



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
Consilium Internationale
FAMILY COMMISSION
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CONCLUSIONS OF SYNOD ON THE FAMILY Part III - THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY

Chapter III **The Family and Pastoral accompaniment**

We continue our work focused on the final report of the synod of the family of October 24, 2015. This following article was prepared by Jenny Harrington of the OFS, and summarizes the third chapter of PART 3 “The Mission of the Family”, - from 69 to 86 - and relates to the Family and Pastoral Accompaniment

INTRODUCTION

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. (No. 69)

1. Complex Situations

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.

The Synod Fathers address various situations of weakness and imperfection experienced in many countries:

- Those that live together without benefit of either a canonical or civil marriage,
- traditional weddings arranged between families,
- an increasing number of those who have lived together for a long period of time ask for celebration of marriage in Church
- simply living together – resulting from an aversion towards institutions and making firm commitments
- De facto unions – rejection of the values of family and marriage, and some marriage is seen as a luxury due to their state in society, and lack of material resources.

Then there are issues related to mixed marriages, marriages of disparity of cult and 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.

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".

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.

2. Accompaniment in Different Situations

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.

A ministry is urgently needed to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down, single parenthood, widowed persons and single mothers and their children.

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. 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. (No 81). 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. (No. 82)

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. (No.83).

3. Discernment and Integration

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.

Pope St 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 to anyone. (No. 85)

The path of accompaniment and discernment guides the faithful to an awareness of their situation before God. Conversation with the Priest, 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.

CONCLUSION

In God’s plan all husbands and wives are called to holiness, and this lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person is able to respond to God’s command with serene confidence in God’s grace and in his or her own will. (cf. FC 34). God is present in the joys and struggles of parents and families, and during these times of difficulty in marriage and family life these can be moments of growth in holiness and love and therefore have a special claim to the Church’s pastoral ministry.

Pope Francis: “...I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord. They may not always encounter in them a confirmation of their own ideas or desires, but they will surely receive some light to help them better understand their situation and discover a path to personal growth. I also encourage the Church’s pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church”. (AL No. 312)

Questions to share in fraternity:

1. In what way, through the abiding presence of God, is your family “salt of the earth and light to the world,” and a place of and for handing on our faith?
2. Does your community, parish, fraternity have a ministry to support, assist and accompany those couples, families, young people in need.
3. What are your joys and hopes / struggles and fears of marriage and family life today?

Documents:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assembly_en.html

https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf

We close praying together: **THE PRAYER OF THE HOLY FAMILY**

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