



**DICASTERIUM
PRO LAICIS FAMILIA ET VITA**

***Message from His Eminence
Kevin Cardinal Farrell
On the Occasion of The XXIII National Meeting of the Pastoral Care of the Family
Organised by the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala's
Commission of the Laity and Consecrated Life
And their respective Sections
Of the Family, of the Youth, and of Lay Movements and New Communities***

Your Excellencies, dear friends and diocesan personnel dedicated to the pastoral care of the family, it is with sense of fraternal encouragement that we offer you some reflections on the Church's call to renew its pastoral care of the family.

We can all appreciate that in every family, like in every parish, the members which make up these institutions are, as much as they are homogenous, that is, of the same family, they are too heterogeneous, so that, though intimately related, each person has his or her own personal emotional needs, age, maturity, status in life, and relationship with God and others.

In recognition of this reality, *Amoris Laetitia* invites us all, with great pastoral uniqueness, to never ignore the fact that each person has a concrete and individual reality which we must discern and serve; that we must thus, concentrate our pastoral efforts not on the basis of abstract theological ideals which are "far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families", but upon what each family member experiences in his or her unique domestic setting (cf. *AL* 31,36).

It is in the concreteness of the person's own life and spiritual needs that we must come to individual peoples from all walks of life, of all ages, of all levels of spirituality and emotional maturity, in their respective relationship with God and with people, in each of ever changing situation or statuses in the life of the Church.

Together and with them we are to help the person walk in the pilgrimage of love, as a member of the People of God, whom the Lord is calling and aiding while gradually revealing Himself to the person in the measure that he or she is able to understand and receive God's Word and grace (cf. *AL* 78).

While pointing and adhering always to the Gospel Truth, our task is therefore, to integrate the individual into God's life of grace, to bring the person always closer to Him, and to do so according to the Gospel dialectic of mercy and love, as well as with the saving power of Christ's Sacraments (cf. *AL* 299, 311 and 312).

Hence why as members of the Church and involved in the pastoral care of the family we are all called never to collectivize our people, our congregations, our society, but to serve the individual person as Jesus Christ Himself did here on earth.

Our vision must be Christ's and His loving concern for each individual person; our language the language of the Holy Spirit, which reaches out to each person not with fancy words, but with simplicity and appealing to their own personal lives, needs and culture. Indeed, with words and actions animated by the logic and healing dynamic of the Incarnate Word of God, we are called to reach out to people as He Himself did with Zacchaeus, with the Canaanite woman, with the Samaritan woman, with individual sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, with the woman caught in adultery.

Our pastoral care must make clear to the individual person that he or she is loved by God and called by God to the life of communion with Him and His own people; to the life of salvation which, on the one hand, begins here and now, but on the other, is not a once and for all complete package of grace, but instead through one's ongoing and ever increasing response to it, is but a communion with God that "wells up" within us "to eternal life" (Jn, 4:14).

Yet in every family pastoral care it is also imperative that we underscore for couples the radiant presence of Christ in conjugal life and married life: in the sacrificial love which spouses have for each other and for their children, in the strengthening of this presence and holiness through means of prayer and the sacraments (cf. *AL* 223), through moments of work and leisure, but especially in every crisis where joy can still be felt in the "expansion of the heart" which grows through a faith-filled Christian response to life's challenges (cf. *AL* 126 and 232). Indeed, if couples are made aware that joy and love grow in serving each other, in asking for pardon, in dialogue and sacrificial love, in having the good of their children at heart, then the indissoluble grace of the Sacrament will truly be allowed to work and "His grace" will "be felt in every new situation that they encounter" (*AL* 74).

We encourage all pastoral agents from the various dioceses, vicariates and prelature, to enrich the various sectors of the your care of the family with this deep pastoral understanding proposed by *Amoris Laetitia*. Yet, as we reflect upon the enrichment of our pastoral care for the family, we may indeed, appreciate also how the concrete experiences and reality of the lay faithful in their respective family life and even their associative life as movements, can help the particular churches towards a richer understanding of developing ministries in the various sectors of family pastoral care (cf. *AL* 48). Indeed, the contribution of the laity, by virtue of their life experience and baptismal calling, is pivotal and their participation also indispensable.

To end, in serving our faithful in Christ, our pastoral efforts will find sure guidance in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. We thus, look forward to receiving news of your pastoral solutions that will most surely be better suited to your territories (*AL* 3), but which in turn, may also serve to enrich our own understanding of the pastoral care of the family, and help inspire other particular churches and episcopal conference, as they too seek to expand and develop their own apostolic work.

November 1st, Solemnity of All Saints
Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life



Kevin Card Farrell
Prefect