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THE RENEWAL OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY
IN THE LIGHT OF THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION
AMORIS LAETITIA

Abstract. The aspirations of Pope Francis for the renewal of pastoral care of the family are based on the deeply theologically rooted principles of the Church's proper role. In the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the principle of God's grace, the principle of pastoral love, the paschal principle of sacrifice and the principle of the Church's missionary activity are all clearly visible. In the document, we can also find a few directions for the renewal of the pastoral care of the family. The strengthening of the focus of the parish as well as the strengthening of the focus of spouses and the domestic Church on pastoral care of the family are crucial. Further on, we find encouragement for the renewal of the preparation for marriage within the ecclesial community, and for the development and strengthening of the pastoral care of married couples. The Pope sees the care for those in irregular situations as an extension of the pastoral care of engaged and married couples. Consequently, for the realization of the desired directions in the development and renewal of pastoral care of the family, it is necessary to expand and deepen the formation of seminarians and priests for their pastoral work with engaged persons, married couples and families.

Key words: Pope Francis; exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*; pastoral care of the family; renewal of pastoral care.

The pastoral care of the family requires development and renewal so that it could effectively participate in the realization of God's plan in contemporary times. In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis encourages the Church to develop a deepened and more effective pastoral care for married couples and the family. This care should be generous, full of sensitivity

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and zeal, as well as including patient pastoral encountering and the accompanying of fiancés, spouses and couples in the subsequent stages of their life and development. It should also be helpful with regard to discernment and integration into the life of the Church. However, such an understanding of the contents of the exhortation raises some important questions: In what way does the Pope motivate the encouragement directed at the Church for the revival, development and renewal of pastoral care of the family? What means of pastoral care can be beneficial for this renewal in light of the papal exhortation? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to take a closer look at the Pope's motivation and the directions of the renewal of the pastoral care of the family.

1. MOTIVES OF THE RENEWAL OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

In searching for the key to the Pope's plan included in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, we notice that the pursuit of a revival and renewal of pastoral care is based on the established guidelines (principles) of the activity of the Church. These principles originate in the New Testament, especially in the Gospel and in the writings of St. Paul. God is the first to implement these principles and He invites the Church to realize them as well. Therefore, it seems, that the Pope's motives¹ for the development and renewal of the pastoral care of the family can be found in those principles of pastoral care, which are deeply rooted in theology. Among these principles in the exhortation are the principle of God's grace, the principle of pastoral love, the principle of the cross—the paschal principle of sacrifice; the principle of the Church's mission and Her every community.

a) The Principle of God's Grace

In the *Letter to Titus*, St. Paul writes that in Christ God revealed and brought to humankind the grace of salvation, "For the grace of God has appeared, saving all" (Titus 2:11). In the *Letter to the Ephesians*, St. Paul highlights the priority of God's acting and of grace, which is effective due to

¹ A motive means the tendency, readiness to head towards certain goals. It involves the aspirations of the man – that is his desires, wishes, intentions, willingness. Cf. Janusz REYKOWSKI, *Z zagadnień psychologii motywacji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1977), 18-25.

faith in Christ, over human deeds and merits, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Furthermore, in St. John's Gospel we read Jesus' words which tell us that God draws man to Himself, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (Jn 6:44). Jesus also says that He, through His Paschal sacrifice draws everyone, "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself" (Jn 12:32). So, God is the One who inwardly stimulates human freedom, draws it and bestows light. His grace changes the person and enables self-realization, liberating his inner transcendence. Christ's Paschal Mystery reveals and liberates everything that constitutes the truth in human nature.² While, in the *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Paul gives testimony to the acting of God's grace in his apostolic activity: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me" (1 Cor 15:10).

Pope Francis seems to be deeply convinced regarding St. Paul's opinion, as mentioned above, when he claims that the Lord accompanies us today in all the hardships of our lives and in transmitting the Gospel of the family.³ In his exhortation, numerous times he offers reminders about the crucial meaning and effectiveness of God's grace in the lives of spouses and couples, and about the necessity to rely on God's grace in pastoral care.⁴ The Pope affirms that God humbles Himself to accompany people on their way to salvation and he indicates what this brings to man: "God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts."⁵ It seems that Pope Francis perceives the whole pastoral care of the Church as an awakening of sensitivity and openness as well as help in response to God's grace. For this reason, the pastoral effort should be responsible and generous. We read, "What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations ..., and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them."⁶

² Cf. Waclaw HRYNIEWICZ, *Pascha Chrystusa w dziejach człowieka i wszechświata. Zarys chrześcijańskiej teologii paschalnej*, vol. 3 (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1991), 106.

³ FRANCIS, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia on Love in the Family*, March 19, 2016), sec. 60 (hereafter AL); all pontifical documents are quoted after and available on the official website of the Holy See: www.vatican.va.

⁴ See AL, 5, 37, 62, 71, 78, 236, 291, 300, 301, 305, 307, 308, and others. The word "grace" is used 48 times in the exhortation.

⁵ AL, 62.

⁶ AL, 35.

So if the pastoral care of the family is, first and foremost, the result of God's acting and His grace, then we should consequently count on the grace of the sacraments and ask the Master of the harvest (cf. Lk 10:2ff.), that is, we should, first of all, rely on prayer which can, on one hand, send out labourers among the lay people and clergy and, on the other hand, open the hearts of the people we meet along the way to God's grace. Therefore, prayer, both individual and communal, is of great significance. The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary can be most effective and fruitful,⁷ especially when combined with entrusting to them those to whom we minister.

b) The Principle of Pastoral Love

The theme of the love realized in marriage and in the family and the ways of strengthening it is the main topic of Pope Francis' exhortation titled *Amoris Laetitia*. The principle of love is deeply rooted in Holy Scripture, in particular in the texts of the Gospel. Jesus Himself gives it the status of a new commandment and of the hallmark of His disciples and of those who believe in Him. In St. John's Gospel, we read: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).

The intention of Pope Francis' document is to encourage families to "persevere in love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience." His concern for strengthening love was mainly focused on conjugal and family love.⁸ At the same time, he encourages the Church to practice zealous care and pastoral love for fiancés, married couples and families, at the different stages of their lives and in various situations.⁹ In the light of the Bible, love means care for man and service to others, it seeks the good of the beloved and at the same time is ready for renunciation and sacrifice.¹⁰ Pastoral love, therefore, can be measured by the time devoted, by the interest and eagerness to understand, by the competence and effort made

⁷ Cf. PIUS XII, *Encyclical Haurietis Aquas on the Devotion to the Sacred Heart*, May 15, 1956, sec. 124.

⁸ See AL, 89-198.

⁹ See AL, 205-213, 217-230, 232-236, 307, 312.

¹⁰ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est on Christian Love*, December 25, 2005, sec. 6.

for the sake of another's good, as well as by the responsibility and respect for human freedom.

What is more, the principle of pastoral love also includes seeking those who have strayed, as is shown in the parable of the lost sheep (cf. Mt 18:12-14). Cardinal C. M. Martini (d. 2012), reading the Gospel of St. Matthew, noticed that nowadays "too many people are lost" and "their departure from the Church violates the balance in communities."¹¹ A similar thought can be found in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which the Pope gives a reminder of the need for the new evangelization of many baptized people. He states that even those who deeply believe and who regularly participate in the life of their community, those encountered in the course of the ordinary pastoral care, need new evangelization which will ignite zeal in their hearts. Those who maintain a living and sincere Catholic faith, expressed in a variety of ways, even if they do not often participate in worship, also need new evangelization. Pastoral care should help them develop so that they could respond to God's love with the whole of their lives. New evangelization is also necessary for the community of baptized people who do not live according to the requirements of the sacrament of Baptism, who do not fully belong to the Church and do not experience the consolation resulting from faith. The Church as a mother tries to help them experience conversion, which will restore in them the joy of faith as well as the desire to be engaged in the Gospel¹².

For further elaboration on this statement, we can quote the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* which highlights the need of the Church to seek all Her sheep. "The Bride of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who goes out to everyone without exception. She knows that Jesus himself is the shepherd of the hundred, not just of the ninety-nine. He loves them all."¹³ In that spirit, the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* clearly highlights the value of Christian love and the care which results from it, as well as mercy in pastoral contact with the faithful (fiancés, spouses, couples in irregular situations). According to the document, the pastoral care of the family should be open, close to people, hospitable, accompanying, sympathetic, healing wounds, and "integrating weakness."¹⁴

¹¹ Carlo M. MARTINI, *Cóż mamy czynić? Medytacje nad Ewangelią według świętego Mateusza* (Kielce: Współczesna Ambona, 1996), 138.

¹² Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World*, November 24, 2013, sec. 14 (hereafter EG).

¹³ AL, 309.

¹⁴ Cf. AL, 27-28, 38, 59, 76, 230-231, 291-293, 296-297, 307-308.

However, a question appears—who is to implement pastoral care in the Church? The place for realizing this concerned love is, first of all, the parish community.¹⁵ Pope Francis presumes that the pastoral care for the family is mainly to be realized in the parish¹⁶ and he refers to this presumption when he is writing about accompanying and supporting fiancés, spouses, couples and families.

The Pope also encourages priests to practice this care and he raises a difficult question regarding the existing pastoral care for the family.¹⁷ He states that the Church does not forget to appreciate the constructive elements in situations which do not correspond to Her teaching on marriage.¹⁸ Therefore, in the light of a Gospel-based pastoral love, he concludes that “a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in ‘irregular’ situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. ... Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God. ... 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.”¹⁹

At the same time, Pope Francis clearly sees pastoral care for the family as a task for the lay faithful.²⁰ Married couples, above all, are the ones who should actively participate in this saving care. The Pope encourages all the faithful “to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy.”²¹

c) The Paschal Principle of Sacrifice

It is a principle based on faith in Christ, Crucified and Risen, lived out by the Lord and written in the pages of the Gospel (cf. Mt 5:3-12; 16:24-27;

¹⁵ C. M. MARTINI, *Cóż mamy czynić*, 140.

¹⁶ AL, 202, 223.

¹⁷ Cf. AL, 37, 200, 227.

¹⁸ AL, 292.

¹⁹ AL, 305; cf. EG, 44.

²⁰ According to Cardinal C. M. Martini (*Cóż mamy czynić*, 139), “every lay faithful should feel like an apostle in his environment, like a seeker of a lost sheep in his community.”

²¹ AL, 200; cf. 5.

Lk 14:25-33). The principle of the cross constitutes the mystery of God's Kingdom.²² According to W. Hryniewicz, the paschal principle of sacrifice and renunciation, which enable one to accept God's gift of grace and salvation, is the fundamental principle of Christian anthropology. The condition of friendship and intimacy between God and man requires human obedience and submission to God as well as sacrifice which constitutes the inevitable test of man's freedom.²³ Hope rooted in Christ's Resurrection is the truth which makes us free, which allows for self-denial and sacrifice. Through this, man himself and the world undergo a transformation. This kind of *kenosis* which is a participation in Christ's *kenosis* (see Phil 2:6-8) is the way to save his own life and the lives of others whose fates are interconnected.²⁴ Pope John Paul II highlighted that "the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering."²⁵ The Church sees in all Christ's suffering brothers and sisters as it were a *multiple subject of his supernatural power*.²⁶ Suffering with Christ has not only an eschatic (cf. Rom 8:17-18) but also an ecclesial dimension "on behalf of his body, which is the Church" (Col 1:24).²⁷

According to the paschal principle of sacrifice (the principle of the cross), evil is not eliminated from life but is changed into good, following the example of Christ and through the power of His death. However, we must first experience the evil, as Jesus did, in order to fight it. This principle has an outstanding spiritual effectiveness and can be applicable in every life situation.²⁸ Yet, the principle of the cross is difficult to accept for human mind, which, without God's help, can rely only on natural human abilities. Saint Paul wrote, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18). C. Martini states that in order to accept this and to act according to this principle, it is necessary to spend long hours in front of the Crucified Jesus. God desires to enable the faithful to fight evil with Him through goodness,

²² C.M. MARTINI, *Cóż mamy czynić*, 145.

²³ Cf. W. HRYNIEWICZ, *Pascha Chrystusa*, 107-108.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Letter on the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering Salvifici Doloris*, February, 11, 1984, sec. 24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ Cf. JACENTY MASTEJ, *Staurologiczno-rezurekcyjna wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2009), 134-5.

²⁸ C. M. MARTINI, *Cóż mamy czynić*, 145.

forgiveness, patience and mercy.²⁹ The paschal principle of sacrifice, which Pope Francis calls participation in the mystery of Christ's cross³⁰ and the conversion of human hearts through the "way of the cross,"³¹ seems to be visible throughout the contents of the exhortation.

At first, the Pope presents the fruits of suffering in marital love.³² He notices the presence of hardship in marriage and family life—especially in struggles with crises and conflicts.³³ He clearly names this principle in Chapter 9, where he discusses the unity of spouses in the light of the Paschal Mystery, "Gradually, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ's cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love."³⁴ He states that "marriage is [...] a sign of the earthly Christ who chose to become one with us and gave himself up for us even to shedding his blood."³⁵

The Pope presupposes the impact of the principle of the cross also in the pastoral care of the family. He reminds us that God constantly transforms human hearts through the "way of the cross."³⁶ He shows the application of this principle when he urges for patient, faithful and long-term accompanying of each couple (fiancés, young married couples, spouses experiencing crisis and suffering, couples who participate in the life of the Church in an imperfect way), as well as for devoting to them time and care—despite the threat of being misunderstood or other multiple difficulties. Pope Francis highlights that pastors and priests must be guided by this principle, "But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, [...] 'always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.' The Church's pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church's teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion [...] Jesus expects us to stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead to enter into the reality of other

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Cf. AL, 317.

³¹ Cf. AL, 62.

³² AL, 130, 162-163.

³³ Cf. AL, 231, 234-240.

³⁴ AL, 317.

³⁵ AL, 161.

³⁶ AL, 62.

people's lives and to know the power of tenderness."³⁷ Nevertheless, the Pope stresses that when we do this, our lives can become complicated.³⁸ However, in the light of the paschal principle of sacrifice these hardships seem to be more of a gift and a promise than a reason to worry or be dissatisfied.

d) The Principle of Missionary Activity of the Church

The Church and all Her communities exist not only for themselves and for sanctifying their members, but also as a support for the world. "Even when the world reacts with anger and infatuation, the Church brings redemption, purification, spreads mercy and forgiveness, brings new life to the world."³⁹ The principle of the missionary activity means that the Church is invited to build a community of the Church. In practice, this means undertaking an unceasing spiritual battle as the Christian community is slowly built. These struggles are often combined with giving testimony in the midst of experience and suffering. However, in these experiences the Church is constantly being filled and strengthened with the fruits of the Spirit, such as: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (cf. Gal 5:22-23).⁴⁰

The principle of the missionary activity of the Church is clearly visible throughout the teaching of Pope Francis and in his pastoral plan for families. The word "missionary" is used 7 times in reference to the missionary conversion of the Church, missionary activity of the family as well as in the actions of the pastoral care of the family. The Pope clearly states that "nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended."⁴¹ He encourages the realization of this missionary activity in the pastoral care of the family, above all, when he talks about the need to present God's plan for love, the beauty of Christian marriage in a positive way—the Gospel of the family.⁴² Pastoral care for families "needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family

³⁷ AL, 308.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ C. M. MARTINI, *Cóż mamy czynić*, 146.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁴¹ AL, 230; cf. AL, 201.

⁴² Cf. AL, 5, 38, 40, 89, 200-201, 293-294, 300, 307, and others.

responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and fulfillment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness."⁴³ The exhortation also reminds us that, as is proper for authentic missionary activity, this is combined with opposition, "in her teaching on the family, the Church is a sign of contradiction."⁴⁴

2. DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND RENEWAL OF THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

The apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, as one of the numerous documents of the Church, is eminently pastoral in nature and contains extensive content devoted to the pastoral care of the family. It not only involves normative content but, due to the conducting of research in local churches and the two-stage synodal conferences (in 2014 and 2015), it strongly refers to the implemented model of the pastoral care of the family. For this reason, the suggested model included in the document seems to be aptly pointing out directions and indicating the forms of the pastoral care of the family at present and for the future.⁴⁵ The impressive insight with which the document elaborates on certain issues allows one to note the advantages and strengths and, on the other hand, disadvantages and weaknesses of the implementation of the pastoral care of the family in practice.

The document of Pope Francis indicates a few key directions for the renewal of the pastoral care of the family. The first point is strengthening the focus of the parish and together with this the focus of spouses and the domestic church on the pastoral care of the family. Further on, there is the encouragement for the renewal of the preparation for marriage in the Christian community and the development and strengthening of the pastoral care of married couples. According to the principle that pastoral love finds its extension in pastoral care born out of mercy,⁴⁶ the Pope sees in this extension the pastoral care of couples in irregular situations. As a result of the directions indicated for the development and renewal of the pastoral care of the

⁴³ AL, 201.

⁴⁴ AL, 200.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ryszard KAMIŃSKI, "Duszpasterstwo rodzin jako refleksja naukowa," in *Duszpasterstwo rodzin. Refleksja naukowa i działalność pastoralna*, ed. Ryszard Kamiński et al. (Lublin: Bonus Liber, 2013), 30-1.

⁴⁶ Cf. Juan J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *La Pastorale Familiare. Tra Programmi Pastoral e Generazione di una Vita* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2013), 139-45.

family, it is necessary to renew and deepen the formation of seminarians and priests for their work with married couples and families.

a) Strengthening the Focus of the Parish on the Pastoral Care of the Family

The issue of the focus of the parish on the pastoral care of the family is not something new. In his exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II wrote that “every parochial community, must become more vividly aware of the grace and responsibility that it receives from the Lord in order that it may promote the pastoral care of the family.”⁴⁷ It is interesting that the Polish Pope notices the issue of grace in developing the pastoral care of the family, which is currently being widely developed by Pope Francis. John Paul II reminded us of this thought in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, stating that “the Church in Europe at every level must faithfully proclaim anew the truth about marriage and the family [...] She sees this as burning need, for she knows that this task is integral to the mission of evangelization entrusted to her by her Bridegroom and Lord, and imposes itself today with unusual force.”⁴⁸ Motivated by this conviction, the Pope of the Family called “to promote in every ecclesial community an adequate and integrated program of pastoral care for the family.”⁴⁹ A few years later, the Pontifical Council for the Family explained the centrality of the pastoral care of the family and life not based on the common crisis of the family but rather on the theological bases and the essence of the Church’s mission.⁵⁰

In this context, the Pope encourages the profound valuing of the parish focusing on the pastoral care of the family. “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.”⁵¹ The Pope highlights the priority of the parish among the other mentioned entities involved in the pastoral care of the family.

⁴⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, November 22, 1981, sec. 70.

⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Europa on Jesus Christ Alive in His Church, the Source of Hope for Europe*, June 28, 2003, sec. 90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁰ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Famiglia e Procreazione Umana*, May 13, 2006, sec. 29, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.dehoniane.it>.

⁵¹ AL, 202.

In the teaching of the Church in Poland, this issue appeared clearly in the document of the Polish Episcopate *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* in 2009. This document contains the statement that “the pastoral care of the family should be the real priority of our ministry. Looking through the prism of the family must be the key in our planning or in the pastoral activities undertaken in the parish. This is expected of us by God and by man.”⁵² These statements are in accordance with the teaching of the Pope and of the Holy See. It seems necessary to enter onto a certain path of formation so that the local Churches could shift the pastoral focus from mainly concentrating on structures and actions on the diocesan level to fostering pastoral care of families in each local Church community. Generating formative and supportive possibilities should be aimed towards making pastoral care for fiancés, spouses and couples in the parish the “greatest concern” for pastors and lay faithful.

b) Strengthening the Focus of Married couples on the Pastoral Care of the Family

The expression given above that a parish is a “family of families” raises the issue of the role of the family in the pastoral care of families. The Second Vatican Council underlined the role of the family as the domestic Church in giving testimony to Christ’s mystery of love (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 11; *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 48, 52; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, sec. 11). Post-conciliar documents clearly indicate the family as the agent of the apostolate, especially among families.⁵³ The exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* directly calls the family to be an agent of pastoral care of the family.⁵⁴

In the discussed exhortation of Pope Francis, we read, “Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through their joy-filled witness as domestic

⁵² THE CONFERENCE OF THE POLISH EPISCOPATE, *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie*, sec. 82 (Tarnów: Biblos, 2009); cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Famiglia e Procreazione Umana*, sec. 29.

⁵³ Cf. PAUL VI, *Encyclical Letter Humanae Vitae on the Regulation of Birth*, July 25, 1968, sec. 26 (hereafter HV); JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, November 22, 1981, sec. 69, 71 (hereafter FC); JOHN PAUL II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, December 30, 1988, sec. 40, 62; JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Families Gratissimam Sane*, February 2, 1994, sec. 18.

⁵⁴ FC, 72.

churches.”⁵⁵ Therefore, we can notice here the continuation of the ecclesial thought with the concern for underlining the focus on the family. However, it is by no means a purely linguistic act, as the exhortation repeatedly stresses the need for the extensive witness of married couples and their accompaniment in the pastoral care of fiancés, spouses as well as couples in irregular situations.⁵⁶ In order to achieve this, religious formation of numerous married couples in the parish is necessary, as ordinary human maturity will not be enough. Pope Francis is aware that families require assistance in formation so that they could become more and more active agents in pastoral care of the family. He states that the situation requires evangelizing and catechetical effort aimed at the interior of the family.⁵⁷

Married couples who are formed in religious movements and communities of families (the creative minority) are the pride and the energizing potential of the Church in terms of the pastoral care of the family. In the parishes where such couples are present, they give witness to their faith, become engaged in various forms of apostolate and accompany spouses in a variety of ways. The plan of Pope Francis is broader and requires providing adequate formation of married couples to prepare them for available and responsible accompanying of fiancés, spouses and couples. This should be achieved through formation organized in the parishes with the participation of parish groups and with the assistance of diocesan centers.⁵⁸

c) The Renewal of the Preparation for Marriage in the Christian Community

A lot of space in the document is devoted to the preparation for marriage.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is perceived here in a renewed way, as the accompanying of engaged couples in the Church communities by married couples, with their witness of faith and marital love. Accompaniment in the parishes should begin on this stage, and then continue after the wedding as the accompanying of the young married couple. Being involved in working with

⁵⁵ AL, 200.

⁵⁶ Cf. AL, 38, 58, 86-87, 183-184, 200, 207, 223-226, 232, 290.

⁵⁷ Cf. AL, 200.

⁵⁸ Cf. Jose GRANADOS, Stephan KAMPOWSKI, and Juan J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *Amoris Laetitia. Accompanying, Discerning, Integrating. Vademecum per una Nuova Pastorale Familiare* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2016), 35-8.

⁵⁹ See AL, 205-216.

engaged couples in the immediate and direct preparation for marriage should become “the primary concern of accompanying.”⁶⁰ The goal is the Christian way of supporting the development of faith and love of engaged couples as well as the “pastoral care of bonds.”⁶¹

Does such a direction of renewal mean the necessity to reject the previously recommended and often-practiced series of pre-marital catechesis in the immediate preparation for marriage? It seems that this is not the intention of the document. Rather, it is concerned with the necessity to develop, improve or transform the existing forms. Because if engaged couples lack long-term accompaniment in the parish, then in their preparation they receive only a small amount of what they really need for development according to the synod and the Pope. This concept implies the question about how to introduce the accompaniment of engaged couples in the parish. It requires formation of mature spouses who are ready to accompany, and is strongly connected with strengthening of the focus of the family on the pastoral care of the family.

d) The Development of the Pastoral Care of Married Couples

The issue of pastoral care of married couples is not something new in papal teaching. Pope Paul VI wrote about the important and most needed form of the current apostolate when “married couples themselves by the leadership they offer will become apostles to other married couples.”⁶² Furthermore, John Paul II also spoke out about concern for young married couples stating that “the task of all the members of the local ecclesial community is to help the couple to discover and live their new vocation and mission.”⁶³ The Pope of the Family presumed that married couples will be accompanied and helped by other married couples and he encouraged young spouses to sincerely accept and sensibly value this discrete, tender and generous help from experienced married couples.⁶⁴ This issue has been elaborated on in various interesting papers.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See J. GRANADOS, S. KAMPOWSKI and J. J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *Amoris Laetitia*, 50-62.

⁶¹ AL, 211.

⁶² HV, 26.

⁶³ FC, 69.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ See Paolo GENTILI, “Accompagnare i Giovani Sposi nella Fecondità dello Spirito,” in *I Primi Anni di Matrimonio. La Sfida Pastorale di un Periodo Bello e Difficile*, ed. Livio Melina (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2014), 77-98.

According to Pope Francis, the process of accompanying mentioned above, which begins in the stage of engagement, should be naturally continued during the first years of marriage. The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* states that it is about completing the formation started in the period of engagement.⁶⁶ He advocates concern for the development of faith and the marital bond of young married couples. The Pope strongly voices this concern to the spouses themselves, as well as to the ecclesial communities and the broader pastoral care of the family.⁶⁷ Accompanying young married couples through nearness, witness and support, and sharing concrete acquired abilities with them not only means serving the maturation of marital love,⁶⁸ but also preventing serious crises of the conjugal bond and an increase in the breakdowns of marriages.⁶⁹ Many married couples are in need of assistance, especially those facing difficulties. “Experienced and trained couples should be open to offering guidance, so the couples will not be unnerved by these crises or tempted to make hasty decisions.”⁷⁰

In many countries and regions, pastoral care for the marital bond of love and for the development of faith of young married couples in parishes is rather occasional and focused only on the symptoms. It may be found more often in specialist and family counseling centers. Unfortunately, in such cases this is usually limited to those married couples who face serious difficulties and who have decided to ask for help. What is more, the intensification of difficult situations is very advanced at this stage, which not always allows for providing effective help. Therefore, the involvement of some spouses and their spiritual concern for the mutual bonds in the sacramental life and prayer should be particularly noticed. Some of the movements of married couples contribute to the building of bonds according to their own programs.⁷¹ Formation in the movements and communities of families as well as retreats focused on marital dialogue and communication are also very helpful. The answer to the question: in what way should pastoral care for married be developed in parishes and how to make it a school of faith and union, pastoral care that reaches out and is inclusive, implies the need for broad empowerment of spouses in the pastoral care of the family.

⁶⁶ AL, 217.

⁶⁷ Cf. AL, 41, 120-157, 211, 217-218, 223-225, 232, 246, 307.

⁶⁸ See J. GRANADOS, S. KAMPOWSKI and J. J. PÉREZ-SOBA, *Amoris Laetitia*, 62-9.

⁶⁹ Cf. AL, 307.

⁷⁰ AL, 232.

⁷¹ *Spotkania Małżeńskie* (Polish “conjugal meetings”) are an example of that, cf. <http://www.spotkaniamalzenskie.pl> (accessed December 20, 2016).

e) Care for Couples in Irregular Situations

According to the exhortation, the general direction of the pastoral care of people and couples in irregular situations⁷² is aimed towards greater pastoral care, inclusion, accompaniment, discernment and integration in ecclesial communities.⁷³ This is concerned with the pastoral approach to people who have contracted civil marriage, the divorced who have entered into new unions and those simply living together, for “the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God’s plan for them.”⁷⁴

Accompanying those interested in the path of discernment and integration is, above all, the task of priests and should be carried out according to the teaching of the Church and a bishop’s guidelines.⁷⁵ This implies the necessity for the episcopal and diocesan promulgation of guidelines concerning pastoral care of persons in irregular situations, containing principles of conduct with respect to people in various situations.⁷⁶ The aim is for a bishop’s guidelines for pastors to be clearly based on the Church’s teaching on marriage and to respect the obligatory sacramental discipline. They should contain clear criteria of discernment and indicate the direction and ways of proceeding in particular irregular situations. At no time should pastoral guidelines exceed the limits of authority in the sphere of pastoral recommendations or propose solutions that raise doubts regarding the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage and the sacramental discipline.

Another way of pastorally accompanying couples whose marital life is far from the ideal and who participate in the life of the Church in an incomplete way is accompaniment by other spouses in the ecclesial communities. This kind of accompaniment does not require fulfilling many conditions and seems to be easier to accept. The Pope wants families to be the leaven of the Gospel in society. Spouses can lead other couples to be more open to the Gospel of marriage in its fullness through their life of witness and cordial conversations.⁷⁷

⁷² Cf. FC, 79-84. The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* contains the expression “irregular situations” (AL, 296).

⁷³ See AL, 291-312.

⁷⁴ AL, 297.

⁷⁵ AL, 300.

⁷⁶ Such indications have so far been promulgated by a few dioceses: Archdiocese in Philadelphia in the United States (July 1, 2016); bishops of the Buenos Aires region in Argentina (September 5, 2016) and the Roman Diocese (September 19, 2016).

⁷⁷ AL, 290, 293, 312.

In light of Pope Francis's exhortation, the pastoral task which should be immediately taken up and intensified in parishes is to offer pastoral love, take care of and offer formation in faith to the couples who live in irregular situations through proclaiming God's word, through prayer and testimony of faith and through Christian love. In such a way, they can be helped with the conversion of their hearts, which seems to be a crucial step on the way of integration or reintegration into the ecclesial community.

f) Introducing and Deepening the Formation of Seminarians and Priests for the Pastoral Care of the Family

Raising the topic of the formation of seminarians and priests for the pastoral care of the family in the exhortation is not something new, as the Congregation for Catholic Education issued a special document devoted to the issue over 20 years ago.⁷⁸ It is valuable that the Pope has highlighted the need for the formation of priests, religious brothers and sisters as well as the lay faithful to work with married couples and families⁷⁹ in the context of the parish's focus on the pastoral care of the family. This formation includes preparing them to animate, direct and coordinate the implementation of the tasks of the pastoral care of the family in the parishes mentioned above. The document contains the statement that priests often lack proper formation to accompany and help in the contemporary complex hardships of families. Moreover, the formation of seminarians concerning the period of engagement and married life should be more interdisciplinary and not merely doctrinal. It should allow for the development of psyche and emotionality.⁸⁰ It is important that families accompany seminarians throughout the entire process and path to priesthood. This is not only an issue of the seminarians having contact with their own families, but also with families in the parishes and the presence of families during the time of seminary and priestly formation.⁸¹

The need for the renewal and deepening of priestly formation seems to be urgent, as it has required renewal for many years. The directions indicated by Pope Francis cover the points previously mentioned by the congregation

⁷⁸ See CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Formazione dei Seminaristi sulla Famiglia*, March 19, 1995, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.dehoniane.it>.

⁷⁹ AL, 202.

⁸⁰ AL, 202-203.

⁸¹ Cf. AL, 203; cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Formazione dei Seminaristi*, sec. 54.

for the formation of seminarians in 1995. It seems that the problem concerns not so much the lack of ecclesial indications but their implementation. The teaching of Pope Francis seems to confirm an awareness of the key role of resources, competence and the attitude of the priest/pastor in the development and renewal of pastoral care. It is, therefore, necessary to hope that the reception and implementation of the recommendations concerning the formation of seminarians and presbyters for pastoral care of the family will accelerate, along with the application of the proposals included in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* for the pastoral care of the family.

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