward people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them,' something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit" (AL, 297).

Without claiming to present an entire pastoral plan, the Holy Father calls for a family apostolate that offers more adequate catechesis and formation, not only of engaged and married couples and their children, but also priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated religious, catechists, teachers, social workers, medical professionals and other pastoral workers.



“The common life of husband and wife, the entire network of relations that they build with their children and the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by *the grace of the sacrament....*”

...Neither of the spouses will be alone in facing whatever challenges may come their way. Both are called to respond to God’s gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort.”

POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA* 74

"A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table."

POPE FRANCIS,
AMORIS LAETITIA 15



Formation for marriage and family life needs to begin at an early stage, Pope Francis urges. A more intensive long-term and short-term marriage preparation, as well as accompanying newly-married couples and the formation of mentor couples, will provide the tools needed to face trials together and thereby prevent, in the first place, problems that might lead to a break-up of the marriage and family. Education of children in schools, parishes and within the family with respect to caring for one another, developing moral virtues, experiencing socialization, fostering good habits – all these are necessary.

If there is a breakdown that leads to separation or even divorce, that loving accompaniment by the Church needs to continue, said the Holy Father. "It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church," he added, and pastoral care to their children needs to be "the primary concern" (AL, 243-45). Likewise, the Church accompanies with love those who are co-habiting or who experience a same-sex attraction to help them to carry out God's will in their lives.

The rule to follow in all cases, the Pope makes clear, is the love and mercy of the Lord. He says: "It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an 'unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous' mercy." In the content of exclusion from the full life of the Church, he continues: "No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves. Naturally, if someone flaunts an objective sin as if it were part of the Christian ideal, or wants to impose something other than what the Church teaches, he or she can in no way presume to teach or preach to others; this is a case of something which separates from the community (cf. Matthew 18:17). Such a person needs to listen once more to the Gospel message and its call to conversion. Yet even for that person there can be some way of taking part in the life of community, whether in social service, prayer meetings or another way that his or her own initiative, together with the discernment of the parish priest, may suggest" (AL, 297).

Marriage and family, as we know from personal experiences, endure all the pains and sufferings, the trials and tribulations of the human condition. Yet, we know that with and through the Risen Christ, all things are made new. Marriage and family can be revitalized and made into the marriage and family that God wants for us.





"Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow;
it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles,
tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and
pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to
care for one another."

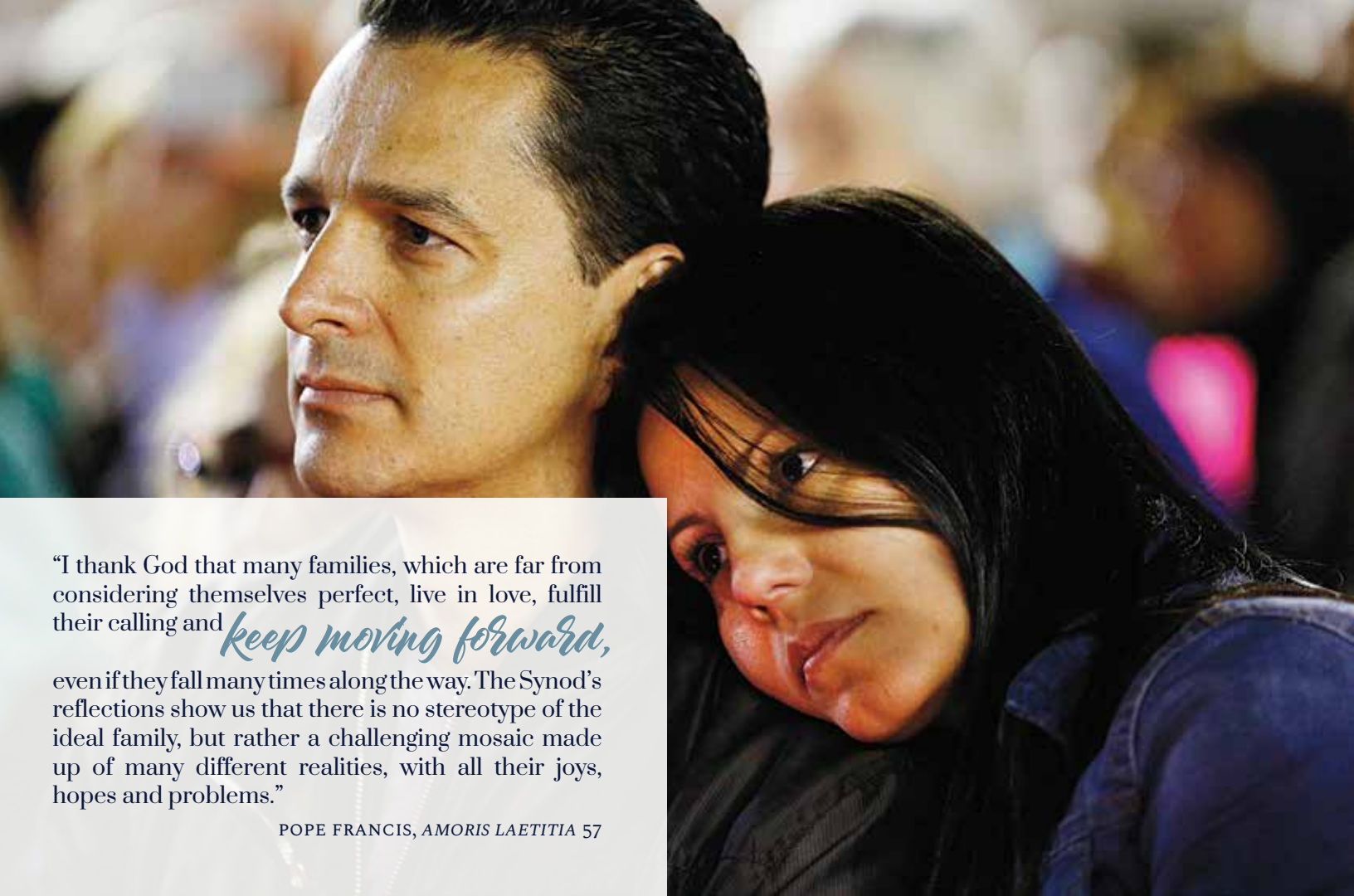
POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA* 126

PART II

THE WAY OF FAITH AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

As beautiful as God’s plan for marriage and family is, for many people it might seem difficult to relate to or may even seem unattainable. As Pope Francis affirms, and as many pastors and pastoral workers know, we live in a culture in which the way the Church acts and the words the Church uses have a different meaning or, in some cases, little meaning to people. Many adult Catholics do not know the fullness of what the Church teaches and have never experienced it lived out. Some know Church teaching, but citing the primacy of individual conscience (which is sometimes a misinformed conscience), they simply pick and choose which teachings they will practice or not follow. For others, the often not so silent pressures of popular culture forcefully propose a “new normal” that sells short the dignity of the human person.

At this point we hear echoes of the address to the United States Bishops by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to our country in 2008 when he underlined how the “barriers” of secularism, materialism, and individualism are “further evidence of the urgent need for a renewed evangelization of culture” (April 16, 2008).



“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and *keep moving forward*, even if they fall many times along the way. The Synod’s reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems.”

POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA* 57

CONTEXT OF TODAY’S MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Today the environment in which we preach the Gospel is highly secularized. In the 2012 Synod on the New Evangelization, a common theme that emerged was the impact of popular culture on the way people think about faith. I have spoken of this global trend as a “tsunami of secularism” that has washed across our cultures, taking with it many foundational elements, such as appreciation of marriage and family, a basic understanding of right and wrong, and a sense of community.

The Holy Father noted it is precisely within this context that our people live, and where the light of the Gospel is offered to help them move beyond partial or false mindsets. The Church seeks to find different ways of demonstrating not simply a desire to accompany people where they are, but also to show we are walking with them in the concrete

situations of their lives toward the truth, and so we can hear them and they can begin to hear us.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, the Church is asked to proclaim the saving love of Jesus with joy. It invites us to be particularly aware of those who live at the peripheries and who may have lost hope wondering whether God could love them or if they can find a place of welcome within the Church. The Pope asks us to be a Church that walks with individuals and families whose marriages or family life may not reflect the fullness of God’s vision and to assure them of their place in the family of God and share the Good News that in Jesus all things will be made new (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Does this openness to others, as together we try to make our way to the Lord, sound like the Gospel

testimony to the saving ministry of Jesus? We need to be less prepared to point out the failures and shortcomings of others and more ready, as our Holy Father says, “to help each person find his or her proper way of participating” (AL, 297). This is a first step in what must be a living part of the Christian community’s welcome, embrace and challenge. The Church, in her vast pastoral experience, recognizes the limits that are a part of the lived experience of each believer.

The act of accompaniment includes fidelity to the teaching as well as awareness of how the teaching is being received or even able to be perceived. An equally important part of our Catholic faith is the recognition that personal culpability rests with the individual. We have always made the distinction between objective wrong and personal or subjective culpability.

The personal culpability of any of us does not depend solely on exposure to the teaching. It is not enough simply to hear the teaching. Each of us has to be helped to grasp it and appropriate it. We have to have “experiential” and not just “objective” moral knowledge, to use the language of Saint John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* (*The Splendor of Truth*) (63). Our consideration of our standing before God recognizes all these elements. We cannot enter the soul of another and make that judgment for someone else. As Pope Francis teaches, “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL, 37).

Secularism – Materialism – Individualism

ACCORDING TO POPE BENEDICT XVI

“While it is true that this country is marked by a genuine religious spirit, the subtle influence of **secularism** can nevertheless color the way people allow their faith to influence their behavior. Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs? Is it consistent for practicing Catholics to ignore or exploit the poor and the marginalized, to promote sexual behavior contrary to Catholic moral teaching, or to adopt positions that contradict the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death?”

“For an affluent society, a further obstacle to an encounter with the living God lies in the subtle influence of **materialism**, which can all too easily focus the attention on the hundredfold, which God promises now in this time, at the expense of the eternal life which he promises in the age to come (cf. *Mark* 10:30). People today need to recognize that implanted within them is a deep thirst for God. They need to be given opportunities to drink from the wells of his infinite love. It is easy to be entranced by almost unlimited possibilities that science and technology place before us; it is easy to make the mistake of thinking we can obtain by our own efforts the fulfillment of our deepest needs.”

“In a society which values personal freedom and autonomy, it is easy to lose sight of our dependence on others as well as the responsibilities we bear towards them. This emphasis on **individualism** has even affected the Church (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 13-15), giving rise to a form of piety which sometimes emphasizes our private relationship with God at the expense of our calling to be members of a redeemed community. Yet from the beginning, God saw that ‘it is not good for man to be alone’ (*Gen* 2:18). We were created as social beings who find fulfillment only in love—for God and for our neighbor. If we are truly to gaze upon him who is the source of our joy, we need to do so as members of the people of God (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 14).”

ADDRESS OF POPE BENEDICT XVI TO THE
BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 16, 2008

RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE

The exhortation places emphasis on the role of the individual conscience in appropriating moral norms into the person's actual circumstances. Given the inroads that secularism and relativism have made among the faithful, the Holy Father has indicated that we have a greater responsibility than in past ages: to recognize those influences that diminish the impact of objective norms; to accompany individuals towards a greater awareness of those norms; and to help others arrive at a greater willingness and capacity to integrate them more fully into their lives.

Here *Amoris Laetitia* confirms the longstanding teaching of the Church and encourages pastors to see through the lens of Christ's mercy and compassion rather than through a rigorous legalism.

Admittedly, this individual process of discernment may not be easy. A person may know well Church teaching, Pope Francis notes, yet have great difficulty in either understanding its inherent positive value, or in being able to fully embrace it right away because of circumstances (AL, 301).

Yet, the underlying moral principle which should inform both that personal discernment and the priest's ministry is that a person whose situation in life is objectively contrary to moral teaching can still love and grow in the faith, he or she can still take steps in the right direction and benefit from God's mercy and grace while receiving the assistance of the Church (AL, 305).

Pastoral dialogue and accompaniment involve the development of conscience and also the expression of a level of support or confirmation for the judgment the individual is making about the state of his soul or her soul. That judgment is the act of the individual and is the basis for their accountability before God.

In practice, this means that while some may be secure in their understanding and appropriation of the faith and the call of the Christian way of life, not all of our spiritual family can say the same thing. Even how we receive and understand the faith and its impact on our lives varies according to our situation, circumstances and life experiences.

The Church's teaching has not changed!

1. No, the Church's teaching has not changed; objective truth remains unaffected.
2. Yes, the ability of the individual to understand and appropriate the teaching and its meaning is still a determining factor in assessing personal culpability.
3. No, prudential judgments of individuals about their own situation do not set aside the objective moral order.
4. Yes, one's culpability before God follows on one's conscience, and a decision of conscience to act in one way or another requires guidance and spiritual formation.
5. In Catholic pastoral ministry there is an interaction of objective moral directives and the effort to live them according to one's ability to grasp them and thus make appropriate prudential judgments.

Accompaniment is that aspect of pastoral ministry, particularly in our heavily secular and relativistic culture, that tries, in light of all the above points, to weave a faithful and realistic pathway to the Lord.

“We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to *take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.*”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 40



THE CALL TO ACCOMPANY OTHERS WHERE THEY ARE

In *Amoris Laetitia*, the Holy Father gives priority to the practice of pastoral accompaniment, which in its most fundamental aspect involves leading others closer to God. We begin each encounter mindful of everyone’s innate human dignity. Pope Francis writes: “The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this ‘art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Exodus 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze, which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (*Evangeliū Gaudium*, 169).

The steady and reassuring pace is especially needed when reaching out to individuals, couples, and children who may feel at the margins or outside of Church life because of their personal situations. We see this in the ministry of Jesus. He began his public ministry with the miracle at the wedding

feast of Cana (cf. John 2:1-11). He shared in everyday moments of friendship with Lazarus and his sisters (cf. Luke 10:38) and with the family of Peter (cf. Mark 8:14). He sympathized with grieving parents and restored their children to life (cf. Mark 5:41; Luke 7:14-15). He was present to families, in their joy and sorrow, in their confusion and pain.

Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis shared a helpful image of a pastor who accompanies. To a group of priests gathered in Assisi, Pope Francis asked, “What could be more beautiful for us than walking with our people?... sometimes in front, sometimes behind and sometimes in the middle.” He further explains, “in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too, too far behind, to keep them united” (Address, October 4, 2013).



"Love endures all things.

This 'endurance' involves not only the ability to tolerate certain aggravations, but something greater: a constant readiness to confront any challenge. It is a love that never gives up, even in the darkest hour...The Christian ideal, especially in families, is a love that never gives up."

POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA* II8, II9

PART III

THE WAY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

The ministry of accompaniment is a collaborative effort of priests and laity who understand themselves to be missionary disciples, who experience the love of the Lord in their encounter with him and who seek to share it with others. Pope Francis invites all of us to this practice of accompaniment, noting, “In addition to the small circle of the couple and their children, there is the larger family, which cannot be overlooked. ... Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith” (AL, 196).

At the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis encouraged young people throughout the world to “make a mess” by getting involved in their local faith community in new and creative ways. When it comes to family life, we know that we do not need to encourage people to go out to make a mess, but to look around at the sometimes challenging mess that is family life. Between the messiness of dirty dishes and daily disagreements, families experience in their daily home life the need to seek forgiveness and to forgive. This experience mirrors our own relationship with God. Family life is messy because the story of each one of us is a bit untidy. We may strive to imitate Jesus Christ by living the Golden Rule to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12), but so often each of us falls short in unloving thoughts, words, or actions.

Some people have focused much of the attention of *Amoris Laetitia* on people in so-called “irregular situations” as divorce and remarriage. A honest spiritual assessment of marital and family life recognizes that it could be said that each one of us is in an “irregular situation” when it comes to our relationship with God. Each of us is a sinner in need of wholeness who has fallen short of the great plan God has laid out for us. Yet we are people of unending hope because our own shortcomings are not the end of the story. It is through the encounter with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that we are reconciled to God and to one another. Each of us is in need of this healing, and so we journey together as brothers and sisters united in our common need for the love and mercy of God that heal every broken human heart.



ACCOMPANYING THE HURTING

Jesus was born into the world as the Prince of Peace, but when he was an infant, his family had to flee as refugees to a foreign land for fear of death. So early in the story of the birth of Jesus, peace is threatened by violence. Today, it is no longer possible to pay attention to the news without seeing real-life examples of suffering families throughout the world and in our own communities. This is not God's plan, for "love abhors making others suffer" (AL, 99).

As we identify the realities of family life, we can think first of those victims of violence in all its forms: sexual assault, domestic abuse, gun injuries

and deaths, gang violence, racist words and actions, human trafficking, and so many other ways that the gift of peace is broken in our world. We know that not only the victims of such acts are affected, but also their families, and the families of those who perpetrate violence. The ripples of both joy and sadness, of sin and forgiveness or the lack of forgiveness affect the lives of not only individuals, but also the entire human family. For "every sin is social... because it also has social repercussions" (Saint John Paul II, 1984 post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Reconciliation and Penance*, 15).

ACCOMPANYING THE DISTRACTED

For many individuals and families in the 21st century, one of the greatest challenges to overcome involves the seemingly never-ending distractions of popular culture. This culture of distraction can distance us from our loved ones. How many times have you seen a couple or a parent and child spending “quality time” together with one or both of them staring at the screens of their phones, “sharing the same room without one even noticing the other?” (AL, 224). When we live constantly distracted by noise or technology, we miss out on quality time with God and those around us. In the process, we train ourselves to believe that our identity is based on the things we accomplish or possess, not on being children of our loving Father.

Multigenerational families learn from family members of all ages, valuing each person for who they are, not what they can do. From the moment of conception to the moment of natural death, our abilities change, but our dignity, rooted in Christ, remains constant. As we age, we may lose some of our physical abilities, but we can never lose our human dignity. Pope Francis notes what we can learn from the elderly, because “their words, their affection or simply their presence help children

to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age-old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them” (AL, 192).

Together as a Church, “We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage” (AL, 40).

Many people might feel tempted to distract themselves from the busyness of life through addictions to technology and social media, drugs and alcohol, or pornography. Such addictions negatively affect us and our human family by limiting our authentic human freedom, the greatest gift God has given to us. In the synod on the family, “drug use was also mentioned as one of the scourges of our time, causing immense suffering and even breakup for many families. The same is true of alcoholism, gambling and other addictions. The family could be the place where these are prevented and overcome” (AL, 51).



ACCOMPANYING THE ANONYMOUS

Many young people today are longing for this sense of intimacy and being known, as they float through life seemingly anonymous. Ironically, as our world has become digitally hyper-connected, an increasing number of people feel more and more alone, for “one symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person’s life and the fragility of relationships” (AL, 43).

For some, anonymity means the lack of authentic friendships, sneaking in and out of church without notice, young people church-hopping Sunday after Sunday without belonging to a parish community, or simply the “same-old, same-old” drudgery day after day. Many others feel anonymous within their own families, communities, or churches: the poor, persons with mental health challenges,

those of different races or ethnicities who are not part of a majority, the divorced and remarried, those experiencing infertility or miscarriage, the undocumented and other immigrants, those without jobs or the underemployed, single people, those who identify with same-sex attraction.

A Church that accompanies will go out to call each person by name and to welcome back those who feel lost or alone. The Church must live up to its identity as a “family of families” (AL, 202) where each person is recognized, cared for, and loved. The response to such anonymity, in family life and in the Church, is finding ways to celebrate the gift of each person, for “as long as we can celebrate, we are able to rekindle our love, to free it from monotony and to color our daily routine with hope” (AL, 226).

“In and among families, the Gospel message should always resound.”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 58



“The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the *family of families.*”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 202

PART IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARISH LIFE

The home of pastoral accompaniment is the parish, where we can all experience the healing love and mercy of Jesus Christ. Accompaniment connects people with the relationships and resources needed to sustain and nurture family life and to heal the broken relationships that weaken or break family ties. The parish has a central role in making visible the Gospel vision for marriage and family life.

In *Amoris Laetitia*, the Holy Father underlines the importance of parishes: “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony” (202). We are blessed in the Archdiocese of Washington by the presence of all three of these experiences of Christian communities that provide numerous support and resources.

Our parishes, as the place where people most experience the life of the Church, must be places of welcome, where everyone is invited, particularly anyone who might be disillusioned or disaffected by contemporary society or even by our faith community. The Church assures all that there is a place for everyone here in our spiritual home.

PASTORS

While *Amoris Laetitia* speaks of “pastors,” our reference here is to all of our brother priests in pastoral ministry. We thank God that we still have a sufficient number of priests to provide parochial vicars in many of our parishes. These words concerning pastoral ministry are addressed both to pastors and parochial vicars, in fact, to all our priests in whatever pastoral ministry is their assignment.

Pope Francis reminds us that it is not enough simply to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning. Preaching and pastoral ministries in parishes should encourage families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate with all members of the family growing in faith together, side by side.

When families seek help at our parishes in dealing with challenges, they should always find pastors who will accompany them and listen to them with sensitivity and a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view; and seek to help them live better lives and recognize their place in the Church (cf. AL, 312).

In discussions with priests, we find that ways in which priests can provide accompaniment include:

- meeting one-on-one with couples in marriage preparation;
- identifying and inviting mentor couples to assist with marriage formation and ongoing ministry;
- regularly including prayers for families in the Prayers of the Faithful and stories and experiences of family life in homilies;
- celebrating wedding anniversaries and wedding vow renewals;
- recognizing weddings, baptisms, and funerals as key moments of evangelization of families, when people on the peripheries are in attendance;
- identifying counseling resources to support families in need;
- inviting couples who choose to get married outside the parish to participate in marriage preparation, mentoring or other formation opportunities; and
- discussing with your staff and parish council how the parish can better support families in the parish.



PARISH LEADERS AND STAFF

Often the first person who gives witness to the joy of the Gospel is not the pastor but the parish staff member or volunteer who answers the phone call of an engaged couple, welcomes a family into religious education or the Catholic school, or who greets a couple before Mass. The fundamental attitude of an accompanying community is hospitality, in particular, that offered by the parish office. Pope Francis points out in a very practical way that the parish office should be prepared to deal helpfully and sensitively with family needs and be able to make referrals, when necessary, to those who can help.



Among the suggestions that have come out of the experience of parish leaders and staff in ways that accompaniment can be provided include:

- when couples inquire about preparing for marriage at your parish, congratulating them before asking them about their registration status or paperwork;
- meeting one-on-one with families when they first join the parish, school, or religious education program, seeking their insights on how the parish can serve them, and how they can serve the parish;
- teaching families how to pray together as a family and celebrate family faith traditions;
- including age-appropriate experiences as a part of parish-wide activities (e.g., soup and Stations, Reconciliation services, parish missions, etc.);
- providing social and retreat experiences for couples and families;
- offering childcare for adult faith formation gatherings; and
- helping families identify other Catholic parishioners in their own neighborhood.

YOUTH

The Scriptures and stories of saints remind us that God does not wait until someone turns 18 or 21 to call them to great things. He chose a young adult, Mary, to become the Mother of God. Many of our great Christian saints and heroes were young people who listened daily to God in prayer and made courageous decisions to answer His call in their lives. As Saint Paul reminds us, “Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).



From many of our young people, we learn that some ways that youth can deepen their faith and be engaged in parish life include:

- strengthening your faith with your family (parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives) by praying and going to Mass and parish activities together;
- actively participating in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation and continuing to put your faith into practice as a fully initiated Catholic;
- selecting a sponsor for Confirmation who will be present during the preparation and also after Confirmation as a mentor in the Catholic faith;
- seeking out opportunities to serve others within your parish or your local community;
- becoming an active participant in the life of the parish through opportunities such as youth ministry programs, or as altar servers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers, etc.;
- being actively engaged during Mass and participating in the liturgy with enthusiasm;
- attending a retreat or conference during high school years (annually if possible); and
- getting to know the pastor, priests, deacons and women religious in your parish.

YOUNG ADULTS

Marriage preparation does not begin when you meet your future spouse or are engaged. “Marriage preparation begins at birth,” Pope Francis notes, and continues through each stage of our lives (AL, 208). The best way to discern or prepare for a vocation is to live your faith wholeheartedly and generously.

For young adults, that can mean cultivating the habits and qualities you want to have in the future, and that you want your future spouse to have: like a habit of daily prayer, commitment to the poor, investment in authentic friendships and freedom from addictions.



Other ways that Catholic young adults, they tell us, can deepen their faith, draw closer to Christ, and find a spiritual home in the Church include:

- discerning the gifts that God has given you and put them into practice in your daily life;
- making the commitment to join a parish community;
- donating and volunteering regularly at the parish;
- finding a small community near you to belong to: family, young adult community, small group, lay movement, etc.;
- asking someone you admire to be a mentor – personally, spiritually, or professionally;
- mentoring someone: a young person in your parish, a younger sibling or family friend, a roommate or co-worker, etc.;
- committing yourself to regular service to the poor, vulnerable and forgotten;
- learning more about your faith through ongoing spiritual reading, retreats, adult faith formation programs, and other opportunities;
- if you feel called to marriage, reading more about the Sacrament of Marriage or befriend a married couple to learn from; and
- honoring your father and mother and other family members by working to grow closer to them and demonstrating your love and care for them, even if you live far away.

ENGAGED COUPLES

Being engaged and planning a wedding is both exciting and overwhelming. Pope Francis offers practical advice for engaged couples: “Short-term preparations for marriage tend to be concentrated on invitations, clothes, the party and any number of other details that tend to drain not only the budget but energy and joy as well. The spouses come to the wedding ceremony exhausted and harried, rather than focused and ready for the great step that they are about to take. ... Here let me say a word to fiancés. Have the courage to be different. Don't let yourselves get swallowed up by a society of consumption and empty appearances” (AL, 212). The period of engagement is not only a time to prepare for a wedding day but for a lifetime of marriage.



Engaged couples tell us that for them it is or was a great help to discuss together how you can begin to put into practice the qualities you want to live out as a married couple. Other ways that they suggest might help engaged couples deepen their wedding planning process include:

- reaching out to your local parish about wedding dates when the church is available, before you book a reception venue;
- attending Mass and praying together, to establish a spiritual bond that will endure;
- remembering that you are planning a lifelong marriage, not simply a one-day wedding! Invest time in the busy months leading up to the wedding day to read a book together about marriage and take part in Catholic marriage preparation that will help prepare you for a lifetime of happiness;
- finding a married mentor couple you look up to and ask to meet them for dinner to talk with them and learn from their experience. Don't have one? Ask your priest for someone to recommend;
- starting your marriage off by being generous. Make a donation to the poor as a part of your wedding budget or in lieu of party favors; and
- learning more about Natural Family Planning including fertility, intimacy, and planning for children.

NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES

Newly married couples begin building their life together as a family with hope, welcoming children and laying down roots. Yet couples can also encounter unexpected struggles and unmet expectations early in their marriage. Pope Francis encourages you that “Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope. Hope is the leaven that, in those first years of engagement and marriage, makes it possible to look beyond arguments, conflicts and problems and to see things in a broader perspective” (AL, 219).

Our parishes are rich with potential in helping young married couples find support for their marriage and family life. Newly married couples can benefit from experienced mentor couples to help them navigate the early years of married life, sharing responsibilities for the daily tasks of family life, preparing to welcome children, learning to pray as a family, and moving through the inevitable challenges that come with work, extended family, financial concerns, etc.



Young married couples tell us that other ways in which they can be enriched by the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage include:

- being generous with others in how you spend your time and money;
- not waiting until you have children to get involved in spiritual and social activities at your parish community;
- seeking out other young Catholic couples for mutual support and friendship;
- forming habits that you want to continue when you have children: eat dinner together at the table, pray before meals, continue to attend Mass together every weekend, incorporate your family traditions or develop new traditions, etc. (e.g., Advent wreaths, house blessings, celebrating your baptism day or feast days); and
- looking for ways to deepen your marriage, sharing date nights and experiences, such as Theology on Tap, marriage retreats, and joining a marriage enrichment group. Do not wait till your marriage is “in trouble” to invest in it.

YOUNG FAMILIES

Families are schools of love in which family life shapes the formation of children and young people and teaches how to care for the aging and elderly. Our Holy Father reminds us that the family “is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen, to share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one” (AL, 276).

Families are a school of human formation and so to the extent that there is a vibrant practice of the faith in the home, our children and young people will be formed as followers of Jesus. A parent’s witness of the Christian life is the first Christian experience a child will have, and parents remain their children’s first and most important teachers, especially in the faith. By parents’ example, children learn enduring lessons about reflecting Christ’s love in marriage and family life. As Pope Francis notes, “Marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment” (AL, 208).

Parents also tell us that among the ways for them to teach their children about the beauty of Christian marriage and family life include:

- letting your youngsters see you praying – at Mass, before meals, before bed, etc. Pray with your children daily. Talk to your children about what your faith means to you. Tell them stories of important “faith moments” in your life;
- planning for Mass in your weekly schedule and make Sunday Mass the center of your family’s prayer life;
- bringing the Church into your home. Invite your parish priest or religious women and men to dinner for conversation, a house blessing, etc.;
- teaching your children gratitude – offer a sincere “thank you” to God in your children’s presence each day;
- modeling God’s forgiveness in all family relationships by asking and offering forgiveness to one another – parents to each other, parents to children, children to parents and among siblings;
- going together to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- reading and exploring as a family Bible stories and age-appropriate stories of the lives of the saints as models of virtue and perseverance in faith;
- volunteering to serve the poor together as a family year-round (e.g. mission trips, food pantry, soup kitchen); and
- continuing to schedule date nights and invest in your marriage, even as schedules get busier and more attention is focused on caring for children.



OLDER COUPLES AND ADULTS

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis writes: “It [the parish] is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey” (28). For many single adults and older couples, the parish can feel like a very young, family-centric experience. Parishes have an opportunity to help people experience the fruitfulness of intergenerational relationships and the beauty of the life of the parish family that is diverse in age, experience and culture.



From many older couples and adults, we learn of the special role they play in this intergenerational community which includes:

- sharing their time and gifts to enrich the whole parish family, by serving regularly in the parish community;
- finding other families in the parish to befriend and make space for friendships across generations;
- including single people in the events and life of your own family;
- praying regularly for your children or loved ones and offering Mass intentions on significant moments in their lives;
- continuing to grow deeper in your faith by practices like attending daily Mass, joining an annual retreat, learning a contemplative style of prayer, or belonging to a small faith community or prayer group; and
- ensuring that you have made aware your desires in regards to health care, end of life, funeral planning and possessions.

FAMILIES IN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

We need to echo what Pope Francis says: “I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way...there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems” (AL, 57).

While every family faces challenges and hardships, many of our families have particular circumstances that without the support of prayer and accompaniment tear at the fabric of family life. Families who are separated due to military service, immigration restrictions, and marital strife experience particular challenges that call for specific forms of accompaniment. To families whose members are separated, the Church seeks to “stand in solidarity” with you (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Strangers No Longer*, 9). Parishes should be ready to help families access the proper resources to address legal, social and medical needs. Even amid challenging circumstances, our faith reminds us that God is always with us and we place our hope in him.

Suggestions for Families and Individuals in Special Circumstances

Below are listed a number of observations that come out of what we have learned in trying to be of pastoral service to families and individuals in special circumstances.

Immigrant families:

- know that your parish is a support for you and should have information regarding legal and social services through Catholic Charities, and other trusted local entities that can support your family during difficult and challenging moments;
- the Archdiocese of Washington’s Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach offers resources and programs that seek to accompany immigrant families and individual Catholics; and
- contact your parish to find essential correspondence, sacramental preparation and religious education materials that are linguistically and culturally appropriate to serve the diverse ethnic and cultural communities within the parish.



Families in the military:

- ask your parish to help you connect to families in the parish who can offer friendship and support at holidays, and during times of deployment; and
- ask your parish to include a prayer space at church or intercessory prayers during Mass that remind people of the sacrifices our military personnel and their families make to defend our country.





Families with persons with special needs:

- encourage your parish to review the standards for compliance that make our churches and parish facilities warmly accessible and welcoming for persons who use audio loops, large print materials, walkers, wheelchairs and other adaptive devices which support inclusion of all persons;
- reach out to your pastor and pastoral staff and/or the Archdiocese of Washington's Department of Special Needs Ministries to ensure that your loved one living with a disability has the support needed to participate fully in the life and rhythm of your parish including faith formation, sacramental preparation, social events and service opportunities; and
- ask your parish to help you connect with other families that include persons with special needs and with opportunities in the community that support and celebrate the lives of all persons.

Ecumenical and interfaith marriages and families:

- help each other be the best person of faith in your particular faith tradition;
- continue to pray together as a family;
- do not put off raising your children in a faith until they can choose. Give your children the gift of faith in the Catholic tradition; and
- teach your children an appreciation for other traditions and model for them how to be a loving family despite differences.

Single parents and families of divorce:

- stay engaged in the larger parish family to share in experiences of motherhood, fatherhood, and family life;
- reach out to your pastor and pastoral staff to communicate your family situation and to ensure that you and your family have the support needed to fully participate in the life of the parish; and
- ask your parish priest to assist you with the annulment process to determine if you can regularize your situation and be married in the Church. The process at the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Washington is user-friendly and the staff is ready to assist you. There is no fee for the annulment process.



Families with loved ones who identify with same-sex attraction:

- maintain relationships with your loved ones or family members. Don't cut off relationship with them and also don't be afraid to communicate healthy boundaries;
- help your loved ones to live inside the Catholic Church amid the faith struggles they may have; and
- continue to seek guidance from your local priest and other ministry groups.



“Love opens our eyes and enables us to see, beyond all else, the *great worth of a human being.*”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 128

PART V

IN SERVICE OF THE MINISTRY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

RESOURCES OF THE OFFICES OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF
WASHINGTON'S CENTRAL PASTORAL ADMINISTRATION

Reflections from Cardinal Wuerl on *Amoris Laetitia* (*The Joy of Love*)

Find talks, articles, blogs, books, and videos from Cardinal Wuerl on the Synod on the Family and *Amoris Laetitia*.

<http://adw.org/amorislaetitia/>

OFFICE OF FAMILY LIFE

The Office of Family Life is home to the *Visible Sign/Signo Visible* initiative, which houses all of the programs that serve individuals and families in preparing for marriage, mentoring in living out each stage of married life and growing in faith and charity.

<http://adw.org/visiblesign/>

Resources for Marriage Preparation

- **Marriage Preparation:** Sacramental preparation for marriage designed to complement the preparation received from your priest.
<http://adw.org/marriage-prep-schedule/>
- **Natural Family Planning:** Natural Family Planning is a morally sound and highly effective method for couples to manage their fertility in a way that respects God and each other. For classes available near you.
<http://adw.org/events/category/natural-family-planning/>

Resources for Marriage Preparation in Spanish

- **Marriage preparation:**
<http://adw.org/events/category/programa-de-preparacion-matrimonial-en-espanol/>
- **Marriage enrichment:**
<http://www.encuentromatrimonial.com/>
- **Natural Family Planning classes:**
<http://adw.org/planificacion-natural/>
- **Resources for married couples:**
<http://www.portumatrimonio.org/>



Healing Ministries

- **At the Well** is the Catholic divorce ministry of the Family Life Office of the Archdiocese of Washington that advocates for and encourages the spiritual, emotional, and social recovery and development of those who are separated, divorced, or are in irregular marriages following a divorce.
<http://adw.org/at-the-well/>
- **Marriage Annulment** at the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Washington is user friendly and the staff is ready to assist you at no cost.
<http://adw.org/tribunal-resources/>
- **Catholics for Family Peace** provides education, resources, and research to help pastoral leaders recognize domestic abuse and respond with compassion.
<http://www.catholicsforfamilypeace.org/>
- **Courage** is a spiritual support system that assists men and women with same-sex attractions in living chaste lives in fellowship, truth and love.
<https://couragerc.org/>
- **Project Rachel Ministry** provides support and healing services for women and men who have experienced emotional and/or spiritual pain after abortion.
<http://adw.org/project-rachel/>

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES

Office of Youth Ministry and Catholic Youth Organization

The Office of Youth Ministry provides spiritual, social and catechetical resources to help young people grow closer to Jesus Christ.

<http://adw.org/office-youth-ministry/>

- **Strong Catholic Families** is a resource to help parents practice the faith with their children at home.
<http://www.nfcym.org/programs-and-trainings/>
- **Accompanying Families in Faith** is a series on understanding *Amoris Laetitia* in the context of family life, sponsored by the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM).
<http://www.nfcym.org/amorislaetitiae webinar>

Office of Campus and Young Adult Ministry

The Office of Campus and Young Adult Ministry fosters a community of young adults in D.C. and in the five Maryland counties in the Archdiocese of Washington.

<http://dccatholic.org/>

- **Young Adult Ministry Events** organizes a wide variety of spiritual and social events for young adults across the Archdiocese of Washington and D.C. area.
<http://adw.org/young-adult-ministry/>
- **College Campus Ministry** offers resources for students to stay active in their practice of the faith.
<http://adw.org/campus-ministry>



Discernment and Vocation Resources

- **Archdiocese of Washington Priestly Vocations** offers ongoing discernment groups and dinners to discern if God is calling you to the priesthood.
<http://www.dcpriest.org/>
- **Archdiocese of Washington Office of Consecrated Life** offers resources and retreats offered for men and women discerning consecrated life.
<http://adw.org/consecrated-life/>

Office for Catechesis and the Office of Catholic Schools

The Office for Catechesis supports and implements the religious education/catechesis efforts in parishes of the Archdiocese of Washington for both adults and youth/children who have as their goal a deepened faith and a more profound understanding of the Person of Christ.

<http://adw.org/religious-education/>

- **Resources to support families learning and growing in the faith.**
<http://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Raising-Children-of-Faith.pdf>
<https://www.familiesofcharacter.com/>

Raising Children with Special Needs

The Department of Special Needs Ministries in the Archdiocese of Washington seeks to create vibrant parish and community programs where all are truly welcomed and invited to walk with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. The department helps provide access to faith through the reception of the Sacraments and participation in parish life.

<http://adw.org/specialneeds/>

- **The Department of Special Needs Ministries** has compiled a list of community resource partners that provide social and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.
<http://adw.org/community-resource-services/>
- A similar **Department of Special Needs Ministries list** has been compiled for families seeking support and resources for those living with mental illness.
<http://adw.org/mental-illness/>
- **Housing for adults with disabilities.**
<http://rosariacommunitiesinc.org/>
- **Support services for those receiving a poor prenatal diagnosis.**
<http://www.isaiahspromise.net/>
- **Resources and supports for military families, veterans returning from war, and families separating from the military.**
<http://vetsvoices.net/our-story.html>



NATIONAL MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE RESOURCES

Marriage Resources

- **Church Teaching on Marriage** is a resource from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that includes documents related to the Church's teaching on marriage, the family, and the person.
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/church-documents-on-defense-of-marriage.cfm>
- **For your Marriage** and **Por Tu Matrimonio** are initiatives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to provide online resources, in English and Spanish, for marriage and family life including blogs, book reviews and daily tips for strengthening marriages.
<http://www.foryourmarriage.org/> and <http://www.portumatrimonio.org/>
- **Marriage: Unique for a Reason** is an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops focused on providing educational resources for couples at different stages of their marriages.
<http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/>
- **National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers** offers resources and an annual conference for parishes to become family-building parishes. The Office for Family Life has an annual membership and can put parishes in touch with these resources.
www.nacflm.org

Catholic Family Movements

- **Catholic Engaged Encounter** is a personal marriage preparation weekend retreat.
<http://www.engagedencounter.org/>
- **World-Wide Marriage Encounter** helps strong marriages grow stronger and to live out the vocation and mission of marriage.
<https://moments4marriage.org/>
- **Retrouvaille** offers retreats for couples facing a crisis or trouble in their marriage.
<https://retrouvaille.org/>
- **Teams of Our Lady** is a movement designed to enrich marriage spirituality and help make good marriages better. Teams provide a proven method of increasing and improving prayer life, which will help couples grow closer to God and each other.
<http://www.teamsofourlady.org/>
- **Couples for Christ** is a movement intended for the renewal and strengthening of Christian family life. The members have committed themselves to the Lord and to one another so that they may grow in maturity as men and women of God and fulfill their primary vocation of raising up families under the lordship of Jesus Christ and for the service of the Kingdom of God.
<https://couplesforchristusa.org/>



Strengthening Families

- **Building the Domestic Church** is the new initiative for Knights of Columbus Councils in the service of building family life and the domestic Church in the parish. It includes “Family Fully Alive,” “Fathers for Good” and the “Family Rosary Program” among other practical and catechetical materials.
<http://www.kofc.org/en/domestic-church/index.html>
- **Theology of the Family** builds on Saint John Paul II’s Theology of the Body. It is a study on God’s plan for marriage and family life and can be used by small groups at the parish level.
<http://www.theologyofthefamily.com/>
- **The Family Project** is a series of videos and a study guide produced by Focus on the Family for small groups to explore the natural and biblical significance of marriage and family life.
<http://www.familyproject.com/>
- **Rooted by Ruah Woods Press** is a Theology of the Body curriculum for grades pre-K-12 for the remote preparation to answer the vocation to love.
<https://www.ruahwoodspress.com/>
- **True Strength** and **True Beauty** are DVD series focused on what it takes to be a real man or woman of God, and discuss the themes of chastity, love, fellowship, and relationships in the everyday lives of young men and women.
<https://www.lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/true-beauty-true-strength-dvd-sets>
- **Chastity Project** provides resources and speakers to help families and teens grow in their understanding and to promote the virtue of chastity so that individuals can see God, and be free to love.
<https://chastityproject.com/>
- **The Choice Wine: 7 Steps to a Superabundant Marriage** is a video-based, small group marriage enrichment that places authentic marital happiness within every couple’s reach. The Choice Wine helps couples to experience a foretaste of heaven in their marriage and family.
<http://paradisusdei.org/the-choice-wine/>



“A love that fails to grow is at risk. Growth can only occur if we respond to God’s grace through constant *acts of love, acts of kindness* that become ever more frequent, intense, generous, tender and cheerful.”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 134

Spiritual Growth

- **Our Lady of Bethesda** offers retreats and workshops for married couples to enrich and deepen their relationships.
<http://www.ourladyofbethesda.org>
- **Beloved** is Augustine Institute's 12-session DVD-based marriage preparation series that explores the true meaning of marriage and how couples live it out together. This can be used for young dating or engaged couples.
<https://www.augustineinstitute.org/formed/beloved/>

Men's and Women's Groups

- **That Man is You** is Paradisus Dei's three-year men's group curriculum that addresses the pressures and temptations that men face in our modern culture, especially those relating to their roles as husbands and fathers. The program harmonizes current social and medical science with the teachings of the Church and the wisdom of the saints to develop the vision of man fully alive.
<http://paradisusdei.org/that-man-is-you/>
- **Walking With Purpose Bible Study** offers personal study and small group discussion that link our everyday challenges and struggles with the solutions given to us through the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church.
<https://walkingwithpurpose.com/bible-studies/>



“All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse.

*Let us make this journey as families,
let us keep walking together.*

What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.”

CONCLUSION

A *moris Laetitia* is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy. Neither the exhortation nor this Pastoral Plan presents a list of answers to each individual human concern. Rather, both call for a pastoral approach to many people – married, single, and divorced – who are struggling to face issues in life, the teaching of the Church, and their own desire to reconcile all of this.

In continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis calls us to the work of the New Evangelization. A hallmark in this papacy is the emphasis that the Church “go out” into the world, to not stay wrapped up within herself, but to go out to give to people the beauty of the Gospel, the amazement of the encounter with Jesus.

As has been noted, Pope Francis approaches his teaching ministry first and foremost as a pastor of souls. This can be a challenge and an incentive for all of us who seek to do the same thing. There is always the temptation simply to announce doctrinal points as if this were the same as engaging in pastoral ministry with persons who are discerning how they can appropriate the teaching. In *Amoris Laetitia*, we hear that voice of experience. In many places, one recognizes a pastor speaking directly to members of his flock, sharing his own experience and wisdom formed from many years of service to God's people.

In the action of going out, encountering, sharing and accompanying, we also recognize that in the journey, we – ourselves – are also drawing closer to the Lord. In all of our evangelizing, teaching, catechizing, counseling, admonishing, and instructing, we also experience both God's liberating truth and saving mercy. None of us can claim yet to be perfect as is our heavenly Father. But we can grow closer to the Lord who will by his grace heal us so that we can have the life he wants for us.

As we carry out our pastoral responsibilities and share the joy of love in marriage and family life, we thank God first of all for the call and then for the guidance we receive from his Holy Church and particularly from our Holy Father, Pope Francis.




“Led by the Spirit, the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going forth and spreading life by

caring for others and seeking their happiness.”

POPE FRANCIS, AMORIS LAETITIA 324

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ope Francis' post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, promulgated on March 19, 2016, is the reference point and reason for this "Pastoral Plan to Implement *Amoris Laetitia*." Directed to parishes, priests, religious, and laity the Plan is meant to encourage reflection on:

1. The richness of the Church's perennial teaching on love, marriage, family, faith and mercy;
2. The essential aspect of pastoral ministry, called accompaniment; and,
3. Several significant themes such as the New Evangelization, the role of conscience, and the privileged place of the parish where we find and experience Christ's way of living and loving.

The Plan also offers resources to assist all engaged in parish life in the pastoral implementation of this teaching.

THE CHURCH’S PERENNIAL TEACHING

The Plan begins with a summary of the teaching of *Amoris Laetitia* highlighting how the first half of the exhortation focuses on the centrality of God’s love. The vocation of the human family is revealed in the infinite love of the Lord who was made incarnate in a human family, and who gave himself for our sake and continues to dwell in our midst. The second half of the exhortation provides some pastoral perspectives. Here the exhortation invites a reflection on the right course of action in ministering to those who struggle to grasp and to live out the teaching. The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to the people and families who struggle to live the teaching on marriage, and to help them to overcome obstacles through discernment, dialogue and prayerful support and understanding to overcome obstacles. Some may ask, “Is the teaching always binding?” The answer of course is yes. Yet *Amoris Laetitia* invites us to adopt a complementary perspective and to look with a parental attitude at those families who find themselves in a position where they struggle to even understand, let alone embrace fully, the teaching because of the concrete circumstances in which they live.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR DAY

The Pastoral Plan considers in detail the challenges that families encounter today in receiving the Church’s teaching on marriage because of the highly secularized cultural environment in which they live. Our age is one in which there are many barriers to encountering Christ and appropriating the Church’s teaching, as people live in a world marked by secularism, materialism and individualism, all supporting a prevalent and dominant relativism. Because of this lack of cultural support, the ministry for encountering and accompanying families through a process of

discernment and growth in the faith becomes essential to the task of the New Evangelization, as we share Christ’s love and truth in our homes, our communities and our world.

THE MINISTRY OF ACCOMPANIMENT

The ministry of accompaniment takes different forms and shapes depending on the particular pastoral situation. Accompaniment includes fidelity to Church teaching and awareness of how the teaching is being received or even able to be perceived. Such a ministry is a collaborative effort of priests and laity who understand themselves to be missionary disciples, who experience the love of the Lord in their encounter with him and who seek to share it with others. We recognize that each of us is a sinner in need of wholeness and that we all have fallen short of the great plan God has laid out for us. Each of us is in need of this healing and so we journey together as brothers and sisters united in our common need for the love and mercy of God that heals every broken human heart.

CONSCIENCE

At the core of accompanying people on the faith journey and helping them appropriate the Church’s teaching stands the humble recognition that the culpability of any of us does not depend solely on exposure to the teaching. It is not enough simply to hear the teaching. We have to be helped to grasp and accept it. We must have “experiential” and not just “objective” moral knowledge, to use the language of Saint John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor* (*The Splendor of Truth*). Priests are called to respect the decisions made in conscience by individuals who act in good faith since no one can enter the soul of another and make that judgment for them. As Pope Francis teaches, “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (AL, 37).

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARISH LIFE

As Pope Francis notes in *Amoris Laetitia*, the Church is a family of families, and the home of pastoral accompaniment is the parish. The parish has a central role in making clear the Gospel vision for marriage and family life. For this reason, the Pastoral Plan concludes by offering a wide variety of resources and suggestions on how to implement the ministry of accompaniment at the parish level. Our parishes, as the sites where people most experience the life of the Church, must be places of welcome, where everyone is invited, particularly anyone who might be disillusioned or disaffected by contemporary society or even by our faith community.

CONCLUSION

Amoris Laetitia is a call to compassionate accompaniment in helping all to experience Christ's love and mercy. Neither the exhortation nor this Pastoral Plan presents a list of answers to each individual human concern. Rather, both call for a pastoral approach for many people – married, single, and divorced – who are struggling to face issues in life, the teaching of the Church, and their own desire to reconcile all of this.

As we carry out our pastoral responsibilities and share the joy of love in marriage and family life, we thank God first of all for the call and then for the guidance we receive from his Holy Church and particularly from our Holy Father, Pope Francis.





Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of true love; to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth, make us once more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability of the family, and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.



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*The joy of love
experienced by
families is also
the joy of the
Church.*

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