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SYNOD OF BISHOPS

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XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY  
IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

**THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS  
TO THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS**

Vatican City

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## Prayer to the Holy Family

### Abbreviations

AA	Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree <a href="#">Apostolicam Actuositatem</a> (18 November 1965)
AG	Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree <a href="#">Ad Gentes</a> (7 December 1965)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , (15 August 1997)
CV	Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter <a href="#">Caritas in Veritate</a> (29 June 2009)
DCE	Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter <a href="#">Deus Caritas Est</a> (25 December 2005)
GS	Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution <a href="#">Gaudium et Spes</a> (7 December 1965)
EG	Francis, Apostolic Exhortation <a href="#">Evangelii Gaudium</a> (24 November 2013)
EN	Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation <a href="#">Evangelii Nuntiandi</a> (8 December 1975)
FC	Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation <a href="#">Familiaris Consortio</a> (22 November 1981)
IL	III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, <a href="#">The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Instrumentum Laboris</a> , (24 June 2014)
LF	Francis, Encyclical Letter <a href="#">Lumen Fidei</a> (29 June 2013)
LG	Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution <a href="#">Lumen Gentium</a> (21 November 1964)
MI	Francis, Letter <i>motu proprio</i> <a href="#">Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus</a> (15 August 2015)
MV	Francis, Bull <a href="#">Misericordiae Vultus</a> (11 April 2015)
NA	Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree <a href="#">Nostra Aetate</a> (28 October 1965)
RM	Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter <a href="#">Redemptoris Missio</a> (7 December 1990)

## Introduction

1. We, the synod fathers, gathered in synod around Pope Francis, wish to thank him for calling us to reflect with him, under his guidance, on the vocation and mission of the family today. In humility, we offer him the fruit of our work, aware of its limitations. Nonetheless, we are able to say that we have constantly taken into consideration the families of the world, their joys and hopes, their sorrows and anxieties. As Christ's disciples, we know that "nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of human persons. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for everyone. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest of bonds" (*GS*, 1). We thank the Lord for the great number of Christian families who generously and faithfully respond to their vocation and mission, despite the many obstacles, misunderstandings and trials. These families need the encouragement of the entire Church, who, together with her Lord and supported by the action of the Spirit, knows that she has a word of truth and hope to address to all humankind. Pope Francis recalled this in opening the final phase of this synodal journey dedicated to the family: "God did not create us to live in sorrow or to be alone. He made men and women for happiness, to share their journey with someone who complements them, [...]. It is the same plan which Jesus presents [...] summarized with these words: 'From the beginning of creation [God] made them male and female; for this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh' (*Mk* 10:6-8; cf. *Gen* 1:27; 2:24)." God "joins the hearts of two people who love one another, he who joins them in unity and indissolubility. This shows us that the goal of conjugal life is not simply to live together for life, but to love one another for life! In this way Jesus re-establishes the order which was present from the beginning. [...] only in the light of the folly of the gratuitousness of Jesus' paschal love will the folly of the gratuitousness of an exclusive and life-long conjugal love make sense" (*Homily at the Opening Mass of the Synod*, 4 October 2015).

2. Even amidst joys and trials, the family is the primary and fundamental "school of humanity" (cf. *GS* 52). Despite signs of a crisis, in various contexts, in the institution of the family, the desire to form a family remains vibrant among the younger generations. The Church, expert in humanity and true to her mission, announces with deep conviction the "Gospel of the Family," which she received as revealed by Jesus Christ and constantly taught by the Fathers, the masters in spirituality and the Church's Magisterium. In the course of the Church's life, the family has assumed special significance: "So great was his love that he [God] began to walk with mankind, he began to walk alongside his people, until the right time came and then he gave the greatest demonstration of love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? To a palace, to a city, to an office building? He sent him to a family. God came into the world in a family. And he could do this because that family was a family with a heart open to love, a family whose doors were open." (Francis,

*Address at the Feast of Families*, Philadelphia, 27 September 2015). In these times, families are sent as “missionary disciples” (cf. *EG*, 120). With this in mind, the family ought to rediscover that it is an essential agent in evangelization.

3. The Holy Father called the Synod of Bishops to reflect on the reality of the family. “The *convenire in unum* around the Bishop of Rome is indeed an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment.” (Francis, *Address at the Prayer Vigil in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family*, 3 October 2014). In the span of two years, the Extraordinary General Assembly (2014) and the Ordinary General Assembly (2015) have undertaken the task of reading the signs of God and human history, in faithfulness to the Gospel. The first synod, to which the People of God made an important contribution, resulted in the *Relatio Synodi*. A tri-fold approach characterized our dialogue and reflections, namely, assessing the complex reality of the family today from the vantage point of faith, indicating both its lights and shadows; looking to Christ so as to contemplate once more, with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what Christ has revealed and is handed down in the faith of the Church; and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit so as to discern ways in which the Church and society can renew their commitment to the family, founded on marriage between a man and a woman. The Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed. The family, beyond being called upon to respond to today's challenges, is primarily called by God to a greater awareness of its missionary character. The synodal assembly was enriched by the presence of couples and families in a discussion which directly concerned them. Preserving the invaluable work of the preceding assembly, dedicated to the challenges of the family, we now turn our attention to its vocation and mission in the Church and the contemporary world.

## PART I

### The Church Listening to the Family

4. The mystery of life's creation on earth fills us with wonder and delight. The family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman, is splendid to behold and irreplaceable in an interpersonal loving relationship which transmits life. Love cannot be reduced to the illusion of a passing moment; love is not an end in itself; love seeks the trustworthiness of a “thou” in another person. In promising mutual love, in both good times and bad, love wants itself to continue until death. At the Synod, the fundamental desire of forming loving relationships, which are sound and inter-generational in the family, was significantly discussed, even beyond cultural and religious lines and the changes in society. In the free act of a man and a woman saying “yes” to each other for their entire life, God's love is made present and is experienced. In the Catholic faith, marriage is a sacred sign in which God's love becomes effective in his Church. The Christian family is, therefore, a part of the life of the Church: a “domestic church.”

The couple and conjugal life are not abstract realities; they remain imperfect and vulnerable. Consequently, an act of will is always necessary in changing oneself, forgiving and starting over. In our responsibility as pastors, we are concerned about the lives of families. We want to heed their real-life situations and challenges, and accompany and illuminate them with the love of the Gospel. We want to give them strength and help them grasp their mission today. We wish to accompany them lovingly, even in their

concerns, giving them courage and hope which come from the mercy of God.

## **Chapter I**

### **The Family and the Anthropological-cultural context**

#### **The Socio-Cultural Context**

5. Docile to what the Holy Spirit asks us, we draw near to today's families in their diversity, knowing that "Christ, the new Adam [...] fully reveals a person to him/herself" (GS, 22) We turn our attention to the contemporary challenges which affect the multiple aspects of life. We are aware of the principal tendencies in anthropological-cultural changes in which individuals, in their emotional life and life as a family, receive increasingly less support from social structures than in the past. On the other hand, we must also take into consideration the development of an exaggerated individualism which distorts family ties, giving precedence to the idea that one can make oneself according to one's own wishes, and thus weakens every family tie. We are thinking of mothers and fathers, grandparents, brothers and sisters, immediate and distant relatives and the bonding of two families at every wedding. We must not forget the lived reality: everywhere, strong family ties continue to give life to the world. People are strongly dedicated in caring for the dignity of every person — man, woman and child — and for ethnic groups and minorities, as well as in defence of the rights of every human being to grow up in a family. Their faithfulness would not be honoured, if we did not make a clear reaffirmation of the value of family life, especially in relying on the light of the Gospel, even in different cultures. We are aware of the major anthropological cultural changes today which have an impact on all aspects of life. We remain firmly convinced that the family is a gift of God, the place where he reveals the power of his saving grace. Even in our day, the Lord calls a man and a woman to marry, abides with them in their life as a family and offers himself to them as an ineffable gift. The Church is called to scrutinize the signs of the times, interpreting "them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which people ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics" (GS, 4).

#### **The Religious Context**

6. The Christian faith is strong and alive. Some regions of the world are witnessing a significant drop in religion in society, which, consequently, has its effect on family life. This approach tends to make religion a private matter and to relegate it to family life only, thus running the risk of reducing the witness and mission of the Christian family in the modern world. In places of advanced social well-being, people are likely to set all their hope in a frantic quest for social success and economic prosperity. In other regions of the world, the adverse effects of an unjust world economic order leads to forms of religion exposed to sectarian and radical extremism. We should also mention movements based on political and religious fanaticism, often openly hostile to Christianity. In creating instability and spreading chaos and violence, they are the cause of much misery and suffering in family life. The Church is called to provide guidance to families in their

practice of religion so as to give it a Gospel orientation.

### **Anthropological Change**

7. In various cultures, relationships and a sense of belonging are important values which shape an individual's identity. The family provides the opportunity for personal fulfilment and contributes to the growth of other persons in society-at-large. The Christian and ecclesial identity received at Baptism comes to fruition in the beauty of family life. In today's society, we observe a multiplicity of challenges which manifest themselves to a greater or lesser degree in various parts of the world. In different cultures, many young people demonstrate a resistance in making definitive commitments in relationships, and often choose to live together or simply to engage in casual relationships. The declining birth rate is a result of various factors, including industrialization, the sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation, economic problems, the growth of a contraceptive mentality and abortion. Consumerism may also deter people from having children, simply so they can maintain a certain freedom and life-style. Some Catholics have difficulty in leading a life in keeping with the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and the family, and in seeing, in such teaching, the goodness of God's creative design for them. The number of marriages taking place in some parts of the world is declining, while separations and divorces are not uncommon.

### **Cultural Contradictions**

8. In great areas across the planet, cultural situations affecting the family display a conflicting character, even under the extensive influence of mass media. On the one hand, marriage and the family are held in high esteem and the idea still prevails that the family represents a safe haven for the most profound and gratifying sentiments. On the other hand, the concept of the family is marred by excessive expectations and, consequently, exaggerated claims on each other. The tensions caused by an overly individualistic culture, which concentrates on possessing and gratification, leads to intolerance and aggression in families. Mention can also be made of a certain feminism which looks on motherhood as exploiting women and as an obstacle to her full realization. Furthermore, we are witnessing an ever-increasing tendency among people of conceiving a child simply as a means of self-affirmation and, at times, by any means possible.

Today, a very important cultural challenge is posed by “gender” ideology which denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without gender differences, thereby removing the anthropological foundation of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative guidelines which promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, which can also change over time. According to our faith, the difference between the sexes bears in itself the image and likeness of God (*Gen 1:26-27*). “This tells us that it is not man alone who is the image of God or woman alone who is the image of God, but man and woman as a couple who are the image of God. [...] We can say that without the mutual enrichment of this relationship — in thought and in action, in affection and in work, as well as in faith — the two cannot even understand the depth of what it means to be man and woman. Modern contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new forms of freedom and new depths in order to enrich the understanding of this

difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and much skepticism. [...] The removal of the difference [...] is the problem, not the solution” (Francis, *General Audience*, 15 April 2015).

### **Conflicts and Social Tensions**

9. The affective and spiritual quality of family life is seriously threatened by the proliferation of conflicts, impoverishment and the migration process. Violent religious persecution, particularly the persecution of Christian families, is ravaging entire areas of our planet, creating an exodus of persons and masses of refugees which exert great pressure on the capabilities of the host-country. Families enduring these trials are very often forcibly uprooted and, in practice, completely shattered. The loyalty of Christians to their faith, their patience and their attachment to their countries of origin are admirable in every respect. The efforts of all political and religious leaders to spread and protect the culture of human rights remains inadequate. While respecting freedom of conscience, living in harmony with each other must be fostered among everyone, based on citizenship, equality and justice. The burden of economic policies and social inequity, even in affluent areas, has a severe impact in providing for children and caring for the sick and the elderly. Dependence on alcohol, drugs or gambling sometimes results from these social contradictions and from the disadvantages caused by these contradictions in family life. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the misuse of resources allocated for family programmes increase the impoverishment of families in many regions of the world.

### **Fragility and Strength of the Family**

10. In today’s socio-cultural crisis, the family, the basic human community, is painfully being weakened and is exhibiting signs of its fragile nature. Nonetheless, the family is also demonstrating its ability to find in itself the courage to confront the inadequacy and failure of institutions in the formation of the person, the quality of social ties and the care of the most vulnerable. Therefore, a proper appreciation of the resilience of the family is particularly necessary in order to be able to strengthen its fragile character. Such strength lies in the family’s capacity to love and to teach how to love. As wounded as the family may be, it can always grow beginning with love.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Family in the Socio-Economic context**

#### **The Family as the Irreplaceable Resource of Society**

11. “The family is a school for human enrichment [...] and the foundation of society” (GS, 52) All the relations among relatives in a family, beyond the small family unit itself, offer valuable assistance in the raising of children, the transmission of values, the safeguarding of inter-generational ties and the enrichment of the spiritual life. While in some regions of the world this is deeply a part of culture, in other places, it appears to be waning. Surely, in a period of a dramatic break-up in life-situations, the multiple levels and facets of relations between family members and relatives are often the only points of connection with a person’s origins and family ties. The support rendered by family relationships is

even more necessary where work-mobility, migration, disasters and fleeing one's native land compromise the stability of every family relationship.

### **Policies Favouring the Family**

12. The authorities responsible for the common good must be seriously committed to the primary good of society, namely, the family. The concern guiding the administration of civil society must provide for and promote family policies which support and encourage families, primarily those of modest means. More concrete measures of compensation are necessarily done by the family in the context of modern "welfare systems" which redistribute resources and perform tasks essential to the common good and help counterbalance the negative effects of social inequity. "The family merits special attention on the part of those responsible for the common good, since it is the basic cell of society. Families foster the solid bonds of unity on which human coexistence is based, and, through the bearing and education of children, they ensure the future and the renewal of society." (Francis, *Address at the Airport of El Alto, Bolivia*, 8 July 2015).

### **Loneliness and Insecurity**

13. In cultures where relationships are weakened by an egotistical manner of living, loneliness is increasingly becoming more common. More often than not, only a sense of the presence of God sustains persons in this emptiness. A general feeling of powerlessness in the face of oppressive socio-economic situations, increasing poverty and a lack of employment require people increasingly to seek work far from the family in order to provide for its needs, thereby causing prolonged separation which weakens relations and isolates family members from each other. The State has the responsibility to create conditions and legislation to guarantee the future of younger generations and to assist them in fulfilling their desire to form a family. Corruption, which sometimes undermines these public institutions, deeply affects the trust and the hope of future generations and others as well. The negative consequences of this mistrust are evident, from dramatic demographic change to difficulties in raising children, from reluctance to welcome newborn life to looking upon the elderly as a burden, until emotional distress is so prevalent that it sometimes results in aggression and violence.

### **The Economy and Growth**

14. Material resources and economic conditions affect the family in two ways, by either contributing to its growth and solidity or by impeding its strength, unity and cohesion. Economic constraints prohibit a family's access to education, cultural activities and involvement in the social life. In many ways, the present-day economic situation is keeping people from participating in society. Families, in particular, suffer from problems related to work, where young people have few possibilities and job offerings are very selective and insecure. Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships each day. "A growth in justice" requires "decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income" (*EG*, 204) and an integral promotion of the poor becomes effective. Adequate policies on behalf of the family are

needed, if, in the future, the family is to live in a harmonious and dignified fashion.

### **Poverty and Exclusion**

15. Everywhere, certain religious and social groups of persons can be found on the margins of society: immigrants, gypsies, the homeless, displaced persons, refugees, the untouchables in the caste system and those who are suffering from diseases which carry a social stigma. The Holy Family of Nazareth also experienced the bitter experience of marginalization and rejection (cf. *Lk* 2:7; *Mt* 2:13-15). In this regard, Jesus' words concerning the last judgment, are clear: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40). The present-day economic system causes various kinds of social exclusion, which often make the poor invisible to society. The prevailing culture and the media contribute to making this invisibility even worse. This results because "in this system, man, the human person, has been removed from the centre and replaced by something else. Because idolatrous worship is devoted to money. Because indifference has been globalized" (Francis, *Address to the World Meeting of Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014). As such, a major concern is the plight of children, who are innocent victims of exclusion which makes them true "social orphans" and tragically affects them for their entire life. Despite the enormous difficulties they face, many poor and marginalized families strive to live their daily lives with dignity, relying on God who does not disappoint and does not abandon anyone.

### **Ecology and the Family**

16. The Church, in response to papal teaching, wants people to thoroughly re-examine the overall orientation of the global system. From this vantage point, she collaborates in the development of a new ecological culture which includes a new mentality, new policies, new educational programmes, a new manner of living and a new spirituality. Since everything is deeply inter-related, as Pope Francis states in his Encyclical *Laudato si'*, exploring aspects of an "integral ecology" must include not only the environment, but also human, social and economic conditions for a sustainable development and the stewardship of all creation. The family, which is part of a significant human ecology, should be adequately protected (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38). Through our family, we belong to the whole of creation; we contribute in a specific manner to promoting ecology; we learn the meaning of the body and the language of love from the difference between a man and a woman and we collaborate in the divine plan of God, the Creator (cf. *LS*, 5, 155). To be aware of all this requires that a real conversion takes place within the family. "In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity" (*LS*, 213).

## **Chapter III**

### **Family, Inclusion and Society**

#### **The Elderly**

17. One of the most serious and urgent tasks of the Christian family is to preserve the link

between generations to ensure the transmission of the faith and the basic values of life. Most families have great respect for the elderly, surrounding them with affection and considering them a blessing. We extend a special word of appreciation to persons in associations and family movements who are engaged in work on behalf of the elderly — spiritually and socially — especially those who work in conjunction with priests in the care of souls. In some places, the elderly are considered essential in ensuring stability, continuity and the historic memory in families and society. In highly industrialized societies, where their number is increasing as a result of a decreasing birth-rate, they risk being seen as a burden. On the other hand, the care that they require often puts a strain on their loved ones. “The elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers who were before us on our own street, in our own home, in our daily battle for a dignified life. They are men and women from whom we have received much. The elder is not alien. We are that elder: in the near or far future, but inevitably, even if we don’t think. And if we don’t learn how to treat the elder better, that is how we will be treated.” (Francis, *General Audience*, March 4, 2015).

18. Grandparents in a family deserve special attention. They are the link between generations, and ensure a psycho-affective balance through the transmission of traditions and customs, values and virtues, where younger persons can recognize their roots. Moreover, grandparents frequently collaborate with their sons and daughters in economic matters, the upbringing of their children and the transmission of the faith to their grandchildren. Many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents. As the Book of Ecclesiastes states: “Do not dismiss what the old people have to say; [...] from them you will learn how to think, and the art of the timely answer” (*Eccl* 8:9). We hope that in the family, in succeeding generations, the faith might be communicated and preserved as a precious heritage for new families.

### **Widowhood**

19. Widowhood is particularly difficult for those who have chosen to live marriage and family life as a gift. However, from the vantage point of faith, various aspects can be appreciated. From the moment of enduring a loss, some display an ability to concentrate their energies in a greater dedication to their children and grandchildren, finding in this expression of love a renewed mission in raising their children. The feeling of emptiness resulting from the death of a spouse is filled, in a certain sense, with the love of family members who show the importance in the family of the person who has lost a spouse, and in this manner permits him/her to maintain the precious memories of the marriage. Those who do not have relatives to whom to dedicate their care and from whom to receive affection, should be aided by the Christian community with a particular attention and availability, especially if they are poor. Those who have lost a spouse can celebrate a new sacramental union without detracting from the value of their previous marriage (cf. *1 Cor* 7:39). From the beginning and in the course of time, the Church has paid special attention to widows (cf. *1 Tim* 5:3-16), even establishing the *ordo viduarum* which might even be reinstated in the present-day.

### **The Last Stages of Life and Loss in the Family**

20. Illness, injury or old age which result in death greatly affect family life. Mourning is especially heartbreaking at the death of children and young people. This painful

experience requires special pastoral attention and the involvement of the Christian community. The importance of the final stages of life is all the more necessary today, when many make the attempt to remove every trace of death and dying. The elderly who are weak and dependent are sometimes unfairly exploited simply for economic advantage. Many families show that it is possible to approach the last stages of life by emphasizing the importance of a person's sense of fulfilment and by integrating one's life in the Lord's Paschal Mystery. A great number of elderly people are received into church institutions, where, materially and spiritually, they are able to live in a peaceful, family atmosphere. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are serious threats to families worldwide, practices which are legal in many countries. The Church, while firmly opposing these practices, feels obliged to assist families who take care of their elderly and sick members, and to promote in every way the dignity and worth of each person until the natural end of life.

### **Persons with Special Needs**

21. Particular attention needs to be given to families whose members have special needs. In these cases, the sudden entrance of a person with a disability into a family creates profound and unexpected challenges and upsets a family's equilibrium, desires and expectations. This situation gives rise to mixed emotions and difficult decisions in coping and planning, while imposing duties, urgencies and new responsibilities. The reality of the family and every aspect of its life are profoundly disturbed. Families which lovingly accept the difficult trial of a child with special needs are to be greatly admired. They render the Church and society an invaluable witness of their faithfulness to the gift of life. In these situations, the family has the opportunity to discover, together with the Christian community, new approaches, new ways of acting, a different manner in understanding and identifying the family and in welcoming and caring for the mystery of the fragility of human life. People with disabilities are a gift for the family and an opportunity to grow in love, mutual aid and unity. The Church, God's family, wants to be a welcoming home to families with persons with special needs (cf. John Paul II, *Homily for the Jubilee of the Disabled*, 3 December 2000). She collaborates in strengthening the family's relationships and training and offers ways for participating in the liturgical life of the community. For many persons with special needs, who are abandoned or alone, the Church's institutions, who welcome them, are often their only families. The Synod expresses profound gratitude and deep appreciation to these institutions. The process of integrating people with special needs into society is more difficult because of an enduring stigma and prejudice — even to the point of a theorization based on eugenics. On the contrary, many families, communities and ecclesial movements become aware of and celebrate the gifts of God in these people with special needs, particularly their unique communication skills and ability to bring people together. Special attention needs to be given to disabled persons who outlive their parents and others in their family who assisted them in life. The death of those who loved them and whom they loved makes these persons even more vulnerable. If the family, in the light of the faith, accepts the presence of people with special needs, they will be able to recognize and guarantee the quality and value of every human life, with its proper needs, rights and opportunities. This approach will encourage care and services on behalf of these disadvantaged persons and will encourage people to draw near to them and provide affection at every stage of their life.

### **Persons Who Are Unmarried**

22. Many people who are unmarried in life are not only devoted to their own family but often render great service in their group of friends, in the Church community and in their professional lives. Sometimes, their presence and contributions are overlooked, however, causing in them a sense of isolation. More often than not, many exhibit noble motives in their full engagement in art, science and the good of humanity. Many put their talents at the service of the Christian community in the name of charity and volunteer work. Others remain unmarried, because they have consecrated their lives for love of Christ and neighbour. Their dedication greatly enriches the family, the Church and society.

### **Migrants, Refugees and Those Suffering Persecution**

23. Special pastoral attention needs to be given to the effects of migration on the family. In various ways, migration has its effects on entire populations in different parts of the world. The Church has exercised a major role in this area. Maintaining and developing this witness to the Gospel (cf. *Mt 25:35*) is more urgently needed today than ever. The truth of the history of humanity and the history of migrants is inscribed in the life of families and entire peoples. Even our faith makes this clear: we are all pilgrims. This conviction ought to lead to understanding, openness and responsibility in the challenges created by migration; those challenges from experiences of suffering as much as those looked upon as an opportunity for a better life. Human mobility, which corresponds to the natural historical movement of peoples, can prove to be a genuine enrichment for both the family that migrates and the country that welcomes these people. Furthermore, forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying migrants, the Church needs a specific pastoral programme addressed to not only families in migration but also members of the families who remain behind. This pastoral activity must be implemented with due respect for their cultures, for the human and religious formation from which they come and for the spiritual richness of their rites and traditions, even by means of a specific pastoral care. “It is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare. This is especially the case when they responsibly assume their obligations towards those who receive them, gratefully respecting the material and spiritual heritage of the host country, obeying its laws and helping with its needs” (Francis, *Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016*, 12 September 2015). Migration is particularly dramatic and devastating to families and individuals, when it takes place illegally and is supported by international networks of human trafficking. This is equally true when it involves women or unaccompanied children who are forced to endure long periods of time in temporary facilities and refugee camps, where it is impossible to start a process of integration. Extreme poverty and other situations in the break-up of families sometimes even lead families to sell their children for prostitution or for organ trafficking.

24. A new country’s encounter with a new culture is made all the more difficult when genuine warmth and acceptance is lacking with respect to the rights of all and a sound, harmonious living together. The Christian community is directly concerned in such a task. “The responsibility to offer refugees hospitality, solidarity and assistance lies first of all with the local Church. She is called on to incarnate the demands of the Gospel, reaching out without distinction towards these people in their moment of need and solitude”

(Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*, 26). A sense of being uprooted from one's country, a nostalgia at being deprived of one's roots and difficulties in being integrated into society, evident today in many places, still endure. They bring to light new suffering in second and third generation migrant families, fuelling fundamentalism and a violent rejection by the host culture. A valuable resource in overcoming these difficulties can precisely be found in families coming together, in which a key role in this process of integration is often played by women in their sharing their experience in bringing up their children. In fact, even in the insecurity of their situation, they bear witness to a culture of family love that encourages other families to welcome and protect life by practicing solidarity. Women can pass on to future generations the living faith in Christ that has sustained them in the difficult experience of migration and has been strengthened as a result. The persecution of Christians, as well as those of ethnic and religious minorities in many parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, are a great trial for not only the Church but also the entire international community. Every effort should be made to encourage, even in a practical way, families and Christian communities to remain in their native lands. Benedict XVI said: "A Middle East without Christians, or with only a few Christians, would no longer be the Middle East, since Christians, together with other believers, are part of the distinctive identity of the region" (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 31).

### **Some Unique Challenges**

25. Some societies still maintain the practice of polygamy; in other places, arranged marriages are an enduring practice. In countries where the presence of the Catholic Church is in the minority many mixed marriages and marriages of disparity of cult exist, with all the difficulties they entail with regard to the form required by canon law, Baptism, bringing up the children and mutual respect from the vantage point of the differences of belief. Where relativism or indifference may pose a threat to such marriages, there may also be a chance to promote the spirit of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue in a harmonious co-existence of communities, living in the same place. In many places, not only in the West, the practice of living together before marriage is widely spreading as well as a type of cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry. In addition, civil legislation often undermines marriage and the family. Secularization in many parts of the world is greatly diminishing any reference to God and inhibiting any sharing of the faith socially.

### **Children**

26. Children are a blessing from God (*Gen* 4:1); they ought to be of primary concern in the family and society and are a priority in the Church's pastoral activity. "In fact, from the way children are treated society can be judged, not only morally but also sociologically, whether it is a liberal society or a society enslaved by international interests. [...] Children remind us [...] that are all sons and daughters. [...] And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we have received it." (Francis, *General Audience*, 18 March 2015). Children, however, often become the point of contention between parents and real victims in families with grave problems. In many ways, children's rights are neglected. In some areas of the world, children are considered a real commodity and seen as cheap workers to be used in fighting wars and as victims of

all kinds of physical and psychological violence. Migrant children are exposed to various types of suffering. Sexual exploitation of children is one of the most scandalous and perverse practices in present-day society. In societies marked by violence due to war, terrorism or the presence of organized crime, children are forced to be raised in degrading family situations. In large cities and their peripheral areas the so-called phenomenon of street children is a dramatically worsening situation.

## **Women**

27. Women have a crucial role in the life of the individual, family and society. “Every human person owes his or her life to a mother, and almost always owes much of what follows in life, both human and spiritual formation, to her” (Francis, *General Audience*, 7 January 2015). A mother conserves the memory and meaning of birth for a lifetime: “But Mary kept all these things pondering on them in her heart” (*Lk 2:19*). Truly, however, the status of women in the world varies considerably, primarily because of socio-cultural factors. The dignity of women needs to be defended and promoted. The problem is not simply a result of economic resources, but one of different cultural outlooks, as highlighted by the plight of women in many recently developed countries. In many places, discrimination results simply because one is a woman: the gift of motherhood is penalized rather than valued. Likewise, in some cultures, sterility in a woman is the cause of social discrimination. Not to be overlooked is the growing phenomena of violence in which women are victims within the family. The exploitation of women and violence to their bodies are often linked to abortion and forced sterilization. In addition, practices related to procreation also have negative consequences, such as, a “womb for hire” or the marketing of gametes and embryos. The emancipation of women requires a rethinking of the duties of the spouses in their reciprocity and shared responsibility for family life. The desire for a child at any cost has not resulted in happier and more sound relations within families, but, in many cases, has actually worsened the inequality between women and men. A contributing factor in the social recognition of the role of women is a greater appreciation of their responsibilities in the Church: their involvement in decision-making, their participation in the administration of some institutions and their involvement in the formation of ordained ministers.

## **Men**

28. Man plays an equally decisive role in family life, particularly in reference to the protection and support of his wife and children. A model for a man in a family is St. Joseph, the just man, who in the hour of danger, “took the child and his mother by night” (*Mt 2:14*) and brought them to safety. Many men are aware of the importance of their role in the family and live according to their masculine role. The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence, which may be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual, deprives children of an appropriate model of paternal behaviour. The increasing duties of women working outside the home has not been suitably compensated by a greater commitment by the man in the home. Today, a man is increasingly losing sight of his role in protecting his wife and children from all forms of violence and degradation. “Husbands — Paul says — must love their wives ‘as their own body’ (*Eph 5:28*); to love them as Christ ‘loved the Church and gave himself up for her’ (v. 25). You husbands [...] do you understand this? Do you love your wives as Christ loves the Church? [...] The effect of this radical devotion asked

of man, for the love and dignity of woman, following the example of Christ, must have been tremendous in the Christian community itself. This seed of evangelical novelty, which reestablishes the original reciprocity of devotion and respect, matured throughout history slowly but ultimately it prevailed.” (Francis, General Audience, 6 May 2015).

## **Young People**

29. Many young people continue to see marriage as the great desire of their life and the idea of forming their own family as a fulfilment of their aspirations. Nevertheless, young people, in practice, have varying attitudes with regard to marriage. Often they are led to postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as: the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family; the desire to avoid the failures of other couples; the fear of something they consider too important and sacred; the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together; a purely emotional and romantic conception of love; the fear of losing their freedom and independence; and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic. The Church is concerned at the distrust of many young people towards marriage and is troubled at the haste with which many of the faithful decide to put an end to one marital commitment and establish another. In their plans of love, young people who are baptized are to be encouraged to have no doubts in viewing the riches available in the Sacrament of Matrimony, to be aware of the strong support they can receive from the grace of Christ and to seize the opportunity of participating fully in the life of the Church. The reasons for the young’s renouncing marriage and their discouragement in marrying need to be more carefully discerned. Young people can gain greater confidence in the choice of marriage thanks to those families who, in the Christian community, provide a trustworthy example of enduring witness over time.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Family, Affectivity and Life**

#### **The Importance of an Affective Life**

30. “Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. *Jn* 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. *Jn* 19:34)” (*DCE*, 7) . To take care of one’s self, to know one’s self interiorly, to live better in line with one’s emotions and feelings and to seek quality in emotional relationships requires opening oneself to the gift of loving others and the desire to build a creative, empowering and sound reciprocity as that in families. The Church’s challenge is to assist couples in the maturation of the emotional aspect of their relationship and in their affective development through fostering dialogue, the life of virtue and trust in the merciful love of God. The commitment to full dedication required in Christian marriage is a strong antidote to the temptation of a person’s living an existence exclusively turned in upon itself.

#### **Formation in Self-Giving**

31. The dynamic of family relations has a primary impact on the formation of younger generations. The speed of changes occurring in present-day society makes the work of accompanying a person's affective formation in sound growth and development more difficult. This process requires appropriate pastoral action which is abundantly equipped with a knowledge imbued with Scripture and Catholic doctrine and provided with suitable educational tools. A proper knowledge of the psychology of the family will serve as an assistance in ensuring that the Christian vision might be effectively transmitted. Such an effort might already begin with the catechesis of Christian Initiation. This formation is also to highlight the admirable character of the virtue of chastity, since the virtue of chastity is understood to mean the integration of affections which fosters self-giving.

### **Weakness and Immaturity**

32. Many cultural tendencies exist in today's world whose goal is to impose a sexuality without any limits and where all affective aspects are explored, even the more complex ones. The idea of emotional weakness is very timely; a narcissistic, unstable and changing affectivity does not help a person to achieve greater maturity. The following cultural tendencies need to be firmly denounced: the prevalence of pornography and the commercialization of the body which is promoted by a distorted use of the internet, forced prostitution and exploitation. In this regard, couples are sometimes uncertain, hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow, many of whom tend to remain in the primary stages of their emotional and sexual life. A crisis of the couple destabilizes the family and can reach the point, through separation and divorce, to have serious consequences on adults, children and society, thereby weakening individual and social ties. The decline in population, due to an anti-birth mentality and promoted by global policies of "reproductive health," threatens the link between generations. This situation also gives rise to a generalized economic impoverishment and loss of hope.

### **Technologies in Human Procreation**

33. The technological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the ability to manipulate the reproductive act, making it independent of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In this way, human life and parenthood have become a modular and separable reality, subject mainly to the wishes of individuals or couples, who are not necessarily heterosexual and properly married. This phenomenon has occurred recently as an absolute novelty on the stage of humanity and is increasingly becoming more common. This situation has profound implications in the dynamics of relationships, in the structuring of social life and in legal systems which intervene to attempt to regulate practices already in place and various situations. In this regard, the Church feels required to speak a word of truth and hope, necessarily beginning with the belief that each human being comes from God and lives constantly in his presence: "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves 'the creative action of God' and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Donum vitae*, Introd., 5, 22 February 1987; cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 53).

## **A Pastoral Challenge**

34. A reflection able to pose the important questions on being human is productive in articulating the most profound aspirations of humanity. The great values of marriage and the Christian family are a response to the search inherent in human existence, even at a time characterized by individualism and hedonism. People ought to be received with understanding and sensitivity to their real-life situations and to learn how to continue their search for meaning in life. Faith inspires a desire for God and to feel fully part of the Church, even in those who are experiencing failure or are in very difficult situations. The Christian message always contains the reality and dynamics of mercy and truth, which converge in Christ: “The Church’s first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident” (*MV*, 12). In formation for conjugal and family life, pastoral care is to take into account the diversity of real-life situations. If, on the one hand, we must promote pathways to ensure the formation of young people for marriage; on the other, we must accompany those who live alone or, without forming a new family, frequently remain connected to their family of origin. Even couples who cannot have children should be given special pastoral attention by the Church to help them discover God’s plan in their situation which is in service to the whole community. Everyone needs to be understood, bearing in mind that situations far from the life of the Church are not always desired; oftentimes, they are created, and, at times, simply endured. From the vantage point of faith, no one is excluded: all are loved by God and are important in the Church’s pastoral activity.

## **PART II**

### **The Family in God’s Plan**

35. Discerning the vocation of the family in the variety of situations treated in the first part of this document requires a sure orientation in formation and guidance. The necessary direction to follow comes from the Word of God in human history, culminating in Jesus Christ who is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” for every man and woman who make up a family. Consequently, we heed what the Church teaches about the family in the light of Sacred Scripture and Tradition. We are convinced that God’s Word responds to the deepest expectations of human love, truth and mercy, and awakens the potential of giving and receiving, even in broken and humbled hearts. In light of the Word, we believe that the Gospel of the Family begins with the creation of humanity in the image of God who is love and calls man and woman to love according to his likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26, 27). The vocation of the married couple and the family to a communion of love and life continues in all stages of God’s plan, despite the limitations and sins of the people. From the beginning, this vocation is founded in Christ the Redeemer (cf. *Eph* 1:3-7). He restores the marriage covenant as it was in the beginning (*Mk* 10:6), heals the human heart (cf. *Jn* 4:10) and gives it the ability to love as Christ loves the Church in offering himself for her (*Eph* 5:32).

36. This vocation receives its ecclesial and missionary form from the sacramental bond which consecrates the indissoluble, conjugal relationship between a husband and a wife.

The exchange of consent establishing this bond, implies the couple's commitment to mutual self-giving and receiving, which is total and definitive and, biblically speaking, in "one flesh" (*Gen 2:24*). The grace of the Holy Spirit makes the married couple's union a living sign of the bond between Christ and the Church. In this way, their union becomes, in the course of their lives, a source of many graces: fruitfulness, witness, healing and forgiveness. The wedding takes place in the community of life and love and the family participates in the work of evangelization. The bride and groom, thus becoming Christ's disciples, are accompanied by him on the way to Emmaus; they recognize him in the breaking of bread; and they return to Jerusalem enlightened by his resurrection (cf. *Lk 24:13-43*). The Church proclaims the family's union with Jesus, by virtue of the Incarnation through which he is a member of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Faith acknowledges the indissoluble bond between the spouses as a reflection of the love of the Divine Trinity, which reveals itself in the unity of truth and mercy proclaimed by Jesus. The Synod makes itself the interpreter of the Church who witnesses and proclaims to the People of God the clear teaching on the truth of the family, according to the Gospel. No matter how distant, every family can attain mercy and be sustained by this truth.

## **Chapter I**

### **The Family in Salvation History**

#### **The Divine Pedagogy**

37. Since the order of creation is determined by its orientation to Christ, we must make distinctions in the grace of the covenant, without separating the different degrees by which God communicates to humanity. Because of the divine pedagogy, according to which the plan of creation is fulfilled through successive stages in the order of redemption, we need to understand the novelty of the Sacrament of Matrimony in continuity with natural marriage as it was in the beginning, based on the order of creation. From this perspective, we understand the salvific action of God, even in the Christian life. Because everything was done through Christ and for him (cf. *Col 1:16*), Christians "gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows. At the same time, however, they need to look to the profound changes which are taking place among nations" (*AG*, 11). The incorporation of the believer into the Church through Baptism is completed in the other Sacraments of Christian Initiation. In the domestic Church, which is his family, the believer starts that "dynamic process, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (*FC*, 9), by an ongoing conversion to the love that saves us from sin and gives fullness of life. Amidst the challenges of contemporary society and culture, faith looks to Jesus Christ and seeks to contemplate and adore his face. He looked with love and tenderness on the women and men whom he encountered and accompanied their steps with truth, patience and mercy in announcing the requirements of the Kingdom of God. "Every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed-of possibilities open up" (Francis, *Address at the Prayer Vigil in Preparation for the Synod on the Family*, 4 October, 2014).

#### **The Icon of the Trinity in the Family**

38. Scripture and Tradition give us access to a knowledge of the Trinity which is revealed in the features of a family. The family is the image of God who "in his deepest mystery is

not all by himself, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love” (John Paul II, *Homily at Parafox Major Seminary*, Puebla de Los Angeles (Mexico), 28 January 1979). God is a communion of persons. At Christ’s Baptism, the voice of the Father called Jesus his beloved Son, and, in this love, we come to recognize the Holy Spirit (cf. *Mk* 1:10-11). Jesus, who has reconciled all things in himself and has redeemed us from sin, not only returned marriage and the family to their original form, but has also raised marriage to the sacramental sign of his love for the Church (cf. *Mt* 19:1-12; *Mk* 10:1-12; *Eph* 5:21-32). In the human family, gathered by Christ, the “image and likeness” of the Holy Trinity (cf. *Gen* 1:26) is now visible, a mystery from which flows all true love. Through the Church, marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit from Christ so as to bear witness to the Gospel of God’s love until the fulfilment of the Covenant on the Last Day, at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (cf. *Rev* 19:9; John Paul II, *Catechesis on Human Love*). The covenant of love and fidelity, lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth, illuminates the principle which gives form to every household, and enables it better to face the vicissitudes of life and history. On this basis, every family, despite its weaknesses, can become a light in the darkness of the world. “Here each of us understands the meaning of family life, its harmony of love, its simplicity and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; may it teach us how sweet and irreplaceable is its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role in the social order” (Paul VI, *Discourse at Nazareth*, 5 January 1964).

### **The Family in Sacred Scripture**

39. Through the fruitfulness of their love, man and woman continue the work of creation and collaborate with the Creator in salvation history through successive genealogies (*Gen* 1:28; 2: 4; 9:1,7; 10; 17:2,16; 25:11; 28:3; 35:9,11; 47:27; 48:3,4). The reality of marriage in its exemplary form is outlined in the book of Genesis, to which Jesus also refers in his idea of married love. Man feels incomplete, because he lacks “a helper fit for him”, who “stands before him” (*Gen* 2:18-20) in an equal dialogue. The woman participates, therefore, in the same reality of the man, represented symbolically by the rib, or by the same flesh, as proclaimed in the song of the man’s love: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen* 2:23). They thus become “one flesh” (*Gen* 2:24). This foundational reality of the marital experience is exalted in the expression of one belonging to the other in the profession of love, pronounced by the woman in the Song of Songs. The formula is similar to that of the covenant between God and his People (cf. *Lev* 26:12): “My beloved is mine and I am his,... I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (*Cant* 2:16; 6:3). Equally meaningful in this Canticle is the constant intertwining of sexuality, *eros* and love, as well as the physical embrace with tenderness, feeling, passion, spirituality and total self-giving. Fully aware that death might interrupt the dialogue between him and her (cf. *Cant* 3 and 5), each one is certain that the power of love remains in overcoming all obstacles: “love is strong as death” (*Cant* 8:6). To celebrate the covenant of love between God and his people, biblical prophecy will utilize not only nuptial symbolism (cf. *Is* 54; *Jer* 2:2; *Ez* 16), but the entire family experience, as attested in a particularly intense manner by the prophet Hosea. The ordeal he endured in marriage and the family (cf. *Hos* 1-3) becomes a sign of the relationship between the Lord and Israel. The infidelity of the people cannot surmount the enduring love of God which the prophet portrays as a father who guides and draws his son to himself with the “bands of love” (cf. *Hos* 11:1-4).

40. The words of eternal life, given by Jesus to his disciples, include his teaching on marriage and the family. In them, we can recognize three basic stages in God's plan. Firstly, there is the family of origin, when God, the Creator, instituted the primordial marriage between Adam and Eve, as the solid foundation of the family. God not only created human beings as male and female (cf. *Gen* 1:27), but he also blessed them so that they might be fruitful and multiply (cf. *Gen* 1:28). For this, “a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (*Gen* 2:24). Subsequently, in its historical form in the tradition of Israel, this union, wounded by sin, underwent several variations: between monogamy and polygamy, between stability and divorce and between reciprocity and subordination of woman to man. Moses' granting the possibility of divorce (cf. *Deut* 24:1ff), which lasted to the time of Jesus, is to be understood within this framework. Lastly, the reconciliation of the world took place with the coming of the Saviour, not only restoring the original divine plan but leading the history of God's People to a new fulfilment. Above all, the indissolubility of marriage (*Mk* 10:2-9) is not meant to be a burden but a gift to those who are united in marriage.

### **Jesus and the Family**

41. The example of Jesus is a paradigm for the Church. The Son of God came into the world in a family. In his thirty years of hidden life in Nazareth — the social, religious and cultural periphery of the Empire (cf. *Jn* 1:46) — Jesus saw in Mary and Joseph a faithfulness lived in love. He began his public life with the sign at Cana, done at a wedding feast (*Jn* 2:1-11). He announced the Gospel of marriage as the fullness of revelation which restores God's original plan (cf. *Mt* 19:4-6). He shared in everyday moments of friendship in the family of Lazarus and his sisters (cf. *Lk* 10:38) and in the family of Peter (cf. *Mt* 8:14). He heard the cries of parents for their children and raising them to life (cf. *Mk* 5:41; *Lk* 7:14,15), thereby showing the true meaning of mercy, which implies the restoration of the Covenant (cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 4). This clearly appears in the meetings with the Samaritan woman (cf. *Jn* 4:1-30) and the adulteress (cf. *Jn* 8:1-11), in which the perception of sin is awakened by the Jesus' gratuitous act of love. Conversion “is an ongoing task for the whole Church who, embracing sinners, (is) at once holy and always in need of purification, (and) follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. This endeavour of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a ‘contrite heart,’ drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God, who loved us first”(CCC, 1428). God gratuitously forgives those who are open to the action of his grace, which takes place through repentance, combined with the intention of living life according to God's will, the effect of his mercy by which he reconciles us to himself. God puts in our hearts the ability to follow Christ by imitating him. The words and attitude of Jesus clearly show that the Kingdom of God is the criterion on which every relationship is defined (cf. *Mt* 6:33). Family ties, though fundamental, “are not absolute” (CCC, 2232). In a manner which caused consternation in his listeners, Jesus made family relations relative in the context of the Kingdom of God (*Mk* 3:33-35; *Lk* 14:26; *Mt* 10:34-37; 19:29; 23:9). This revolution in affection, which Jesus introduced into the human family, is a radical call to universal brotherhood. No one is excluded from this new community gathered in Jesus' name, because all are called to be part of God's family. Jesus shows how the divine condescendence may accompany the human journey with his grace, transform the hardened heart with his mercy (cf. *Ez* 36:26) and guide its fulfilment through the Paschal

Mystery.

## Chapter II

### The Family in the Magisterium of the Church

#### The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council

42. Based on what she has received from Christ, the Church has developed over the centuries a rich teaching on marriage and family. One of the greatest examples of this Magisterium was proposed by the Second Vatican Council in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which devotes an entire chapter to the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. *GS*, 47-52). This document defines marriage and the family in the following manner: “The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one.”(*GS*, 48). The “true love between husband and wife” (*GS*, 49) involves a mutual gift of self, which is to include and integrate the sexual dimension and affectivity according to the divine plan (cf. *GS*, 48-49). This clearly shows that marriage and the conjugal love that gives it life, “are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children” (*GS*, 50). Furthermore, the grounding of the couple in Christ is emphasized: Christ the Lord “comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony” (*GS*, 48) and remains with them (*sacramentum permanens*). He assumes human love, purifies it, brings it to fulfilment and gives the married couple, with his Spirit, the ability to live it by permeating every aspect of their life of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the couple, like consecrated persons through a grace proper to them, builds up the Body of Christ and is a domestic Church (cf. *LG*, 11), so that the Church, through fully understanding her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests that mystery in an authentic way.

#### Blessed Pope Paul VI

43. Blessed Pope Paul VI, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, greatly developed the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a particular way, with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he highlighted the intrinsic link between conjugal love and the generation of life: “Married love, therefore, requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, which today, rightly enough, is much insisted upon, but which at the same time should be rightly understood. [...] the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society” (*HV*, 10). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI highlighted the relationship between the family and the Church: “One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of ‘domestic Church.’ This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from

which the Gospel radiates” (*EN*, 71).

## **Pope Saint John Paul II**

44. Pope Saint John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love and the theology of the body. In them, he has given the Church a wealth of reflections on the nuptial meaning of the human body and God’s plan for marriage and the family from the beginning of creation. In particular, by treating conjugal love, he described how spouses, in their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness. In the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and particularly in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II pointed to the family as the “way of the Church.” He also offered a general vision of man and woman’s vocation to love and proposed basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. “In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up — married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity — through which each human person is introduced into the ‘human family’ and into the ‘family of God,’ which is the Church” (*FC*, 15).

## **Pope Benedict XVI**

45. Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, returned to the topic of the truth of the love between man and woman, that is fully illuminated only in light of the love of the Crucified Christ (cf. *DCE*, 2). He stresses that “marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love” (*DCE*, 11). Moreover, in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he highlights the importance of family love as a principle of life in society, a place where we learn the experience of the common good. “It is thus becoming a social and even economic necessity once more to hold up to future generations the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person. In view of this, States are called to enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family, founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character” (*CiV*, 44).

## **Pope Francis**

46. Pope Francis, in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, treats the connection between the family and faith: “The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage [...] Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings” (*LF*, 52). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope recalls the centrality of the family among the cultural challenges of today: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society

transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple” (*EG*, 66). Pope Francis, in further treating issues relating to the family, has dedicated an organic cycle of catechesis which thoroughly examines the various persons in the family, their different experiences and the stages of life.

### **Chapter III**

#### **The Christian Teaching on the Family**

##### **Marriage in the Order of Creation and the Fullness of the Sacrament**

47. The order of redemption illuminates and fulfils that of creation. Natural marriage, therefore, is fully understood according to its realization in the Sacrament of Matrimony: only in contemplating Christ does a person have an in-depth knowledge of the truth about human relationships. “Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (*GS*, 22). Quite appropriately, we can use a Christocentric hermeneutic to understand the natural properties of marriage, which make up the goods of the spouses (*bonum coniugum*), namely, union, openness to life, fidelity and indissolubility. In light of the New Testament, according to which all things were created through Christ and for him (cf. *Col* 1:16; *Jn* 1:1ff), the Second Vatican Council wanted to express appreciation for natural marriage and the positive elements in other religions (cf. *LG*, 16; *NA*, 2) and different cultures, despite their limitations and shortcomings (cf. *RM*, 55). Discernment of the presence of the “seeds of the Word” in other cultures (cf. *AG*, 11) can also be applied to the reality of marriage and the family. In addition to true natural marriage, positive elements are present in the forms of marriage in other religious traditions. We maintain that these forms — still based on the true and stable relationship of a man and a woman — are ordered to the Sacrament of Matrimony. While considering the human wisdom of the people, the Church recognizes that this family is also the basic cell which is necessary and fruitful in human coexistence.

##### **The Indissolubility and Fruitfulness of the Conjugal Union**

48. The faithfulness of God to the covenant, which cannot be revoked, is the basis for the indissolubility of marriage. The all-inclusive, profound love between husband and wife is not only based on human capacity: God supports this covenant with the power of his Spirit. The choice that God made in our regard is reflected, in some way, in the choice of a spouse: just as God keeps his promise even when we fail, so love and conjugal fidelity maintain their value “in good times and in bad.” Marriage is a gift and a promise of God, who hears the prayers of those who ask for his help. The hardness of the human heart, its limitations and its weakness in the face of temptation is a great challenge in living a life in common. The witness of couples who faithfully live their marriage highlights the value of this indissoluble union and awakens the desire to constantly renew their commitment to fidelity. Indissolubility corresponds to the profound desire of mutual and enduring love which the Creator has placed in the human heart, a gift which he himself gives to each couple: “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (*Mt* 19:6; *Mk* 10:9). The man and woman accept this gift and care for it so that their love might be able to endure forever. Faced with the sensibility of our times and the actual difficulty in maintaining

life-long commitments, the Church is called to propose the demands and a plan of life according to the Gospel of the Family and Christian marriage. “St Paul, speaking of new life in Christ, says that Christians — each one of them — are called to love one another as Christ has loved them, that is to ‘be subject to one another’ (Eph 5:21), which means to be at the service of one another. And here he introduces an analogy between the husband and wife and Christ and his Church. It is clear that this is an imperfect analogy, but we must take it in the spiritual sense which is very lofty and revolutionary, and, at the same time, simple, available to every man and woman who entrusts himself and herself to the grace of God” (Francis, *General Audience*, 6 May 2015). Once again, this proclamation gives hope!

### **The Goods of the Family**

49. Marriage is “a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (*CIC*, can. 1055 - §1). In mutual acceptance, those who are engaged promise each other a total gift of self, fidelity and openness to life. In faith and with the grace of Christ, they recognize the gifts which God offers them and commit themselves, in his name, in the presence of the Church. God consecrates the love of a husband and a wife and confirms the indissoluble character of their love, offering them the grace to live in faithfulness, mutual integration and openness to life. Let us thank God for marriage because, through the community of life and love, Christian spouses know happiness and experience that God loves them personally, with feelings of warmth and tenderness. The man and the woman, individually and as a couple, — recalls Pope Francis — “are the image of God.” Their difference “is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God” (*General Audience*, 15 April 2015). The unitive end of marriage is a constant reminder that this love grows and deepens. Through their union in love, the couple experiences the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood and shares their plans, trials, expectations and concerns; they learn care for each other and mutual forgiveness. In this love, they celebrate their happy moments and support each other in the difficult passages of their life together.

50. The fruitfulness of the couple, in a full sense, is spiritual. They are living signs of the Sacrament of Matrimony and a source of life for the Christian community and the world. The act of generation, showing the “inseparable connection” between the unitive and procreative aspects — as highlighted by Blessed Paul VI (cf. *HV*, 12) — must be understood in light of the parents’ responsibility and commitment to the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who are the most precious fruit of conjugal love. From the very first moment of conception the child is a person, who transcends those who have procreated them. “According to God’s plan, being a son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another, original and new, human being. And for parents each child is original, different, diverse” (Francis, *General Audience*, 11 February 2015). The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members — from toddlers to seniors — are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable. Family relations contribute decisively to the sound building of human society in fellowship, which cannot be reduced to simply the inhabitants of a territory or citizens of a State who live together.

## **The Truth and Beauty of the Family**

51. With heartfelt joy and profound consolation, the Church looks to families who faithfully follow the teachings of the Gospel. The Church thanks them for their witness and encourages them to continue. Because of these families, the beauty of an indissoluble, ever-faithful marriage is made credible. The first experience of ecclesial communion between persons grows and develops in the family, in which, through grace, the mystery of Trinitarian love is reflected. “Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous — even repeated — forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life.” (*CCC*, 1657). The Gospel of the Family nourishes those seeds still awaiting maturity and must also treat those trees which have withered and require attention (cf. *Lk* 13:6-9). The Church as a sure teacher and caring mother acknowledges that, for those who are baptized, a sacramental marriage is the only marriage bond which exists and any rupture of that bond is against the will of God. At the same time, she is also aware of the fragility of many of her children who struggle along the path of faith. “Without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they [the lay faithful] need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur [...] A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings” (*EG*, 44). This truth and beauty is to be safeguarded. When faced with difficult situations and wounded families, people need to recall this general principle: “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations” (*FC*, 84). The degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases and factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision. Therefore, while clearly expressing doctrine, pastors are to avoid judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people live and endure distress because of their condition.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Towards the Ecclesial Fullness of the Family**

#### **The Intimate Bond Between the Church and the Family**

52. The blessing and responsibility of a new family, sealed in the Sacrament of Matrimony, involve the couple's willingness to be advocates and promoters, within the Christian community, of the basic covenant between a man and a woman. In society, the willingness to beget children, to protect the weak and to live a life in common, involves a responsibility that should be supported, acknowledged and appreciated. In virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony, every family becomes, in effect, a good for the Church. From this vantage point, considering the interplay between the family and the Church will be a precious gift for the Church at the present time: the Church is good for the family, the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord's gift in the Sacrament of Matrimony is a matter not only for the individual family but the Christian community itself, in a manner for which it is responsible. To preserve the union of marriage, when difficulties — even serious ones — arise, a discernment of each's obligations and failures should be thoroughly examined by the couple with the assistance of the pastors and

community.

### **The Grace of Conversion and Fulfilment**

53.. The Church remains close to couples whose marital relationship has degenerated to the point of separation. In cases where a relationship painfully ends, the Church feels the duty to accompany the spouses in their period of suffering so their relationship does not lead to a serious conflict. First of all, particular attention needs to be given to the children, who are the first affected by the separation, so that they suffer as little as possible, because “when a dad and mom hurt one another, the souls of their children suffer terribly” (Francis, *General Audience*, 24 June 2015). The light of Christ enlightens every person (cf. *Jn* 1:9; *GS*, 22), seeing things as Christ would see them inspires the Church's pastoral care for the faithful who are living together or who are only married civilly or who are divorced and remarried. From the vantage point of divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them, she encourages them to do good, to lovingly take care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work. Hopefully, dioceses will promote various means of discernment for these people and to involve them in the community to help and encourage them to grow and eventually make a conscious, coherent choice. Couples need to be told about the possibility of having recourse to a process of a declaration of nullity regarding their marriage.

54. When a couple in an irregular union reaches a noteworthy stability through a public bond — and is characterized by deep affection, responsibility towards the children and the ability to overcome trials — this can be seen as an opportunity, where possible, to lead the couple to celebrating the Sacrament of Matrimony. A different case occurs, however, when persons live together without a desire for a future marriage, but instead have the decided intention not to establish any institutionally recognized relationship. Civil marriages between a man and a woman, traditional marriage and, taking into account the difference due, even cohabitation are emerging phenomena in many countries. The situation of the faithful who have established a new union requires special pastoral attention: “In these decades [...] the awareness has truly grown that it is necessary to have a fraternal and attentive welcome, in love and in truth, of the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of the marital sacrament; in fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated” (Francis, *General Audience*, 5 August 2015).

### **Mercy: The Core of Revelation**

55. The Church starts from the real-life situations of today's families, all in need of mercy, beginning with those who suffer most. With the Merciful Heart of Jesus, the Church must draw near and guide the weakest of her members, who are experiencing a wounded or lost love, by restoring confidence and hope, as the beacon light of a port or a torch carried in the crowd, to illuminate those who have lost their way or find themselves in the midst of a storm. Mercy is “the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ” (*MV*, 25). God's sovereignty shines forth in his mercy; a mercy always faithful to his very being, which is love (cf. *I Jn* 4:8), and to his covenant. “It is precisely in his mercy that God manifests his omnipotence” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 30, art. 4; cf. *The Roman Missal*, the Opening Prayer for the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time). Proclaiming

the truth in love is itself an act of mercy. In the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis said: “Mercy is not contrary to justice but is the behaviour of God toward the sinner.” He continues: “God does not deny justice. He rather envelops it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice” (*MV*, 21). Jesus is the face of the mercy of God the Father: “God so loved the world [...] [that] the world might be saved through him [the Son]” (*Jn* 3:16, 17).

### **PART III**

#### **The Mission of the Family**

56. From the beginning of history, God has been generous with his love towards his children (cf. *LG*, 2), so that they could attain fullness of life in Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, God invites families to enter into this life, to proclaim it and to communicate it to others (cf. *LG*, 41). As Pope Francis forcefully reminds us, the mission of the family always extends outside itself in service to our brothers and sisters. Each family is asked to participate in the Church’s mission in a unique and privileged manner. “In virtue of their Baptism, all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (*EG*, 120). All over the world, in the real-life situation of families, we can see much happiness and joy, but also much suffering and anguish. We want to look at this reality with the same eyes with which Christ looked at it, as he walked among the people of his time. We want our attitude to be one of humility and understanding. Our desire is to accompany each and every family so that each family might discover the best way to overcome the obstacles it encounters. The Gospel is always a sign of contradiction. The Church never forgets that the Paschal Mystery is central to the Good News that we announce. She wants to help families recognize and welcome the cross, when it is placed before them, so that they can carry it, along with Christ, on the path which leads to the joy of the resurrection. This task requires “a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (*EG*, 25). Conversion, then, profoundly affects a style of communication and language. The language to be adopted must be meaningful. Proclamation has to make people experience the Gospel of the Family as a response to the deepest longings of the human person, a response to his/her dignity and a response to complete personal fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. It is not only a question of norms, but announcing the grace which provides the ability to live the goods of the family. Today more than ever, transmitting the faith requires a language which is able to reach everyone, especially young people, so as to communicate the beauty of love in the family and make people understand the meaning of terms such as self-giving, conjugal love, fidelity, fruitfulness and procreation. This need for a new and more appropriate language initially enters in introducing children and adolescents to the topic of sexuality. Many parents and people who are involved in pastoral work have difficulty finding an appropriate yet respectful language to bring together the biological and complementary natures of sexuality which enrich each other through friendship, love and the self-giving of a man and a woman.

#### **Chapter I**

##### **The Formation of the Family**

## Marriage Preparation

57. Christian marriage cannot be reduced to a cultural tradition or to a simple legal agreement. Christian marriage is a genuine call from God which demands careful discernment, constant prayer and adequate growth and development. In this regard, a programme of formation is needed which might accompany persons and couples so that communicating the faith might be united with an actual living experience provided by the entire ecclesial community. The effectiveness of this assistance also requires improved premarital catechesis — sometimes poor in content, today — which is an integral part of routine pastoral care. The ministry on behalf of engaged couples also ought to be included in the general commitment of the Christian community to present, in a proper and convincing fashion, the Gospel message about the dignity of the person, his/her freedom and respect for his/her rights. In this regard, the three stages indicated in *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 66) need to be borne in mind: remote preparation, which treats the transmission of the faith and Christian values within the family; proximate preparation, which coincides with the various programmes of catechesis and the formative experiences lived within the ecclesial community; and immediate preparation for marriage, which is part of a broader programme, characterized by the vocation to marriage itself.

58. In the cultural change taking place in the present-day, models are often presented which conflict with the Christian vision of the family. Sexuality is often separated from a plan of authentic love. In some countries, formation programmes are even imposed by civil authorities whose content is in conflict with the human and Christian vision of man. As to these programmes, the Church strongly affirms her freedom to set forth her teaching and the right of conscientious objection on the part of educators. Moreover, the family, while remaining the primary place for formation (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3), cannot be the only place for formation in matters of sexuality. In this regard, true and proper pastoral programmes of support need to be devised, targeting both individuals and couples, with particular attention given to young people at the age of puberty and adolescence, so as to help them discover the beauty of sexuality in love. Christianity proclaims that God created humanity as male and female, and blessed them to form one flesh and transmit life (cf. *Gen* 1: 27-28; 2, 24). Their difference, in equal personal dignity, is God's seal of goodness on creation. According to the Christian principle, soul and body, as well as biological sex (*sex*) and socio-cultural role of sex (*gender*), can be distinguished but not separated.

Pre-matrimonial programmes seem to require additional topics to better form people in faith and love in the general process of Christian initiation. In this regard, the importance of the virtues needs to be recalled, especially chastity, which is invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. The formation programme should assume the structure of a journey towards vocational discernment for both the individual person and the couple, ensuring a better synergy between the various pastoral areas. The pre-marital programme might also be given by married couples who are capable of accompanying engaged couples before their marriage and in the initial years of marriage, thereby showing the value of the ministry of married couples. Giving value to interpersonal relationships in the Church's pastoral activity will encourage the gradual opening of minds and hearts to the fullness of God's plan.

## **The Celebration of Marriage**

59. The marriage liturgy is a unique event, which is a familial and social celebration. The first signs of Jesus were done at the wedding feast of Cana. The good wine, resulting from the Lord's miracle which brought joy at the formation of a new family, is the new wine of Christ's covenant with the men and women of every age. An engaged couple devotes a great deal of time preparing for the wedding ceremony. These cherished moments ought to be for them, their families and friends a truly spiritual and ecclesial celebration. The wedding celebration is an auspicious opportunity to invite many people to the celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Christian community, through its heartfelt and joyous participation, is to welcome the new family in its midst so that the new family as a domestic Church might feel a part of the larger ecclesial family. The wedding liturgy ought to be prepared through a mystagogical catechesis which may make a couple understand that the celebration of their covenant takes place "in the Lord." Frequently, the celebrant has the opportunity to address an assembly made up of people who seldom participate in the life of the Church or belong to other Christian denominations or religious communities. The occasion provides a valuable opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, which can lead the families who attend to a rediscovery of faith and love which come from God.

## **The Initial Years of Family Life**

60. The initial years of marriage are a vital yet delicate period, during which couples grow in an awareness of their vocation and mission. Consequently, this period calls for pastoral guidance which continues after the celebration of the Sacrament. The parish is the place where experienced couples may be made available to the younger ones, possibly in conjunction with associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. In this way, newly married couples ought to be encouraged to remain open to a basic attitude of welcoming the great gift of children. At the same time, the importance of a family spirituality, prayer and participation in Sunday Mass can also be stressed and couples can be encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the practical needs of life. A personal encounter with Christ through the reading of the Word of God, in the community and in homes, especially in the form of *lectio divina*, is a source of inspiration in the family's daily activities. Liturgies, devotional practices and Eucharistic celebrations for families, especially on the anniversary of marriage, sustain the family's spiritual life and its missionary witness. Not infrequently, in the initial years of married life, couples have a tendency to isolate themselves and, consequently, from the community. Strengthening the network of relationships between couples and creating meaningful connections among people are necessary for the maturation of the family's Christian life. Movements and Church groups often provide these moments of growth and formation. The local Church, by integrating the contributions of various persons and groups, assumes the work of coordinating the pastoral care of young families. In the initial phase of married life, some experience a particular discouragement which comes from the frustration of the desire to have children. Not infrequently, this situation gives rise to a crisis which can quickly lead to separation. For reasons like these, the nearness of the community through the love and care of responsible families is particularly important for young married couples.

## **The Formation of Priests and Other Pastoral Workers**

61. Pastoral care needs to be renewed by taking into consideration the Gospel of the Family and the Church's Magisterium. Consequently, a more adequate formation is required of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers, who ought to promote the integration of families into the parish community, especially in Christian formation programmes for the sacraments. In particular, seminars and programmes of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation ought to prepare future priests to become apostles of the family. Formation for the ordained ministry cannot overlook affective and psychological development, with direct involvement in appropriate programmes. Courses and programmes, planned specifically for pastoral workers, can be of assistance in their integrating the pre-marital preparation programme in the broader dynamic of ecclesial life. During the formation period, candidates for the priesthood appropriately live for periods of time with their families and may be guided in acquiring experiences in family ministry so as to develop an adequate knowledge of the current situation of families. The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes the appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church. Dedication to this invaluable ministry can receive vitality and practicality from a renewed alignment between the two main forms of the vocation to love, namely, marriage, which flourishes in the Christian family, based on a love of choice, and the consecrated life, the image of the communion of the Kingdom, which starts from the unconditional acceptance of another as a gift of God. In the communion of vocations, a fruitful exchange of gifts is accomplished, one which enlivens and enriches the Church community (*Acts 18:2*). Family spiritual direction can be considered one of the parish ministries. We suggest that the diocesan office for family and other pastoral offices intensify their cooperation in this field. In the ongoing formation of priests and pastoral workers, we hope that programmes will continue to treat with appropriate tools the growth and development of the psychological and affective aspects which are needed in the pastoral care of families, especially in light of particular emergency situations arising from cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

## **Chapter II**

### **Family, Generativity, Upbringing**

#### **The Transmission of Life**

62. The presence of large families in the Church is a blessing for the Christian community and society, because openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of conjugal love. In this regard, the Church expresses her deep gratitude to families who welcome children — especially those who are most weak and vulnerable — raise them, surround them with affection and transmit the faith to them. These children, born with special needs, draw the love of Christ; they ask the Church to safeguard them as a blessing. Unfortunately, a widespread mentality exists which reduces the generation of life to individual gratification only or that of the couple. Economic, cultural and educational factors are sometimes determinant, contributing to a sharp decline in the birth-rate which weakens the social fabric, compromises the relationship between generations and renders more uncertain an outlook towards the future. Even in this area, we must begin by listening to persons and verify the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life which human love needs

to be lived to the full. This situation calls for an ever-increasing diffusion of the documents of the Church's Magisterium which promote the culture of life. Family ministry should involve more Catholic specialists from the biomedical field in marriage preparation programmes and guidance of married couples.

### **Generative Responsibility**

63. According to the order of creation, conjugal love between a man and a woman and the transmission of life are ordered to each other (cf. *Gen* 1:27-28). In this way, the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of humankind, through the transmission of human life. Spouses are to be open to life and formed in "a right judgment: let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting, they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself" (*GS*, 50; cf. *VS*, 54-66). In conformity with a conjugal love based on the nature of the person and a humanly completed act, the just way for family planning is that of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect for the times of fertility and consideration of the dignity of the partner. In this sense, the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 10-14) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14; 28-35) ought to be taken up anew so as to awaken in people an openness to life in contrast to a mentality which is often hostile to life. We repeatedly urge young couples to be open to life. Doing so, can increase the openness to life in the family, the Church and society. Through its many institutions for children, the Church can help create not only society but also the community of faith, which might be more childlike. The courage to transmit life is notably strengthened when a suitable atmosphere is created for the little ones, an atmosphere which offers help and guidance in bringing up one's children (cooperation among parishes, parents and families).

The choice of responsible parenthood presupposes the formation of conscience, which is "the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There each one is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of the heart" (*GS*, 16). The more the couple tries to listen in their conscience to God and his commandments (cf. *Rom* 2:15), and are accompanied spiritually, the more their decision will be intimately free from a subjective arbitrariness and the adaptation to people's conduct where they live. For the sake of this dignity of conscience, the Church strongly rejects the forced State intervention in favour of contraception, sterilization and even abortion. The use of methods based on the "laws of nature and the incidence of fertility" (*HV*, 11) are to be encouraged, because "these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom" (*CCC*, 2370). Emphasis needs to be placed more and more on the fact that children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world.

### **The Value of Life in All Its Stages**

64. Life is a gift from God and a mystery that transcends us. For this reason, life should in no way be discarded, either in its beginning or at its end. On the contrary, special attention

to all phases of life needs to be guaranteed. People today, too easily “consider the human being in himself as a commodity, which you can use and then throw away. We have given rise to a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading” (*EG*, 53). In this regard, the family, supported by every level of society, needs to accept unborn life and to care for life in its final stages. With regard to the tragedy of abortion, the Church, above all, affirms the sacred and inviolable character of human life and is committed in a practical way in favour of it (cf. *EV*, 58). Through her institutions, she counsels pregnant women, supports single mothers, assists abandoned children and is near to those who endured an abortion. Those who work in healthcare facilities are reminded of the moral obligation of conscientious objection. Similarly, the Church not only feels the urgency to assert the right to a natural death, without aggressive treatment and euthanasia, but also takes care of the elderly, protects people with special needs, assists the terminally ill, comforts the dying and firmly rejects the death penalty (cf. *CCC*, 2258).

### **Adoption and Foster Parenting**

65. The adoption of orphaned and abandoned children, accepting them as one’s own, in the spirit of faith, becomes a form of an authentic family apostolate (cf. *AA*, 11), which is repeatedly mentioned and encouraged by the Magisterium (cf. *FC*, 41; *EV*, 93). The choice of adoption and foster care expresses a particular kind of fruitfulness in the marriage experience, beyond cases where infertility is painfully present. This decision is an eloquent sign of welcoming life, a witness of faith and fulfilment of love, and restores a mutual dignity to a bond which has been interrupted: spouses without children and children without parents. Consequently, all initiatives aimed at facilitating adoption services need to be supported. The trafficking of children between countries and continents is to be prevented by appropriate legislative action and State control. Continuity in the relationships of parenting and upbringing, by necessity, is based, as in procreation, on the sexual difference of a man and a woman. In light of situations where parents want a child at any cost or as a right to self-fulfilment, adoption and foster care, rightly understood, manifest an important aspect of parenting and the raising of children, since they make people aware that children, whether natural, adoptive or taken in foster care, are persons in their own right who need to be accepted, loved and care for and not just brought into this world. The best interests of the child should always underlie any decision in adoption and foster care. As noted by Pope Francis, “children have the right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother” (*Address to Participants in the International Colloquium on the Complementarity Between Man and Woman*, organized by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 17 November 2014). The Church, however, must state that, where possible, children are entitled to grow up in their birth family, with as much support as possible.

### **The Upbringing of Children**

66. Undoubtedly, one of the key challenges posed in families today is that of the upbringing of children, made all-the-more challenging and complex by the today’s culture and the great influence of the media. Due account needs to be given to the needs and expectations of families who in everyday life are places of growth and places for the practical and essential transmission of faith, spirituality and virtues which shape human existence. One’s own family is often the place where a vocation to the priesthood or the consecrated life is born. Therefore, parents are urged to ask the Lord for the priceless gift

of a vocation for one of their children. In bringing up children, protection needs to be afforded to the right of parents to freely choose the type of education to be given to their children, according to their convictions, its accessibility and the calibre of education. People need assistance in living affectivity as a process of maturation — even in the marital relationship — in an ever-deepening acceptance of the other and an ever fuller giving of self. This requires offering formation programmes that nourish conjugal life and the importance of the laity who provide guidance through a life of witness. In this regard, great assistance comes from the example of a couple's profound and faithful love which is based on tenderness, respect and the ability to grow over time. In a practical way, opening oneself to the the generation of life makes a person experience a mystery which transcends us.

67. In different cultures, the adults of the family retain an irreplaceable role in the upbringing of children. However, in many areas, we are witnessing a progressive weakening of the role of parents in raising their children, because of an invasive presence of the media within the family, as well as a tendency to delegate or outright relinquish their role to third parties. On the other hand, the media (especially the social media) unite members of a family, even at a distance. The use of e-mail and other social media can keep family members together over time. Furthermore, the media can provide an opportunity to evangelize young people. This requires the Church to encourage and support families in their efforts vigilantly and responsibly to participate in the educational programmes affecting their children and in their formation. The Synod unanimously restated that the primary school of formation is the family and that the Christian community is engaged in the support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. Places and times for families to meet need to be determined to encourage the training of parents and the sharing of experiences among families. Parents, as the first teachers and witnesses of faith for their children, need to be actively involved in their preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

68. Catholic schools play a vital role in assisting parents in their duty to raise their children. Catholic education promotes the role of the family, ensures good preparation and provides education in the virtues and values as well as instruction in Church teaching. Catholic schools should be encouraged in their mission to help pupils grow into mature adults, who can view the world with the love of Jesus and who can understand life as a call to serve God. In this way, Catholic schools are important in the Church's evangelizing mission. In many parts of the world, Catholic schools are the only schools to provide genuine opportunities for the children of poor families, especially for young people, offering them an alternative to poverty and a way to make a real contribution to society. Catholic schools should be encouraged to pursue their activity in the poorest communities by serving the less fortunate and most vulnerable members of our society.

### **Chapter III**

#### **The Family and Pastoral accompaniment**

##### **Complex Situations**

69. The Sacrament of Matrimony as a faithful and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, called to accept one another and to welcome life, is a great grace for the human

family. The Church has the duty and joy to announce this grace to every person and in every situation. Today, the Church more urgently senses the responsibility of making the baptized rediscover how the grace of God at work in their lives — even in the most difficult of situations — can lead them to the fullness of the Sacrament. While the synod acknowledges and encourages families who honour the beauty of Christian marriage, it wishes, at the same time, to promote a pastoral discernment of situations where people have a difficulty appreciating and receiving the Sacrament as a gift, or in various ways, compromise this gift. To maintain a pastoral dialogue with these Church members to enable them to achieve a consistent openness to the fullness of the Gospel of Marriage and the Family, is a serious responsibility. Pastors should identify elements which can promote evangelization and the human and spiritual growth of those who are entrusted by the Lord to their care.

70. Pastoral ministry on behalf of the family clearly proposes the Gospel message and gathers the positive elements present in those situations, which do not yet or no longer correspond to this message. In many countries, a growing number of couples live together without benefit of either a canonical or civil marriage. In some countries, a traditional wedding is arranged between families and is often celebrated in different stages. In still others, an increasing number of those who have lived together for a long period of time ask for the celebration of marriage in Church. Oftentimes, the choice of simply living together results from not only a general aversion towards institutions and making firm commitments but also an expectation of a sense of security in life (awaiting a job and a steady salary). And finally, in other countries, *de facto* unions are becoming more numerous, because of not only the rejection of the values of family and marriage but also, for some, marriage is seen as a luxury due to their state in society. Consequently, in the latter case, the lack of material resources forces couples to live in *de facto* unions. All these situations must be addressed in a constructive manner, attempting to turn them into opportunities leading to conversion and the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel.

71. The choice of a civil marriage or, in many cases, simply living together, is often not motivated by prejudice or resistance against a sacramental union, but from situations or cultural contingencies. In many circumstances, the decision to live together is a sign of a relationship which wants, in reality, to lead to a stable union in the future. This intention, which translates into a lasting, reliable bond, open to life, can be considered a commitment on which to base a path to the Sacrament of Marriage, discovered as God's plan in one's life. The path of growth, which can lead to a sacramental marriage, is to be encouraged by recognizing the traces of a generous and enduring love, namely, the desire of a couple to seek the good of others before their own; the experience of forgiveness requested and given; and the aspiration to form a family not for itself but open to the good of the ecclesial community and all of society. While pursuing these goals, value can also be given to those signs of love which properly correspond to the reflection of God's love in an authentic conjugal plan.

72. Issues related to mixed marriages require specific attention. Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons “have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement.” For this purpose, “an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the

Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony” (*FC*, 78). Concerning sharing the Eucharist, one needs to remember that “the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party of the marriage may be admitted to Eucharistic communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter, both for Eastern Christians and for other Christians, taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the Sacrament of Matrimony by two baptized Christians. Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case according to the stated norms [...]” (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 25 March 1993, 159-160).

73. Marriages of disparity of cult represent a privileged place for inter-religious dialogue in everyday life, and can be a sign of hope for religious communities, especially where there are situations of tension. Each one shares his/her spiritual experiences or the journey of seeking a religion, if one is not a believer (*1 Cor* 7:14). At the same time, marriages of disparity of cult involve special difficulties regarding both the Christian identity of the family and the religious upbringing of the children. The spouses are called to transform more and more their initial feeling of attraction in a sincere desire for the good of the other. This opening also transforms belonging to various religious persuasions into an opportunity to enrich the quality of the relationship. The number of households with married couples of disparity of cult, on the rise in mission territories and even in countries of long Christian tradition, urgently requires providing a differentiated pastoral care according to various social and cultural contexts. In some countries where freedom of religion does not exist, the Christian spouses are obliged to convert to another religion in order to marry, and, therefore, cannot celebrate a canonical marriage of disparity of cult or baptize their children. We must therefore reiterate the necessity to respect the religious freedom of everyone.

74. While mixed marriages and marriages of disparity of cult can be potentially fruitful, they can also lead to critical situations which are not easily resolved, more on the pastoral rather than the normative level, namely, the religious upbringing of the children, participation in the liturgical life of the spouse and the sharing of a spiritual experience. To deal constructively with differences in the order of faith, attention needs to be given to the persons who make up the marriage, not only in the period before the wedding. Unique challenges face couples and families in which one partner is Catholic and the other is a non-believer. In such cases, witnessing the ability of the Gospel to immerse itself in these situations will make possible the upbringing of their children in the Christian faith.

75. Particular problems arise when persons in a complex marital situation wish to be baptized. These people contracted a stable marriage in a time when at least one of them did not know the Christian faith. In such cases, bishops are called to exercise a pastoral discernment which is commensurate with their spiritual good.

76. The Church’s attitude is like that of her Master, who offers his boundless love to every person without exception (cf. *MV*, 12). To families with homosexual members, the Church reiterates that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his/her dignity and received with respect, while carefully avoiding “every sign of unjust discrimination” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding*

*Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, 4). Specific attention is given to guiding families with homosexual members. Regarding proposals to place unions of homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, “there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family” (*ibid*). In every way, the Synod maintains as completely unacceptable that local Churches be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies link financial aid to poor countries to the introduction of laws to establish “marriage” between people of the same sex.

### **Accompaniment in Different Situations**

77. The Church lovingly shares the joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of every family. For the Church, staying close to the family as a companion on the journey means to assume an attitude which is wisely nuanced. Sometimes, staying close and listening in silence is needed; at other times, moving ahead and pointing the way; and at still other times, the appropriate action is to follow, support and encourage. “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. *Ex* 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” (*EG*, 169). 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. Accompaniment requires specifically trained priests and the establishment of specialized centres where priests, religious and lay people might learn how to take care of each family, with particular attention to those in difficulty.

78. What is urgently needed today is a ministry to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down. Though separation often leads to the end of many, long years of conflict between the spouses, it causes still greater suffering in the children of the marriage. The loneliness of the spouse who is abandoned or who has been forced to cease living in a situation characterized by continuous, severe ill-treatment, calls for particular care on the part of the Christian community. Prevention and treatment in cases of domestic violence require close cooperation with law enforcement to move against the perpetrators and adequately protect the victims. Promoting the protection of children from sexual abuse is also important. In addition to accompanying these families, the Church exercises “zero tolerance” in these cases. Consideration seems appropriate for families in which some members carry out activities which require the Church’s special attention, like soldiers, who are physically separated from their families for long periods of time, with all the consequences that this entails. When returning from war, these men and women are often suffering from post-traumatic syndrome and are troubled in conscience, which poses serious moral questions for them, all of which requires special pastoral attention.

79. Failure in a marriage is a painful experience for everyone. On the other hand, this marriage failure can become an opportunity for reflection, conversion and trust in God. In each’s becoming aware of his/her responsibility, everyone can find confidence and hope in him. “From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry,

no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends” (*MV*, 25). To pardon an injustice is not easy, but it is a journey that grace makes possible, thus, the need for pastoral conversion and reconciliation also through specialized counselling and mediation centres which are to be established in dioceses. Justice, however, is to be promoted for everyone involved in a failed marriage (spouses and children). The Christian community and its Pastors have the duty to ask the spouses, who are separated and divorced, to treat each other with respect and mercy, especially for the good of the children, who ought not endure further suffering. Children cannot be an object of contention between the parents; instead, ways must be sought so that the children might overcome the trauma of a broken home and grow in as serene an atmosphere as possible. In every case, the Church is always to highlight the injustice which often comes from a situation of divorce.

80. Single parenthood results from a variety of situations: biological mothers or fathers who have never wanted to form a family; situations of violence, where a parent is forced to flee with the children; the death of one parent; one parent’s abandonment of the family; and other situations. Whatever the cause, the parent who lives with the child(ren) must find support and comfort from the other families that form the Christian community and, thus, from the pastoral programmes provided by the parish. Oftentimes, these families suffer further from severe economic problems, uncertainty in employment, difficulties in child support and the lack of a stable residence. The same pastoral concern ought to be manifested with regards to widowed persons and single mothers and their children.

81. When a husband and wife are having trouble in their relationship, they must be able to count on the help and guidance of the Church. Experience shows that with proper help and reconciliation through the grace of the Holy Spirit, a large percentage of marriage crises are satisfactorily overcome. Knowing how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a fundamental experience in family life. Forgiveness between spouses allows them to rediscover the truth of a love that lasts forever and never passes away (*1 Cor* 13:8). Reconciliation is needed almost everyday in family relations. Misunderstandings due to relations with the families of origin, conflicts because of different religious and cultural customs, various opinions on the upbringing of children, anxiety over economic difficulties and tensions that arise as a result of addictions and job loss are just a few of the widely-held reasons for tension and conflict. The arduous art of reconciliation, which requires the support of grace, needs the generous cooperation of relatives and friends, and sometimes even outside help and professional assistance. In the most painful situation, like marital infidelity, a true and proper work of repair is necessary on each’s part. A broken promise can be made whole; the spouses must learn hope in this regard, even from the time of marriage preparation. The action of the Holy Spirit is crucial in the care of persons and broken families, in the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and in the necessity of spiritual guidance by specialized pastoral workers.

82. For many of the faithful who have had an unhappy marital experience, investigating and verifying the invalidity of the marriage represents a possible course of action. The recent *motu proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* and *Mitis et Misericors Iesus* led to a simplification of the procedures in the declaration of nullity of a marriage. With these documents, the Holy Father also wanted to “make clear that the bishop himself in his particular Church, of which he is pastor and head, is the one who renders judgment for the faithful entrusted to him” (*MI*, preamble, III). The implementation of these documents is

therefore a great responsibility for Ordinaries in dioceses, who are called upon to judge some cases themselves and, in every case, to ensure the faithful an easier access to justice. This involves preparing a sufficient staff, composed of clerical and lay persons, who dedicate themselves *a priore* to this ecclesial service. Consequently, information, counselling and mediation services, associated with the family apostolate, need to be provided to persons who are separated or couples in crisis. These persons from the family apostolate are also able to receive persons in the preliminary inquiry of the marriage process (cf. *MI*, Art. 2-3).

83. The witness of those who, despite difficult conditions, have not embarked on forming another union and remain faithful to the sacramental bond, deserves the acknowledgment and support of the Church. She wants to show them the face of a God who is faithful to his love and always able to restore strength and hope. Persons who are separated or divorced but not remarried and who are often witnesses of marital fidelity, are encouraged to find in the Eucharist the food that sustains them in their present state.

### **Discernment and Integration**

84. The baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried need to be more integrated into Christian communities in a variety of possible ways, while avoiding any chance of scandal. The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral care, a care which might allow them not only to realize that they belong to the Church as the Body of Christ, but also to know that they can have a joyful and fruitful experience in it. They are baptized; they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all. Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion, currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surpassed. Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able to live and grow in the Church and experience her as a mother, who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel. This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important. That the Christian community cares for these people is not a weakening of her faith and witness in the indissolubility of marriage: to the contrary, in this very way, the Church expresses her charity.

85. Pope Saint John Paul II offered a comprehensive policy, which remains the basis for the evaluation of these situations: “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage” (*FC*, 84). It is therefore the duty of priests to accompany such people in helping them understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the Bishop. Useful in the process is an examination of conscience through moments of reflection and penance. The divorced and remarried should ask themselves: how they have acted towards their children, when the conjugal union entered into crisis; if they made attempts at reconciliation; what is the situation of the abandoned party; what effect does the new relationship have on the rest of the family and the community of the faithful; and what example is being set for young people, who are preparing for marriage.

A sincere reflection can strengthen trust in the mercy of God which is not denied anyone.

Moreover, one cannot deny that in some circumstances “imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified” (CCC, 1735) due to several constraints. Accordingly, the judgment of an objective situation should not lead to a judgment on “subjective imputability” (Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Declaration of 24 June 2000, 2a). Under certain circumstances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while supporting a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person’s properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations. Even the consequences of actions taken are not necessarily the same in all cases.

86. The path of accompaniment and discernment guides the faithful to an awareness of their situation before God. Conversation with the priest, in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of Church and Church practice which can foster it and make it grow. Given that gradualness is not in the law itself (cf. FC 34), this discernment can never prescind from the Gospel demands of truth and charity as proposed by the Church. This occurs when the following conditions are present: humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it.

## **Chapter IV**

### **The Family and Evangelization**

#### **A Family Spirituality**

87. The family, in its vocation and mission, is truly a treasure of the Church. However, as St Paul says in relation to the Gospel, “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). Above the doorway of family life, says Pope Francis, are “three expressions I’ve already mentioned here in St Peter’s Square several times before. The expressions are: ‘may I?’, ‘thank you’, and ‘pardon me’. Indeed, these expressions open up the way to living well in your family, to living in peace. They are simple expressions, but not so simple to put into practice! They hold much power: the power to keep home life intact even when tested with a thousand problems. But if they are absent, little holes can start to crack open and the whole thing may even collapse” (Francis, *General Audience*, 13 May 2015). Papal teaching is an invitation to deepen the spiritual dimension of family life, beginning from the rediscovery of family prayer and listening to the Word of God in common, which leads to a commitment to charity. The staple food of the spiritual life of the family is the Eucharist, especially on the Day of the Lord, as a sign of his deep grounding in the ecclesial community (cf. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 52; 66). Domestic prayer, participation in the liturgy and the practice of Marian and popular devotions are an effective means of encountering Jesus Christ and the evangelization of the family. This highlights the special vocation of the spouses to realize, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, holiness in their married life, even in participating in the mystery of the cross of Christ, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love.

88. Family tenderness is the bond uniting parents to each other and they with their children. Tenderness means to give with joy and stir in the other the joy of feeling loved. Tenderness is expressed in a particular way by exercising loving care in treating the limitations of the other, especially when they are evident. Dealing with delicacy and respect means attending to wounds and restoring hope and to rekindle trust in the other. Tenderness in family relationships is the daily virtue that serves to overcome inner conflicts and disagreements in relations with others. In this regard, Pope Francis invites us to reflect: “Do we have the courage to welcome with tenderness the difficulties and problems of those who are near to us, or do we prefer impersonal solutions, perhaps effective but devoid of the warmth of the Gospel? How much the world needs tenderness today! The patience of God, the closeness of God, the tenderness of God” (*Homily at Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of Christmas*, 24 December 2014).

### **The Family: Object of Pastoral Care**

89. To be faithful to its mission, the Christian family will have to well understand where it originates: the family cannot evangelize without being evangelized. The mission of the family includes the fruitful union of the spouses, the upbringing of their children, the witness of the Sacrament of Matrimony, preparing other couples for marriage and friendly guidance of couples or families facing difficulties. Consequently, an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family is important. In this regard, care should be taken in giving proper value to couples and parents as active agents in catechesis, especially in their children lives, in collaboration with priests, deacons, consecrated persons and catechists. This effort starts from the time a couple starts dating. Family catechesis is of great assistance as an effective method in training young people and parents to be aware of their mission as evangelizers of their own family. Furthermore, the connection between family experience and Christian Initiation needs to be stressed. The whole Christian community must become a place where families come, meet and seek advice as they walk in faith and share ways leading to growth and mutual exchange.

90. The Church must instill in families a sense of belonging to the Church, a sense of “we” in which no member is forgotten. All are encouraged to develop their skills and realize their plan of life in serving the Kingdom of God. May every family, incorporated in the Church, rediscover the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting policy-making, an economy and a culture in the service of the family, through the use of *social networks* and the *media*, which calls for the ability to create small communities of families as living witnesses of Gospel values. Families need to be prepared, trained and empowered to guide others in living in a Christian manner. Families who are willing to live the mission *ad gentes* are to be acknowledged and encouraged. Finally, we note the importance of connecting youth ministry with family ministry.

### **The Relationship with Cultures and Institutions**

91. “The Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful” (*GS*, 58). These cultures and respect for each’s unique

characteristics is important to bear in mind. The words of Blessed Pope Paul VI deserve consideration: “The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures” (EN, 20). Pastoral care of marriage and the family needs to acknowledge those positive elements that come together in different cultural and religious experiences, which are a “*praeparatio evangelica*.” In the encounter with cultures, however, an evangelization which is truly attentive to the needs of the promoting the family cannot avoid boldly denouncing any form of pressure coming from culture, society, politics or the economy. The growing hegemony of a market logic, which upsets the times and places of genuine family life, also contributes to worsening discrimination, poverty, exclusion and violence. Various families, who are living in conditions of economic poverty, due to unemployment, job insecurity or lack of social services and health care, not infrequently, because of their inability to receive credit, become the victims of usury and are sometimes forced to flee their homes and even their children. In this regard, the suggestion was made to create appropriate economic structures of support for these families or structures capable of promoting familial and social solidarity.

92.. The family is “the first and vital cell of society” (AA, 11). The family must rediscover its vocation to support life in society in all its aspects. It is essential that families, through their associating one with the other, find ways to interact with political, economic and cultural institutions in order to build a more just society. In this regard, dialogue and cooperation needs to be developed with various social entities, while encouragement and support needs to be given to the laity, who are committed as Christians on the cultural and socio-political level. In particular, policy-makers must respect the principle of subsidiarity and not limit the rights of families. In this regard, consideration needs to be given to *The Charter of Rights of the Family* (cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, 22 October 1983) and *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (10 December 1948). For Christians engaged in political life, the commitment to life and the family must take priority, since a society that neglects the family has lost its access to the future. Family associations, engaged in working together with groups of other Christian traditions, have as their main aim, among others, promoting and defending: life and the family; freedom of education; religious freedom; the proper balancing of work-time and time for the family; the defense of women in the workplace; and the protection of the right to conscientious objection.

### **Openness to Mission**

93. Through Baptism, the Family of the Church is missionary by nature and increases her faith in the act of sharing that faith with others, above all, with her children. The very act of living a life of communion as a family is the primary form of proclamation. In fact, evangelization begins in the family, which transmits corporeal as well as spiritual life. The role of grandparents in the transmission of the faith and religious practices should not be overlooked; they are witnesses to the connection between generations and the guardians of the great traditions of wisdom, prayer and good example. The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity specifically through proclaiming the Gospel and through its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely: solidarity with the poor; openness to a diversity of people; the protection of creation; moral and material solidarity with other families, especially the most needy; a commitment to the promotion of the common good, also through the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in

which the family lives; and putting into practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy and spiritual.

### **Conclusion**

94. During this assembly, we synod fathers, gathered around Pope Francis, experienced the tenderness and the prayer of the whole Church, we walked like the disciples of Emmaus and recognized the presence of Christ in the breaking of bread at the Eucharistic table, in fellowship and the sharing of pastoral experiences. We hope that the result of this work, now delivered into the hands of the Successor of Peter, might give hope and joy to many families in the world, guidance to pastors and pastoral workers, and a stimulus to the work of evangelization. In concluding this report, we humbly ask the Holy Father to consider the possibility of issuing a document on the family, so that the family, the domestic Church, might increasingly radiate Christ, who is the light of the world.

### **Prayer to the Holy Family**

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate  
the splendour 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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