

Lessons Learnt from Amoris Laetitia, the Joy of Love, of Pope Francis



Post-Synodal Apostolic

Exhortation

AMORIS LAETITIA

The Joy of Love

of

Pope Francis

Prologue

Amoris laetitia is a post-synodal apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis.

Dated 19 March 2016, it was released on 8 April 2016.

It follows the Synods on the Family held in 2014 and 2015.

The text was released in Latin, English, French, and German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

The English text runs about 250 small-format pages with nearly 400 footnotes. Its introduction and 9 chapters comprise 325 numbered paragraphs.

Quotations are drawn from the writings of earlier popes, documents of the second Vatican Council and regional Episcopal conferences, St. Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther King, Jr.

It includes what is thought to be the first reference to a film in a papal document, namely Babette's feast (1987), along with references to works by Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Antonin Sertillanges, Gabriel Marcel, and Mario Benedetti.

Amoris Laetitia will be a valuable guide for all those engaged in ministry to those discerning and preparing for marriage and to married couples and families at all stages.

An overview of Amoris Laetitia

Introduction

The Joy of Love

Chapter 1 In the light of the Word

1. You and your wife
2. Your children are as the shoots of an olive tree
3. A path of suffering and blood
4. The work of your hands
5. The tenderness of an embrace

Chapter 2 The experiences and challenges of families

1. The current reality of the family
2. Some challenges

Chapter 3 Looking to Jesus: the vocation of the family

1. Jesus restores and fulfils God's plan
2. The family in the documents of the Church
3. The sacrament of Matrimony
4. Seeds of the Word and imperfect situations
5. The transmission of life and the rearing of children

6. The family and the Church

Chapter 4 Love in marriage

1. Our daily love
2. Growing in conjugal love
3. Passionate love
4. The transformation of love

Chapter 5 Love made fruitful

1. Welcoming a new life
2. An expanding fruitfulness
3. Life in the wider family

Chapter 6 Some pastoral perspectives

1. Proclaiming the Gospel of the family today
2. Preparing engaged couples for marriage
3. Accompanying the first years of married life
4. Casting light on crises, worries and difficulties
5. When death makes us feel its sting

Chapter 7 Towards a better education of children

1. Where are our children?
2. The ethical formation of children
3. The value of correction as an incentive
4. Patient realism
5. Family life as an educational setting

6. The need for sex education
7. Passing on the faith

Chapter 8 Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating weakness

1. Gradualness in pastoral care
2. The discernment of “irregular” situations
3. Mitigating factors in pastoral discernment
4. Rules and discernment
5. The logic of pastoral mercy

In reading it one must remember that “the Church’s task is often like that of a field hospital” (AL 291).

Chapter 9 The spirituality of marriage and the family

1. A spirituality of supernatural communion
2. Gathered in prayer in the light of Easter
3. A spirituality of exclusive and free love
4. A spirituality of care, consolation and incentive
5. Prayer to the Holy Family

What does the title mean?

Amoris Laetitia is Latin for "The Joy of Love."

Where did *Amoris Laetitia* come from?

Amoris Laetitia is the result of Pope Francis' prayerful reflection on the discussions and outcomes of two synods of bishops held in Rome: an Extraordinary Synod in 2014, and an Ordinary Synod in 2015, both on the topic of marriage and the family. The exhortation is meant to share with the Church the Holy Father's teaching and encouragement regarding pastoral ministry to families, and what marriages and families are called to at this time in history.

What topics does the apostolic exhortation cover?

Amoris Laetitia covers a wide range of topics related to marriage and family life, with a particular emphasis on the family's vocation and mission of love. It speaks about the family's strengths and gifts, and also the contemporary challenges faced by families throughout the world. The exhortation encourages married couples, families, and pastoral ministers to accompany and care for families and others in need of the Lord's mercy and healing. It includes an extended reflection on love and what it means in the day-to-day reality of marriage and family life.

The opening sentence reads, "The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church" (no. 1). With these words, Pope Francis opens Amoris Laetitia, his exhortation on love in the family. The joyful and life-giving love of the family arises from the experience of the joyful and life-giving love of God.

Pope Francis's Love Letter Invites Deeper Reflection on the Beauty of Marriage and Christ's Teaching.

Pope Francis' "love letter to families" invites everyone to grow as members of the family of God.

Pope Francis' new apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love), released April 8, brings "a rich reflection on the mission of the family and on how the Church can equip couples to embrace God's vision for marriage and can offer healing for families who are struggling," said the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth.

We are called to share truth of family with mercy and help those struggling. The same mercy and patience that are essential for building a strong family must be shown to those whose families are in trouble or have broken up.



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Lessons learnt from Amoris Laetitia

Here are ten things to know about the pope's groundbreaking new document.

1. The church needs to understand families and individuals in all their complexity.

The church needs to meet people where they are. So pastors are to “avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations” (296). People should not be “pigeonholed or fit into overly rigid classifications leaving no room for personal and pastoral discernment” (298). In other words, one size does not fit all. People are encouraged to live by the Gospel, but should also be welcomed into a church that appreciates their particular struggles and treats them with mercy. “Thinking that everything is black and white” is to be avoided (305). And the church cannot apply moral laws as if they were “stones to throw at people's lives” (305). Overall, he calls for an approach of understanding, compassion and accompaniment.

2. The role of conscience is paramount in moral decision making.

“Individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the church's practice in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage” (303). That is, the traditional belief that individual conscience is the final arbiter of the moral life has been forgotten here. The church has been “called to form consciences, not to replace them” (37). Yes, it is true, the Pope says, that a conscience needs to be formed by church teaching. But conscience does more than to judge what does or does not agree with church teaching. Conscience can also recognize with “a certain moral security” what God is asking (303). Pastors, therefore, need to help people not simply follow rules, but to practice “discernment,” a word that implies prayerful decision making (304).

3. Divorced and remarried Catholics need to be more fully integrated into the church.

How? By looking at the specifics of their situation, by remembering “mitigating factors,” by counseling them in the “internal forum,” (that is, in private conversations between the priest and person or couple), and by respecting that the final decision about the degree of participation in the church is left to a person's conscience (305, 300). (The reception of Communion is not spelled out here, but that is a traditional aspect of “participation” in church life.) Divorced and remarried couples should be made to feel part of the church. “They are not excommunicated and should not be treated as such, since they remain part” of the church (243).

4. All members of the family need to be encouraged to live good Christian

lives.

Much of “Amoris Laetitia” consists of reflections on the Gospels and church teaching on love, the family and children. But it also includes a great deal of practical advice from the pope, sometimes gleaned from exhortations and homilies regarding the family. Pope Francis reminds married couples that a good marriage is a “dynamic process” and that each side has to put up with imperfections. “Love does not have to be perfect for us to value it” (122, 113). The pope, speaking as a pastor, encourages not only married couples, but also engaged couples, expectant mothers, adoptive parents, widows, as well as aunts, uncles and grandparents. He is especially attentive that no one feels unimportant or excluded from God’s love.

5. We should no longer talk about people “living in sin.”

In a sentence that reflects a new approach, the pope says clearly, “It can no longer simply be said that all those living in any ‘irregular situation’ are living in a state of mortal sin” (301). Other people in “irregular situations,” or non-traditional families, like single mothers, need to be offered “understanding, comfort and acceptance” (49). When it comes to these people, indeed everyone, the church need to stop applying moral laws, as if they were, in the pope’s vivid phrase, “stones to throw at a person’s life” (305).

6. What might work in one place may not work in another.

The pope is not only speaking in terms of individuals, but geographically as well. “Each country or region...can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs” (3). What makes sense pastorally in one country may even seem out of place in another. For this reason and others, as the pope says at the beginning of the document that for this reason, not every question can be settled by the *magisterium*, that is, the church’s teaching office (3).

7. Traditional teachings on marriage are affirmed, but the church should not burden people with unrealistic expectations.

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