

## Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*

### Lead Messages

*This background material is provided by the USCCB and is meant to complement the supplementary resources provided by the Holy See. Please refer to the summary document and Q & A document of the Holy See for more information. Further information is also available at [www.usccb.org/amoris-laetitia](http://www.usccb.org/amoris-laetitia).*

### **Reflecting on the Apostolic Exhortation as a Whole**

The Holy Father has asked us not to rush through the text (see no. 7), and so we plan to study the entire exhortation prayerfully, over time, in order to benefit from it. The pope writes, “The greatest benefit... will come if each part is read patiently and carefully” (no. 7). It is also important not to limit our reading to particular sections but to take in the whole of the document. This Jubilee Year of Mercy offers a fitting context to receive this document through the lens of God’s mercy, “the beating heart of the Gospel” (no. 309), meant for every person and family.

### **Goodness of Marriage and the Family**

The Holy Father has reminded us that the task of the family is entrusted “to a man, a woman and their children, so that they may become a communion of persons in the image of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (no. 29). “Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth” (no. 30). He also reaffirms that it is in the nature of true love to be “definitive” and lasting (see no. 123). The family is also “the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one” (no. 276). Christian marriage “enliven[s] society” (no. 184).

### **On the Vocation to Love**

*Amoris Laetitia* offers a profound reflection on love in marriage and the family. It calls married couples to grow in real friendship together (see no. 120f.) and to see conjugal love, “after the love that unites us to God,” as “the greatest form of friendship” (no. 123). The Holy Father encourages all marriages and families to never stop striving to grow in love. “This is a never-ending vocation...” (no. 325).

### **Pastoral Care of the Family**

“Today, more important than the pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (no. 307). The vast majority of families see husbands and wives living out their marriages and being good parents; they are holding up the future of our society. At the same time the Holy Father calls for great tenderness and compassion towards those in “irregular” situations. “In no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God’s plan in all its grandeur” (no. 307).

### **Accompaniment**

The call to accompany and to be close to families will surely be an abiding hallmark of this document. As he has stressed since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis wants a Church with open doors, of welcome and accompaniment, “in a context of pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and above all integrate” (no. 312). He meditates in *Amoris Laetitia* on the Church’s calling to imitate

Christ's tenderness (see nos. 59, 60, 308, 310) and sensitivity (see nos. 144, 234, 312) in order to communicate God's love to particular people.

### **Marriage Preparation**

Pope Francis calls the Church to increase her efforts to prepare men and women well for the vocation of marriage. In the U.S., our dioceses have really been making great strides in this area. We have more work to do, but we are thankful for all those who have developed various programs that do just what the pope is recommending in this exhortation: preparation that offers the Gospel message, opening hearts to God's grace with joy and enthusiasm, and a combination of catechesis with the practical skills necessary.

### **Welcoming the Gift of Children**

The Holy Father calls attention to the great gift that children are, both to their parents and to society (see no. 166, 168). He emphasizes that children are to be cherished from the first moment of their conception (see nos. 81, 83) and that they have the right to grow up with a mother and father (see no. 172). He encourages married couples to consider adoption (see nos. 179, 180) and mourns the wounds that divorce and separation have on children (see nos. 245-246).

### **Discernment**

Pope Francis repeatedly calls the Church to discernment of particular situations, a central part of Jesuit spirituality. He expresses great confidence in the judgment of conscience and recognizes the importance of a proper formation of conscience. "Individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church's praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage. Naturally, every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience..." (no. 303, see also nos. 222, 298, 300, 302). He also trusts in the discernment of bishops and priests when it comes to meeting a person one-on-one in a process of accompaniment that seeks to help the person determine their position before God (see no. 300).

### **Vulnerable Persons**

We welcome the pope's exhortation to care more fully for the vulnerable people in our country, especially the families who need our help: the poor or homeless, migrants, victims of abuse or violence, the ill, the addicted, those with special needs, single parents and the elderly (see nos. 43-47). We know that the Church can do more in the U.S. to reach out to these populations and be more missionary-focused as the pope calls us to be, including families (see nos. 230, 289)

### **Prayer**

Prayer is where we meet God in our daily lives. Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of prayer for the couple together and the family as a whole (see nos. 216, 223, 227). He also sees the necessity for a vital relationship between the family and the parish (see nos. 223-227).

### **What's Next?**

This Apostolic Exhortation encourages renewed pastoral efforts to lift up the beauty of marriage and family life, to assist families in living out their vocation to love, and to reach out with the Lord's mercy to those who are struggling. It will serve as a support and inspiration, in continuity with the great treasury of Church teaching on marriage and family life, for the Church in the U.S. at the national level and for dioceses and parishes across the country.