



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**THE VOCATION AND MISSION
OF THE FAMILY
IN THE CHURCH AND
THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

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Abbreviations

- AA Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November 1965)
- AG Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965)
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (15 August 1997)
- CV Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009)
- DC Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Instruction *Dignitas Connubii* (25 January 2005)
- DCE Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005)
- DeV St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986)
- GS Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965)
- EdE St. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003)
- EG Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013)
- EN Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975)
- FC Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981)
- IL III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, *Instrumentum Laboris*, (24 June 2014)
- LF Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (29 June 2013)
- LG Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964)
- MV Francis, Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* (11 April 2015)
- NA Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965)
- NMI Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Apostolica *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001)
- RM Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990)

Presentation

The period between synods is drawing to a close. During this time the Holy Father, Pope Francis entrusted to the whole Church the task "to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the ideas [proposed by the assembly] and to find concrete solutions to the many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront" (Discourse at the Conclusion of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 18 October 2014).

After reflecting on The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization during the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2014, the XIV Ordinary General Assembly, scheduled to take place from 4 to 25 October 2015, will treat the topic: The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World. This long synodal journey is characterized by three moments which

are closely connected, namely: considering the challenges of the family; discerning the family's vocation; and reflecting on the family's mission.

A series of question was integrated into the Relatio Synodi, the fruit of the last Assembly, so as to learn how the Relatio Synodi was received and to solicit a thorough examination of its contents. The resulting document served as the Lineamenta which was sent to the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches sui iuris, the episcopal conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General.

The entire People of God was involved in the process of reflection and study. This also occurred as a result of the Holy Father's weekly catechesis on the family during his general audiences, as well as on other occasions, when he provided guidance in this shared synodal journey. The renewed interest in the family, brought about by the Synod, is illustrated in the attention the family has received in not only Church circles but also civil society.

The material in the Responses received from the above-listed entities, was further augmented by so-called Observations, which were submitted by many of the Faithful (individuals, families and groups). Various members of the particular churches, organizations, lay groups and other Church entities made important recommendations. Universities, academic institutions, research centers and individual scholars have — and presently continue — to enrich the thorough examination of the topics of the Synod with their Contributions, through symposia, conferences and publications, thus shedding light on new aspects, as "requested beforehand" in the Lineamenta.

The Instrumentum Laboris is comprised of the definitive text of the Relatio Synodi to which a summary of the Responses, Observations and scholarly Contributions have been incorporated. For readability, the numeration reflects both the text of the Relatio and the document's existing format. The original paragraphs and headings in the Relatio appear in italic print and are indicated by the corresponding number in parenthesis.

The document is divided into three parts, which illustrate the continuity between the two Assemblies, namely, Considering the Challenges of the Family (Part I) which draws more directly from the initial phase of the Synod; The Discernment of the Vocation of the Family (Part II) and The Mission of the Family Today (Part III) which both introduce the topic of the second phase with the intention of offering to the Church and the contemporary world pastoral incentives to spur renewed efforts in evangelization.

*Lorenzo Card. Baldisseri
General Secretary*

Vatican City, 23 June 2015

Introduction

1. (1) *The Synod of Bishops, gathered around the Holy Father, turned its thoughts to all the families of the world, each with its joys, difficulties and hopes. In a special way, the Assembly felt a duty to give thanks to the Lord for the generosity and faithfulness of so many Christian families in responding to their vocation and mission, which they fulfill with*

joy and faith, even when living as a family requires facing obstacles, misunderstandings and suffering. The entire Church and this Synod express to these families our appreciation, gratitude and encouragement. During the prayer vigil held in St Peter's Square on 4 October 2014 in preparation for the Synod on the family, Pope Francis evoked, in a simple yet concrete way, the centrality [of the experience] of the family in everyone's lives: "Evening falls on our assembly. It is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table, in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received, of the encounters which warm the heart and make it grow, good wine which anticipates the unending feast in the days of man. It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the bitter twilight of shattered dreams and broken plans; how many people trudge through the day in the blind alley of resignation, of abandonment, even resentment: in how many homes the wine of joy has been less plentiful, and therefore, also the zest — the very wisdom — for life [...]. Let us make our prayer heard for one another this evening, a prayer for all."

2. (2) *Within the family are joys and trials, deep love and relationships which, at times, can be wounded. The family is truly the "school of humanity" (GS, 52), which is much needed today. Despite the many signs of crisis in the family institution in various areas of the "global village", the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and serves as the basis of the need of the Church, an expert in humanity and faithful to her mission to proclaim untiringly and with profound conviction the "Gospel of the Family", entrusted to her together with the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ and ceaselessly taught by the Fathers, the masters of spirituality and the Church's Magisterium. The family is uniquely important to the Church and in these times, when all believers are invited to think of others rather than themselves, the family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization. Think of the witness of so many families that fulfill their Christian mission.*

3. (3) *At the Extraordinary General Assembly of October, 2014, the Bishop of Rome called upon the Synod of Bishops to reflect upon the critical and invaluable reality of the family, a reflection which will then be pursued in greater depth at its Ordinary General Assembly scheduled to take place in October, 2015, as well as during the full year between the two synodal events. "The convenire in unum around the Bishop of Rome is already an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment." These were the words used by Pope Francis in describing the synodal experience and indicating the task at hand: to read both the signs of God and human history, in a twofold yet unique faithfulness which this reading involves.*

4. (4) *With these words in mind, we have gathered together the results of our reflections and our discussions in the following three parts: listening, so as to look at the reality of the family today in all its complexities, both lights and shadows; looking, our gaze is fixed on Christ to ponder, with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church's faith, tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family; and confronting the situation, with an eye on the Lord Jesus, to discern the ways in which the Church and society can renew their commitment to the family founded upon the marriage between a man and a woman.*

5. While preserving the precious fruit of the previous Assembly, the next step is to take the challenges of the family and consider them in light of the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world. The family, in addition to being called upon to respond to today's challenges, is, above all, called by God to an ever-increasing awareness of its missionary identity as a domestic Church, even to the point of "going outside itself". In a world often marked by loneliness and sadness, the "Gospel of the Family" is indeed good news.

PART I

Considering the challenges of the family

Chapter I

The Family and the Anthropological-Cultural Context

The Socio-Cultural Context

6. (5) *Faithful to Christ's teaching, we look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows. We turn our thoughts to parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, close and distant relatives and the bonds between two families forged by marriage. Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and require an analytic and diversified approach. The positive aspects are first to be highlighted, namely, a greater freedom of expression and a better recognition of the rights of women and children, at least in some parts of the world. On the other hand, equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by a troubling individualism which deforms family bonds and ends up considering each component of the family as an isolated unit, leading, in some cases, to the idea that a person is formed according to his own desires, which are considered absolute. Added to this is the crisis of faith, witnessed among a great many Catholics, which oftentimes underlies the crisis in marriage and the family.*

Anthropological Changes

7. Today's society is characterized by a variety of tendencies. Only a minority of people lives, supports and encourages the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and the family, seeing in it the goodness of God's creative plan. Marriages, whether religious or not, are decreasing in number, while separation and divorce is on the rise. People are becoming increasingly aware of the dignity of every person — man, woman and child — and the importance of different ethnic groups and minorities, which — already widespread in many societies, not only in the West — are becoming prevalent in many countries.

In various cultures young people are displaying a fear to make definitive commitments, including a commitment concerning a family. In general, an extreme individualism, increasingly becoming widespread, focuses uppermost on gratifying desires which do not lead to total personal fulfilment.

The development of a consumer society has separated sexuality from procreation. This fact is also one of the underlying causes of an increasing decline in the birth rate, which, in some places, is related to poverty or the inability to care for children; and in others, to the unwillingness to accept responsibility and to the idea that children might infringe on freely pursuing personal goals.

Cultural Contradictions

8. Many cultural contradictions have their effect on the family. The family continues to be seen as a safe haven for the most intimate and rewarding of loving relationships, but the tensions resulting from an extreme individualistic culture, centred on amassing possessions and enjoyment, generate within the family intolerance and aggression which is sometimes out of control. A certain kind of feminism can also be mentioned, a feminism which considers motherhood a pretext to exploit women and hinder her full realization. At the same time, there is a growing tendency to consider having a child a way of fulfilling one's personal desires, something to be achieved by any means available. Finally, there are theories according to which personal identity and emotional intimacy ought to be radically detached from the biological difference between male and female.

At the same time, however, some want to recognize the stable character of a couple's relationship apart from sexual difference, and place it on the same level as the marital relationship, which is intrinsically connected to the roles of a father and a mother and determined on the biological basis of child-bearing. The resulting confusion is of no assistance in defining the specific character of such unions in society. Rather, it relegates the special bond between biological difference, reproduction and human identity to an individualistic choice. What is certainly needed is a more thorough examination of human nature and culture which is based not simply on biology and sexual difference, fully aware that "the removal of difference [...] creates a problem, not a solution (Francis, *General Audience*, April 15, 2015).

Social Contradictions

9. Traumatic events, such as wars, the exhausting of resources and migration, are increasingly having an impact on the emotional and spiritual calibre of family life and are endangering relationships within the family. Oftentimes, the family's material and spiritual resources are brought to the point of depletion.

In general, serious contradictions result from the burden of reckless economic policies and insensitive social policies, even in so-called affluent societies. In particular, the increased cost of raising children and the great deterioration in the additional tasks of social care for the sick and elderly, precisely delegated to families, is a real burden which greatly affects family life.

In addition, the effects of adverse economic development, unclear in nature, the growing phenomenon of the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and the diversion of resources which should be devoted to programmes on behalf of the family is further impoverishing the family and leading to problems. Dependence on alcohol, drugs or gambling is sometimes an expression of these social contradictions and the disadvantages

which are part of family life.

The Weakness and Strength of the Family

10. The family, the basic human community, is showing as never before, through its cultural and social crisis, the great suffering which is being caused by the family's weakening and fragile character, and, at the same time, the family's great strength, in itself, in being able to compensate for the inadequacy and inaction of institutions with respect to the formation of the person, the quality of social ties and the care of the most vulnerable. Therefore, a proper appreciation of the strength of the family is particularly necessary, if its weaknesses are to be treated.

Chapter II

The Family and the Socio-Economic Context

The Family: An Irreplaceable Resource of Society

11. The family is still, and will always remain, the fundamental and indispensable pillar of social life. In fact, many different persons share life together, through which relationships are strengthened and the family grows in dialogue and the mutual acceptance of various generations. In this way, the family represents a fundamental value and an irreplaceable resource for the harmonious development of every human society, as the Council states: "The family is a school for human enrichment [...] and the foundation of society" (*GS*, 52). In the relations in a family — marital, filial and fraternal — all family members willingly establish strong ties, in harmony and mutual respect, which permit them to overcome the dangers of isolation and loneliness.

Public Policies on Behalf of the Family

12. Since the family is the leading agent in building society and not a private matter, adequate public policies on behalf of the family are necessary which support and promote the family. Furthermore, the recommendation was made to give consideration to the relationship between welfare and the compensatory action of the family. With regard to public policies on behalf of the family and inadequate welfare systems, such compensatory action redistributes resources and tasks for the common good, helping to re-balance the negative effects of inequality in society.

13. (6) *One symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person's life and the fragility of relationships. There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end in crushing families. Such is the case in increasing instances of poverty and unemployment in the workplace, which at times is a real nightmare or in overwhelming financial difficulties, which discourage the young from marrying. Families often feel abandoned by the disinterest and lack of attention by institutions. The negative impact on the organization of society is clear, as seen in the demographic crisis, in the difficulty of raising children, in a hesitancy to welcome new life and in considering the presence of older persons as a burden. All these can affect a person's emotional balance, which can sometimes lead to violence. The State has the responsibility to pass laws and create work*

to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family.

The Economic Challenge

14. The concrete aspects of family life are closely connected with economic matters. Many point out that, to this day, the family can easily suffer from a variety of things which make it vulnerable. Among the most important problems are those related to low wages, unemployment, economic insecurity, lack of decent work and a secure position at work, human trafficking and slavery.

The following effects of economic inequity are reflected in a particularly acute manner in the family: growth is impeded; a home is missing; couples do not wish to have children; children find it difficult to study and become independent; and a calm planning for the future is precluded. Pope Francis insists that a change in perception by everyone in society is necessary to overcome this situation: "Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality" (*EG*, 204). Renewed solidarity between generations begins with attending to the poor of this generation, before those of future generations, giving particular attention to family needs.

The Challenge of Poverty and Social Exclusion

15. A particularly important challenge is posed by social groups. Oftentimes, these groups are very numerous and characterized by a poverty which is not only economic but often cultural, thereby preventing the realization of a plan of family living that is commensurate to the dignity of the person. Moreover, despite enormous difficulties, many poor families try to live with dignity in their daily lives, trusting in God, who neither disappoints nor abandons anyone.

There are indications that the current economic system is producing various kinds of social exclusion. Those who feel excluded fall into various categories. A common feature, however, is that oftentimes these "outsiders" are "invisible" in the eyes of society. The dominant culture, the media and major institutions frequently contribute to continuing — or making even worse — this systematic "invisibility". In this regard, Pope Francis asks: "Why are we accustomed to seeing decent work destroyed, countless families evicted, rural farm workers driven off the land, war waged and nature abused?" And he answers: "Because in this system man, the human person, has been removed from the centre and replaced by something else. Because idolatrous worship is devoted to money. Because indifference has been globalized" (*Address to the Participants at the World Meeting of the Popular Movements*, 28 October 2014).

Social exclusion weakens the family and becomes a serious threat to the dignity of its members. Of particular concern is the condition of the children, who seem to be punished *a priori*, because of social exclusion and oftentimes are tragically scarred for life by hardship and suffering. They can truly and properly be called "social orphans".

The Ecological Challenge

16. From the point of view of ecology, problems are seen to arise from an inadequate access to water by many, the degradation of the environment, hunger and malnutrition, uncultivated and devastated lands, and a "throw-away" culture. The described situations have an impact, often a very strong one, on family living and the serene character of family life.

For these reasons, and also as a result of the efforts of Pope Francis, the Church hopes and works together with others towards a profound rethinking on the orientation of the global system, through an ecological culture capable of formulating a perspective, public policy, an educational programme, a way of living and a spirituality. Because everything is intimately connected, examining the aspects of a "holistic ecology" is needed, which includes not only the environment, but also human, social and economically sustainable development and the protection of creation.

Chapter III

The Family and Inclusion

The Elderly

17. Many highlight the plight of elderly people within families. In developed societies the number of the elderly is increasing, while the birth rate decreases. What the elderly can provide as a resource is not always adequately appreciated. As noted by Pope Francis: "The number of elderly has multiplied, but our societies are not organized well enough to make room for them, with proper respect and practical consideration for their frailty and their dignity. While we are young, we are led to ignore old age, as if it were a disease to keep away from; then when we become old, especially if we are poor, if we are sick and alone, we experience the shortcomings of a society programmed for efficiency, which consequently ignores its elderly. And the elderly are a wealth not to be ignored" (*General Audience*, 4 March 2015).

18. Special attention needs to be given to grandparents in the family. They are the link between the generations, ensuring the transmission of traditions and customs in which those who are very young can trace their roots. Furthermore, they often guarantee, in a discreet manner without financial compensation, a valuable economic support to young couples and assist in caring for their grandchildren, even passing on their faith. Many people, especially in these times, can acknowledge that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents. This demonstrates how the faith is communicated and safeguarded within the family, in the succession of generations, thereby becoming an irreplaceable legacy for newer families. Consequently, the elderly deserve genuine recognition, appreciation and a cordial reception by young people, families and society.

The Challenge of Widowhood

19. Widowhood is a particularly difficult experience for those who have chosen and lived marital and family life as a gift from the Lord. Nevertheless, in the light of faith, this state in life provides various possibilities which can prove to be invaluable. For example, in enduring this painful experience, some demonstrate an ability to pour their energies into greater dedication to their children and grandchildren, finding in this loving experience a

new enlightening mission in raising children. The void left by a deceased spouse, in a certain sense, is filled by the love of family members who give a value to the person who remains, thereby allowing him/her to treasure the memory of his/her marriage. On the contrary, those who cannot count on the presence of relatives to whom to dedicate themselves and from whom to receive affection and nearness, ought to receive special attention from the Christian community and given support through the community's availability, especially if the persons who are suffering a loss are poor.

The Final Stage of Life and Mourning in the Family

20. People of advanced age are aware of being in the final stage of life. Their condition affects every aspect of family life. Facing disease, which often accompanies the prolongation of old age, and, above all, the prospect of dying, seen as approaching or actually experienced in the loss of loved ones (spouse, family, friends) are critical aspects of this stage of life, leading individuals and the entire family to redefine a sense of equilibrium.

Today, an appreciation of the final stage of life is all the more necessary, at least in developed countries which try to remove all aspects of this time of death. In light of the negative view of this period — which considers only the aspects of decline and the gradual loss of capacity, autonomy and affection — a person's final years can be considered and faced with a certain sense of fulfilment and integration into one's entire lifetime. It also becomes possible to discover a new aspect to a person's productive ability by passing on a particular moral legacy to future generations. A person's spirituality and sense of transcendence, combined with the nearness of family members, are essential resources so that old age can also be filled with a sense of dignity and hope.

Families undergoing mourning require special care. When the loss concerns babies, children and young people, the impact on the family is particularly strong.

The Challenge of Disability

21. Special consideration ought to be given to families with persons with special needs, where a disability unexpectedly interrupts life, generates a profound and unforeseen challenge and upsets a family's balance, desires and expectations, which causes mixed emotions to be confronted and processed and which imposes duties, urgent necessities, new needs and different roles and responsibilities. The conception of the family and its entire life-cycle are deeply disturbed. Nevertheless, the family, together with the Christian community to which it belongs, can discover various abilities, unforeseen skills, new gestures and ways of communicating, forms of understanding and identity, in the long and difficult journey of acceptance and care in the mystery of life's fleeting character.

22. Such a process, in itself extraordinarily complex, becomes even more difficult in societies where harsh forms of stigma and prejudice still survive, preventing the fruitful meeting of disability and the emergence of solidarity and accompaniment by the community. For each person and the entire community, such a meeting can actually be a valuable opportunity for growth in justice, love and the defense of the value of every human life, starting with the recognition of a profound, shared sense of vulnerability.

Some ardently desire that, in a truly welcoming community, the family and the person with special needs will not feel alone and rejected, but might find relief and support, especially when the family's strength and resources are lacking.

23. In this regard, this situation poses the challenge of what is called "after us", in other words, family situations created by poverty or being alone or the recently verified phenomenon, whereby, in the most economically advanced societies, a high probability exists that the lengthening of life expectancy will allow people with disabilities to survive their parents. If the family is able to accept, in the light of faith, the presence of persons with special needs, the family will also help them not to see their disability as a limitation but rather to recognize their unique gifts and value. This will lead to guaranteeing, defending and appreciating the potential in every life, both individually and as a family, and recognizing the needs inherent to the individual and his/her right to equal dignity and opportunity, to care and services, to company and affection and to a spirituality, beauty and full sense of meaning, in every stage of life, from conception, through aging to a natural death.

The Challenge of Migration

24. Many are concerned about the effects of migration on the family, which, in various ways, concerns entire populations in different parts of the world. Person who are migrating require a specific pastoral care, which is given to not only families in migration but also members of the families who are left behind in their places of origin. Such care is to be done while respecting their cultures and the human and religious formation from which each comes. Today, migration is creating tragic consequences for masses of individuals and families, as if they were "a surplus" in different populations and territories. These people legitimately seek a better future and, at times, a "re-birth" in those cases where they can no longer live in the place of their birth.

25. Various situations of war, persecution, poverty and inequality, usually because of migration, in addition to a treacherous journey which often threatens life itself, have a traumatic effect on individuals and their families. Indeed, in the migration process, the families of migrants are inevitably torn by multiple experiences of abandonment and division. In many cases, the family unit dramatically suffers a separation between those who leave ahead of the others and those who are awaiting a return or reunification. Those who leave find themselves bereft of their land, culture and language as well as ties with their extended family and community, not to mention their past and the traditions followed in the course of their life.

26. Encountering a new country and a new culture is made all the more difficult when there are no conditions of genuine warmth, acceptance, respect for the rights of everyone and the right of peaceful coexistence and solidarity. A sense of disorientation, a nostalgia for a past which is now lost, not to mention difficulties in an authentic integration into the community — which are experienced while creating new ties and planning a life combining the past and present, cultures and localities as well as languages and different mentalities — are perceived, in many situations today, as insurmountable. Instead, these experiences indicate renewed suffering in second and third generation migrant families, fueling a phenomena of fundamentalism and a violent rejection of the host culture.

A valuable resource in overcoming these difficulties is seen in the encounters among families. A key role in this process of integration is often done by mothers, through their sharing the experience of bringing up their children.

27. The experiences of migration are particularly dramatic and devastating for families and individuals: when they are illegal; when they are supported by a network of international trafficking in human beings; when they involve unaccompanied children; and when they require prolonged periods of time in places between one country and another and between the past and the future, and extended time in refugee camps or centres, where it is impossible to begin a process of establishing roots and planning for the future.

Other Special Challenges

28. (7) *Some cultural and religious contexts pose particular challenges. In some places, polygamy is still being practiced and in places with long traditions, the custom of "marriage in stages". In other places, "arranged marriages" are an enduring practice. In countries where Catholicism is the minority, many mixed and interreligious marriages take place, all with their inherent difficulties in terms of jurisprudence, Baptism, the upbringing of children and the mutual respect with regards to difference in faith. In these marriages there can be a danger of relativism or indifference; but there can also be the possibility of fostering the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a living together of diverse communities in the same place. In many places, and not only in the West, there has been a widespread increase in the practice of cohabitation before marriage or simply cohabitating with no intention of a legally binding relationship. In addition to this, there is often civil legislation which compromises marriage and the family. Because of secularization in many parts of the world, the reference to God is greatly diminished and the faith is no longer shared socially.*

The Family and Children

29. (8) *Especially in some countries, a great number of children are born outside marriage, many of whom subsequently grow up with just one of their parents or in a blended or reconstituted family. Divorces are increasing, many times taking place solely because of economic reasons. Oftentimes, children are a source of contention between parents and become the real victims of family break-ups. Fathers who are often absent from their families not simply for economic reasons need to assume more clearly their responsibility for children and the family. The dignity of women still needs to be defended and promoted. In fact, in many places today, simply being a woman is a source of discrimination and the gift of motherhood is often penalized rather than esteemed. Not to be overlooked is the increasing violence against women, where they become victims, unfortunately, often within families and as a result of the serious and widespread practice of genital mutilation in some cultures. The sexual exploitation of children is still another scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society. Societies experiencing violence due to war, terrorism or the presence of organized crime are witnessing the deterioration of the family, above all in big cities, where, in their peripheral areas, the so-called phenomenon of "street-children" is on the rise. Furthermore, migration is another sign of the times to be faced and understood in terms of its onerous consequences to family life.*

The Role of Women

30. Many quarters are witnessing an emancipation of women which is clearly indicating a woman's role in the growth of the family and society. The truth remains, however, that the status of women in the world differs to a notable degree, primarily as a result of cultural factors. Undoubtedly, these problem-situations cannot be resolved simply with an end of the economic crisis or the arrival of a modern culture, as evidenced by the difficult conditions of women in various countries of recent development.

In western countries, the empowerment of women requires a rethinking of the duties of the spouses in their reciprocity and common responsibility towards family life. In developing countries, the exploitation of women and the violence done to their bodies and the tiring tasks imposed on them, even during pregnancy, are oftentimes compounded by abortion and forced sterilization, not to mention the extreme negative consequences of practices connected with procreation (for example, a womb "for rent" or the marketing of embryonic gametes). In advanced countries, the desire for a child "at all costs" has not resulted in happier and stronger family relationships, but, in many cases, has actually exacerbated the inequality between women and men. Sterility in a woman, according to a prejudice in different cultures, is a condition which brings social discrimination.

A contributing factor in acknowledging the determining role of women in society could be a greater appreciation of their responsibility in the Church, namely, their involvement in the decision-making process, their participation — not simply in a formal way — in the governing of some institutions; and their involvement in the formation of ordained ministers.

Chapter IV

The Family, Affectivity and Life

The Importance of Affectivity in Life

31. (9) *Faced with the aforementioned social situation, people in many parts of the world are feeling a great need to take care of themselves, to know themselves better, to live in greater harmony with their emotions and feelings and to seek affective relationships of quality in the best manner possible. These proper aspirations can lead to a desire to put greater effort into building relationships of self-giving and creative reciprocity, which are empowering and supportive like those within a family. In this case, however, individualism and living only for one's self are a real danger. The challenge for the Church is to assist couples in their emotive maturation and affective development through fostering dialogue, virtue and trust in the merciful love of God. The full commitment required in marriage can be a strong antidote to the temptation of a selfish individualism.*

The Formation of Affectivity

32. Families need to recognize their direct responsibility in the formation of affectivity in younger generations. The speed with which changes are occurring in contemporary society makes guidance in achieving the affectivity of the whole person more difficult.

This also requires that pastoral workers be trained properly, with not only a thorough knowledge of Scripture and Catholic doctrine but also pedagogical tools, as well as a suitable number of sociologists and doctors. A knowledge of the psychology of the family will be of assistance in effectively transmitting a Christian conception of affectivity. This effort at education might already begin with the catechesis of Christian initiation.

Affective Fragility and Immaturity

33. *(10) Cultural tendencies in today's world seem to set no limits on a person's affectivity in which every aspect needs to be explored, even those which are highly complex. Indeed, nowadays the question of affective fragility is a pressing one; a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity. Particularly worrisome is the spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet and reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution. In this context, couples are often uncertain, hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life. A crisis in a couple's relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds. The decline in population, due to a mentality against having children and promoted by the world politics of reproductive health, creates not only a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured but also the danger that, over time, this decline will lead to economic impoverishment and a loss of hope in the future. The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on the birthrate.*

The Bio-ethical Challenge

34. Indications come from many parts of the world that the so-called bio-technological revolution has introduced into the field of human procreation the possibility of manipulating the act of human reproduction, making it independent of the sexual relationship between man and woman. In this way, human life and parenthood have become modular and separable realities, subject mainly to the wishes of individuals or couples who are not necessarily heterosexual or regularly married. In recent times, this phenomenon, occurring as a true novelty in human sexuality and gaining increasing popularity, is having a profound effect in relationships, in society and in the judicial system which intervenes in an attempt to regulate a variety of different situations and what is already taking place.

The Pastoral Challenge

35. *(11) In this regard, the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope, which is based that man comes from God, and that, consequently, a reflection of capable of reframing the great questions about the meaning of human existence can be responsive to humanity's most profound expectations. The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to the search that characterizes human existence, even in these times of individualism and hedonism. People need to be accepted in the concrete circumstances of life. We need to know how to support them in their searching and to encourage them in their hunger for God and their wish to feel fully part of the Church,*

also including those who have experienced failure or find themselves in a variety of situations. The Christian message always contains in itself the reality and the dynamic of mercy and truth that meet in Christ.

36. In formation programmes for marriage and family life, pastoral workers are to take into consideration the diversity of concrete situations. On the one hand, they need to promote programmes which ensure that young people are properly formed; on the other hand, programmes are equally necessary for those who have not married and oftentimes still live with their parents. Couples who are unable to have children should also receive the Church's special pastoral attention so they may perceive God's plan in their situation, in service to the entire community.

Many request that the group of persons referred to as "far from the Church" not carry the connotation of "excluded" or "rejected," since such persons are loved by God and are at the heart of the Church's pastoral activity. Everyone is entitled to be treated with understanding, bearing in mind that some situations which keep people from participating in the life of the Church are not always intentionally chosen. Oftentimes these situations result — and are sometimes endured with great suffering — because of the conduct of a third party.

PART II

The Discernment of the Family Vocation

Chapter I

The Family and Divine Pedagogy

Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation

37. (12) *In order to "walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of his Face. ... Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up" (Francis, Discourse, 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with patience and mercy, in proclaiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.*

The Word of God in the Family

38. To look at Jesus means, above all, to listen to his Word. Reading Sacred Scripture in not only the community but also the home leads to enlightening the centrality of the couple and the family in God's plan and to understanding how God might enter into family life, thereby making it more beautiful and vital.

Despite several initiatives, however, it seems that Catholic families still lack a more direct contact with the Bible. The pastoral care of the family increasingly highlights the centrality of encountering Christ, an experience which naturally takes place when the family is grounded in Sacred Scripture. Therefore, many wish, above all, that a vital relationship

with the Word of God be encouraged in families, so that they might be orientated towards a true and proper personal encounter with Jesus Christ. A recommended approach to Sacred Scripture is *lectio divina*, which is a prayerful reading of the Word of God and a source of inspiration in everyday life.

The Divine Pedagogy

39. (13) *Since the order of creation is determined by its orientation towards Christ, a distinction needs to be made without separating the various levels through which God communicates to humanity the grace of the covenant. By reason of the divine pedagogy, according to which the order of creation develops through successive stages to the order of redemption, we need to understand the newness of the Christian Sacrament of Marriage in continuity with natural marriage of the origins, that is, the manner of God's saving action in both creation and the Christian life. In creation, because all things were made through Christ and for him (cf. Col 1:16), Christians "gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows; they ought to follow attentively the profound changes which are taking place among peoples" (AG, 11). In the Christian life, the reception of Baptism brings the believer into the Church through the domestic church, namely, the family; thus beginning "a dynamic process [which] develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (FC, 9), in an ongoing conversion to a love that saves us from sin and gives us fullness of life.*

Natural Marriage and the Fullness of the Sacrament

40. Bearing in mind that natural realities must be understood in the light of grace, one cannot fail to remember that the order of redemption illuminates and celebrates the order of creation. Natural marriage, therefore, is fully understood in light of its realization in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Only in fixing one's gaze on Christ can a person come to an in-depth knowledge of the truth of human relationships. "Only in the mystery of the incarnate Word is the mystery of the person enlightened. [...] Christ, the new Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals a person to him/herself and makes his/her supreme calling clear" (GS, 22). With this in mind, it seems particularly opportune, using a Christocentric key, to understand the rich and varied natural characteristics of marriage.

Jesus and the Family

41. (14) *Jesus himself, referring to the original plan of the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between a man and a woman, though saying to the Pharisees that "for your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19: 8). The indissolubility of marriage ("what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" Mt 19:6), is to be understood not as a "yoke" imposed on persons but as a "gift" to a husband and wife united in marriage. In this way, Jesus shows how God's humbling act of coming to earth might always accompany the human journey and might heal and transform a hardened heart with his grace, orientating it towards its principle, by way of the cross. The Gospels make clear that Jesus' example is paradigmatic for the Church. In fact, Jesus was born in a family; he began to work his*

signs at the wedding of Cana and he announced the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores the original divine plan (Mt 19:3). At the same time, however, he put what he taught into practice and manifested the true meaning of mercy, clearly illustrated in his meeting with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-30) and with the adulteress (Jn 8:1-11). By looking at the sinner with love, Jesus leads the person to repentance and conversion ("Go and sin no more"), which is the basis for forgiveness.

Indissolubility: A Gift and Task

42. The testimony of couples who fully live a Christian marriage highlights the value of the indissoluble bond of marriage and demonstrates always new ways of witnessing to marital fidelity. Indissolubility represents a personal response to the profound desire for mutual and enduring love: a "never-ending" love which becomes a choice and a gift of one's self, a gift made by each spouse to the other, sealing the couple's relation to God himself and all that God entrusts to them. Particularly important from this perspective is the celebration of wedding anniversaries in the Christian community so as to recall that, if a marriage is grounded in Christ, permanently living together as a couple is not only possible but also a beautiful experience.

The Gospel of the Family offers an ideal in life which must take into account a sense of the times and the real difficulties in permanently maintaining commitments. In this regard, the Church needs to proclaim a message which might give hope and not be burdensome, so that every family may know that the Church never abandons the family, because of "the indissoluble bond of the history of Christ and his Church with the history of marriage and the human family" (Francis, *General Audience*, 6 May 2015).

Living as a Family

43. Many recommend fostering a morality of grace which might lead to the discovery and flowering of the beauty of the virtues inherent in married life, which include: respect and mutual trust; mutual acceptance and gratitude; and patience and forgiveness. Pope Francis says that above the portal leading to family life "are written three words [...] 'may I?', 'thank you' and 'pardon me'. Indeed, these expressions open up the way to living well in your family, to living in peace. They are simple expressions, but not so simple to put into practice! They hold much power: the power to keep home life intact even when tested with a thousand problems. But if they are absent, little holes can start to crack open and the whole thing may even collapse."(Francis, *General Audience*, 13 May 2015). Indeed, the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the beginning of a process which includes and sustains the various stages and trials of love, all of which, nourished by grace, requires a gradual growth towards full development.

The Family in God's Salvific Plan

44. (15) *The words of eternal life, which Jesus gave to his disciples, included the teaching on marriage and the family. Jesus' teaching allows us to distinguish three basic stages in God's plan for marriage and the family. In the beginning, there is the original family, when God the Creator instituted the first marriage between Adam and Eve as the solid foundation of the family. God not only created human beings male and female (Gen*

1:27), but he also blessed them so they might be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). For this reason, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This union was wounded by sin and became the historical form of marriage among the People of God, for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce (cf. Dt 24:1ff.). This was the principal practice in the time of Jesus. With Christ's coming and his reconciling a fallen world through his redemption, the period begun by Moses ended.

Conjugal Union and Fruitfulness

45. Some stressed that highlighting the teaching contained in Sacred Scripture can be of assistance in showing how, from the time of Genesis, God sealed the couple with his image and likeness. Along these lines, Pope Francis recalled that "man alone is not the image of God nor is woman alone the image of God, but man and woman as a couple are the image of God. The difference between man and woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God." (*General Audience*, 15 April 2015). Some point out that the complementary nature of the unitive and procreative character in marriage is written into the divine plan in creation: the unitive character being the result of a conscious, gratuitous and deliberate choice, which is realized in the procreative character. Furthermore, the procreative act must be understood from the vantage point of responsible parenthood and the duty of faithfully caring for and raising children.

The Family: Image of the Trinity

46. (16) *Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and the family to their original form (Mk 10:1-12). Marriage and the family have been redeemed by Christ (Eph 5:21-32), restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which every true love flows. The spousal covenant, originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation, receives its full meaning in Christ and his Church. Through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion. The Gospel of the Family spans the history of the world from the creation of man in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1: 26-27) until it reaches, at the end of time, its fulfillment in the mystery of the Christ's Covenant with the wedding of Lamb (cf. Rev 19:9) (cf. Saint John Paul II, Catechesis on Human Love)*

Chapter II

The Family and Church Life

The Family in the Church's Documents

47. (17) *"Throughout the centuries, the Church has maintained her constant teaching on marriage and family. One of the highest expressions of this teaching was proposed by the Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, which devotes an entire chapter to promoting the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. GS, 47-52). This document defined marriage as a community of life and love (cf. GS, 48), placing love at the center of the family and manifesting, at the same time, the truth of this love in counter distinction to the various forms of reductionism present in contemporary culture.*

The 'true love between husband and wife' (GS, 49) implies a mutual gift of self and includes and integrates the sexual and affective aspects, according to the divine plan (cf. GS, 48-49). Furthermore, Gaudium et Spes, 48, emphasizes the grounding of the spouses in Christ. Christ the Lord 'comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony' and remains with them. In the Incarnation, he assumes human love, purifies it and brings it to fulfillment and gives to the spouses, with his Spirit, the capacity to live that love, permeating every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the bride and groom are, so to speak, consecrated and, through his grace, they build up the Body of Christ and are a domestic church (cf. LG, 11), so that the Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way" (IL, 4).

48. In light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and successive Magisterial documents, the recommendation was made to thoroughly examine the missionary dimension of the family as a domestic Church, which is grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism and achieved by fulfilling one's proper task within the Christian community. By nature, the family is missionary and increases its faith in the very act of communicating that faith to others. To appreciate the missionary role entrusted to the family calls for Christian families to rediscover the call to witness to the Gospel with their lives and not allow their faith to remain hidden. The actual "living out" of family communion is a form of missionary proclamation. In this regard, the role of the family needs to be promoted in pastoral activity through various forms of witness which include: solidarity with the poor, openness to the diversity among people, the stewardship of creation and a commitment to fostering the common good, beginning primarily where one lives.

The Family: The Way of the Church

49. (18) *"In the wake of Vatican II, the papal Magisterium has further refined the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a special way, Blessed Pope Paul VI, in his Encyclical Humanae Vitae, displayed the intimate bond between conjugal love and the generation of life. Pope St. John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love, his Letter to Families (Gratissimam Sane) and, especially, his Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio. In these documents, the Pope called the family the 'way of the Church,' gave an overview on the vocation of man and woman to love and proposed the basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. In specifically treating 'conjugal love' (cf. FC, 13), he described how the spouses, through their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness" (IL, 5).*

The Divine Measure of Love

50. (19) *"Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, again took up the topic of the truth of the love between man and woman, which is fully understood only in light of the love of Christ Crucified (cf. DCE, 2). The Pope emphasized that 'marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love' (DCE, 11). Moreover, in his Encyclical Caritas in Veritate, he emphasizes the importance of love as the principle of life in society (cf. CV, 44), the place where a person learns to*

experience the common good" (IL, 6).

The Family at Prayer

51. The teaching of the Popes is an invitation to thoroughly examine the spiritual aspect of family life, beginning with rediscovering family prayer and listening in common to the Word of God, which leads to a commitment to the works of charity. Of basic importance in family life is rediscovering the Lord's Day as a sign of the family's deep sense of belonging to the ecclesial community. Adequate pastoral guidance is also proposed so that a concrete family spirituality can grow in response to questions which arise in everyday life. Particularly helpful would be nourishing a family spirituality with strong faith experiences, especially in faithfully participating in the Eucharist, "the source and summit of entire Christian life" (LG, 11).

The Family and Faith

52. (20) *"Pope Francis, in his Encyclical Lumen Fidei, treating the connection between the family and faith, writes: 'Encountering Christ, letting themselves (young people) be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness' (LF, 53)" (IL, 7).*

Catechesis and the Family

53. Many consider that the catechetical programme for the family needs to be revised. In this regard, attention might be given to involving married couples in catechesis, especially with their children, in conjunction with priests, deacons and consecrated persons. This collaboration serves to demonstrate that the vocation of marriage is an important reality which requires an adequate preparation for a reasonable period of time. Integrating sound Christian families and dependable ministers in this programme adds to a community's credibility in its witnessing to young people on their journey in making significant choices in their lives.

The Christian community refuses to be simply a place to go for human services; instead the Christian community is a place where families are born and where they meet and interact as they walk together in faith and share ways of growth and mutual exchange.

The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together

54. (21) *Mutual self-giving in the Sacrament of Marriage is grounded in the grace of Baptism, which establishes the foundational covenant of every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other and with Christ's grace, the engaged couple promises a total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life. The married couple recognizes these elements as constitutive in marriage, gifts offered to them by God, taking seriously their mutual commitment, in God's name and in the presence of the Church. So, in faith it is possible to assume the goods of marriage as commitments which are more sustainable through the help of the grace of the Sacrament. God consecrates the love of husband and*

wife and confirms its indissolubility, offering them assistance to live their faithfulness, mutual complementarity and openness to life. Therefore, the Church looks to married couples as the heart of the entire family, which, in turn, looks to Jesus.

55. Joy is an expression of the full realization of a person. To manifest the unique joy of the union of husband and wife and the formation of a new family calls for presenting the family as a place of personal and gratuitous relations, unlike those in society. The voluntary and reciprocal self-giving, the life which is born and the care of one member for the other, from the youngest to the oldest, are just some of the aspects which make the family unique in its beauty. It is important to develop the idea that marriage is a life-long choice which does not limit one's existence, but instead makes it richer and fuller, even in times of difficulty.

Through this choice in life, the family builds society not as simply the numerical sum of the residents of a particular territory or as a group of citizens of a given State, but as a genuine experience of a people united in spirit and, in the case of the Church, the People of God.

Chapter III

The Family and The Path Leading to its Fullness

The Mystery of Matrimony in relation to the Creator

56. (22) *From the same perspective, in keeping with the teaching of the Apostle who said that the whole of creation was planned in Christ and for him (cf. Col 1:16), the Second Vatican Council wished to express appreciation for natural marriage and the valid elements present in other religions (cf. NA, 2) and cultures, despite their limitations and shortcomings (cf. RM, 55). The presence of the seeds of the Word in these cultures (cf. AG, 11) could even be applied, in some ways, to marriage and the family in so many non-Christian societies and individuals. Valid elements, therefore, exist in some forms outside of Christian marriage — based, however, on a stable and true relationship of a man and a woman — which, in any case, we maintain are oriented towards Christian marriage. With an eye to the popular wisdom of different peoples and cultures, the Church also recognizes this type of family as the basic, necessary and fruitful unit for humanity's life together.*

57. The Church is aware of the lofty aspects of the mystery of marriage between a man and a woman, a mystery seen in the context of the relationship between the person created by God and God the Creator. Therefore, the Church wishes to highlight this original grace, that arises from the relation of the created person and the Creator and is part and parcel of the experience of the marriage covenant, which God intentionally designed to correspond to marriage's original vocation and to justly putting this vocation into effect. The seriousness of adhering to this divine plan and the courage required to witness to it is especially to be esteemed in these times, when this conception, which touches upon every relationship within the family, is called into question, if not opposed or outrightly dismissed.

Therefore, even in cases where the decision of persons living together or those civilly

married to proceed to a sacramental marriage is still in a virtual state or in its initial stage or not yet specifically defined, the Church is asked not shy away from the task of encouraging and supporting such a development. At the same time, something good can be done by showing, in a friendly manner, an appreciation for the commitment already made and acknowledging adherence to those elements proper to the divine plan arising from the relation of the person created by God and God the Creator.

Some emphasize the importance of developing adequate pastoral care for families of marriages of disparity of cult, whose number is growing in not only mission territories, but also countries of a well-established, Christian tradition.

The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy towards Broken and Fragile Families

58. (23) *With inner joy and deep comfort, the Church looks to families who remain faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer. In fact, they witness, in a credible way, to the beauty of a marriage which is indissoluble and faithful forever, while always remaining faithful to each other. Within the family, "which could be called a domestic church" (LG, 11), a person begins a Church experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. "In a family, a person learns the effort and the joy of work, fraternal love, and generosity in forgiving others — always renewed — and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life" (CCC, 1657). The Holy Family of Nazareth is a wondrous model in whose school we "understand why we have to maintain spiritual discipline, if we wish to follow the teachings of the Gospel and become Christ's disciples" (Blessed Pope Paul VI, Address at Nazareth, 5 January 1964). The Gospel of the Family also nourishes the seeds which are still waiting to grow; and serves as the basis for caring for those trees which have withered and must not be neglected.*

The Intimate Bond between the Church and the Family

59. The blessing and responsibility of a new family, sealed in the Church's Sacrament of Matrimony, implies a willingness to be promoters and advocates, within the Christian community, of the general calibre of the covenant between man and woman in all areas of society, the procreation of children, the protection of the weakest in society and life in common. This willingness requires a responsibility which should be supported, recognized and appreciated.

In virtue of the Sacrament of Marriage, each family becomes in every way a blessing for the Church, who requests on her part to be considered a blessing by the new-born family. From this perspective, the Church would certainly offer a precious gift in these times, if she displayed a humble willingness more equitably to consider this reciprocity of the *bonum Ecclesiae*, namely, the Church is a blessing for the family and the family is blessing for the Church. Safeguarding the Lord's gift in the Sacrament is the responsibility of the Christian couple, on the one hand, and the Christian community, on the other, each in due manner. When difficulties, even serious ones, arise in maintaining the union of marriage, discerning each's obligations and failures ought to be examined fairly by the couple with the assistance of the community, so that each may understand, assess and repair what

was omitted or neglected.

60. (24) *The Church, a sure teacher and caring mother, recognizes that the only marriage bond for those who are baptized is sacramental and any breach of it is against the will of God. At the same time, the Church is conscious of the weakness of many of her children who are struggling in their journey of faith. "Consequently, without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur. [...] A small step in the midst of great human limitations can be more pleasing to God than a life which outwardly appears in order and passes the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings"(GE, 44).*

The Family: A Gift and Task

61. The faithful's attitude towards people who have not yet come to an understanding of the importance of the Sacrament of Marriage is expressed primarily in a personal, friendly relationship which accepts another as he/she is, without judging, and seeks to meet his/her basic needs and, at the same time, witnessing to God's love and mercy. It is important to be clearly aware that everyone is weak and that each person is a sinner like everyone else, yet not failing to affirm the blessings and values of a Christian marriage. Moreover, people need to become aware that in God's plan the family is not a duty but a gift, and that today the decision to enter into the Sacrament of Marriage is not a foregone conclusion but something to be developed and a goal to be achieved.

Assistance in Reaching the Fullness of God's Plan

62. (25) *In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried or simply living together, 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 the God's plan for them. Looking to Christ, whose light illumines every person (cf. Jn 1:9; GS, 22), the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work.*

63. The Christian community might also display a friendliness to couples in difficulty through the nearness of those families who are actually living a Christian marriage. The Church draws near spouses who are running the risk of separation, so they can rediscover the beauty and the strength of their married life. In cases of a painful end to a relationship, the Church feels the duty of being close to these people in their time of suffering in such a way as to prevent disastrous conflicts between the spouses and, above all, to minimize the suffering of the children.

Some expressed the wish that Dioceses promote programmes which gradually involve people living together or civilly married. Starting with civil marriage, a Christian marriage might then be achieved, after a period of discernment, which may lead in the end to a

truly informed choice.

64. (26) *The Church looks with concern at the distrust of many young people in relation to a commitment in marriage and suffers at the haste with which many of the faithful decide to put an end to the obligation they assumed and to take on another. These lay faithful, who are members of the Church, need pastoral attention that is merciful and encouraging and that adequately distinguishes situations. Young people who are baptized should be encouraged to understand that the Sacrament of Marriage can enrich their prospects of love and that they can be sustained by the grace of Christ in the Sacrament and by the possibility of participating fully in the life of the Church.*

The Young and the Fear of Marrying

65. When considering the prospect of marriage, many young people are afraid of failure, which is also a result of their witnessing, in these times, many marriage break-ups. Consequently, more attention needs to be given to discerning the underlying reasons for their renunciation and discouragement. Indeed, some think that, in many cases, the reasons might have to do precisely with an awareness of a goal which — while appreciated and no less desired — seems incommensurable in reasonably evaluating one's strengths or might arise from a grave doubt about the constancy of one's feelings. As for fidelity and stability in a loving relationship, which, nevertheless, still remain desirable, some young people feel an anxiety — or even anguish — at not being able to ensure fidelity and stability in love, which often causes them to renounce marrying. Such difficulty, though in itself surmountable, is referred to as proof that fidelity and stability in love is radically impossible. In addition, sometimes aspects of social convenience and economic problems related to the celebration of marriage have an impact in the decision not to marry.

66. (27) *In this regard, a new aspect of family ministry is requiring attention today — the reality of civil marriages between a man and woman, traditional marriages and, taking into consideration the differences involved, even cohabitation. When a union reaches a particular stability, legally recognized, characterized by deep affection and responsibility for children and showing an ability to overcome trials, these unions can offer occasions for guidance with an eye towards the eventual celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. Very often, on the other hand, a couple lives together not in view of a possible future marriage but without any intention of a legally binding relationship.*

67. (28) *In accordance with Christ's mercy, the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and lost love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm. Conscious that the most merciful thing is to tell the truth in love, we go beyond compassion. Merciful love, as it attracts and unites, transforms and elevates. It is an invitation to conversion. We understand the Lord's attitude in the same way; he does not condemn the adulterous woman, but asks her to sin no more (Jn 8:1-11).*

Mercy and Revealed Truth

68. The Church's point of departure is the concrete situation of today's families, all in need of mercy, beginning with those who are suffering most. In fact, mercy manifests the sovereignty of God, which permits him to be faithful, time and again, to his very being, which is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4, 8) and to his covenant. Mercy is the revelation of the faithfulness and identity of God in himself, and thus, at the same time, a demonstration of the Christian identity. Consequently, mercy does not detract from the truth; mercy is revealed truth itself and is closely linked with the fundamental truths of the faith — the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord. Without these truths, mercy would vanish. Mercy is "the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ" (*MV*, 25)

Part III

The Mission of the Family Today

Chapter I

The Family and Evangelization

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts

69. (29) *Discussion at the synod focussed on some of the more urgent pastoral needs to be addressed in the local Churches, in communion cum Petro et sub Petro. Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family is urgently needed in the work of evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4:15), in faithfulness to the mercy displayed in Christ's kenosis. Truth became flesh in human weakness, not to condemn it but to save it (cf. Gn 3:16, 17).*

Tenderness in the Family — God's Tenderness

70. Tenderness means to give joyfully and, in turn, to stir in another person the joy of feeling loved. Tenderness is expressed in a particular way in looking at another's limitations in a loving way, especially when they clearly stand out. Dealing with delicacy and respect means attending to wounds and restoring hope in such a way as to revitalize trust in the other. Tenderness in family relationships is the virtue which helps people overcome the everyday conflicts within a person and in relations with others. In this regard, Pope Francis invites everyone to reflect on his words: "Do we have the courage to welcome with tenderness the difficulties and problems of those who are near to us, or do we prefer impersonal solutions, perhaps effective but devoid of the warmth of the Gospel? How much the world needs tenderness today! The patience of God, the closeness of God, the tenderness of God." (*Homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of Christmas, 24 December 2014*).

71. (30) *Evangelizing is the shared responsibility of all God's people, each according to his ministry and charism. Without the joyous testimony of married people and families, domestic churches, proclamation, even if done in its proper way, risks being misunderstood or lost in a flurry of words that is characteristic of society today (cf. NMI, 50). On various occasions, the synod fathers emphasized that Catholic families, by reason of the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, are called upon to be the active agents in every pastoral activity on behalf of the family.*

The Family: Agent of Pastoral Activity

72. The Church must instill in families a sense of belonging to the Church, a sense of "we", in which no member is forgotten. Everyone ought to be encouraged to develop their skills and accomplish their personal plan of life in service of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, every family within the Church ought to rediscover the joy of communion with other families so as to serve the common good of society by promoting a public policy, an economy and a culture in service of the family, even through the use of the social network and the media.

This calls for the ability to create small communities of families as living witnesses of Gospel values. Some families need to be prepared, trained and empowered so they can accompany other families in living in a Christian manner. Families who are willing to assume the mission *ad gentes* are to be acknowledged and encouraged. Finally, linking the pastoral ministry of young people with that on behalf of the family is of noted importance.

The Wedding Liturgy

73. An engaged couple spends a considerable length of time preparing for marriage. The actual celebration of marriage, preferably in the community to which one or both of them belongs, requires due attention and emphasis, above all, on the celebration's proper spiritual and ecclesial character. The Christian community, in warmly and joyfully participating in the celebration and through the invocation of the Holy Spirit, receives the new family in its midst so that, as the domestic Church, the new family might feel itself a part of the larger Church family.

Frequently, the celebrant has occasion to address an assembly of people who minimally participate in the life of the Church or who belong to other Christian denominations or other religions. Consequently, this can serve as a valuable opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of the Family, which might prompt, even in the families that are present, a rediscovery of the divine gifts of faith and love. The celebration of a wedding is also a timely occasion to invite many to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Family: God's Work

74. (31) *The primacy of grace needs to be highlighted and, consequently, the possibilities that the Spirit provides in the Sacrament. It is a question of allowing people to experience that the Gospel of the Family is a joy that "fills hearts and lives", because in Christ we are "set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness" (EG, 1). In light of the Parable of the Sower (cf. Mt 13;3), our task is to cooperate in the sowing; the rest is God's work; nor must we forget that, in preaching about the family, the Church is a sign of contradiction.*

75. The primacy of grace is fully manifested when the family renders an account of its faith and the married couple actually live their marriage as a vocation. In this regard, the following recommendations were made: to support and encourage the faithful witness of Christian couples; to engage in sound programmes of growth in the grace of Baptism, especially in youth programmes; to adopt a symbolic, experiential and meaningful

language in preaching and catechesis; and to provide meetings and special courses for pastoral workers, so they can effectively communicate with their listeners and educate them to invoke and recognize God's presence in their sacramental union and the continuing process of conversion.

Missionary Conversion and a Renewal in Language

76. (32) *Consequently, this work calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, not stopping at proclaiming a merely theoretical message with no connection to people's real problems. We must continually bear in mind that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in marriage and the family and that, consequently, the transmission of faith itself from parents to children has often been interrupted. In the face of a strong faith, the imposition of certain cultural perspectives which weaken the family and marriage will cause no harm.*

77. (33) *Conversion also needs to be seen in the language we use, so that it might prove to be effectively meaningful. Proclamation needs to create an experience where the Gospel of the Family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one's dignity and complete fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. This does not consist, not in merely presenting a set of rules, but in espousing values that respond to the needs of those who find themselves today even in the most secularized of countries.*

78. The Christian message ought to be preferably proclaimed in a manner which might inspire hope. A clear, inviting and open communication needs to be adopted, one which does not moralize, judge or control, but bears witness to the Church's moral teaching, while, at the same time, remaining sensitive to the circumstances of each individual.

Since many do not understand the various subjects of the Church's Magisterium, a language is urgently needed which everyone, especially young people, can understand and one which conveys the beauty of family love and the meaning of terms, such as self-giving, conjugal love, fertility and procreation.

Using Culture as a Means

79. In these times, it seems necessary to use culture as a means to more adequately transmit the faith, a culture which is capable of coherently expressing both faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ and to the person of today. Blessed Paul VI taught: "On us particularly, the pastors of the Church, rests the responsibility for reshaping with boldness and wisdom, but in complete fidelity to the content of evangelization, the means that are most suitable and effective for communicating the Gospel message to the men and women of our times." (*EN*, 40).

Today in particular, stress needs to be placed on the importance of a joyful and optimistic proclamation of the truths of the faith concerning the family and also making use of specialized teams and experts in communication who might know how to give proper consideration to the issues arising from how people are living in these times.

The Word of God: Source of the Spiritual Life of the Family

80. (34) *The Word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family. All pastoral work on behalf of the family must allow people to be interiorly fashioned and formed as members of the domestic church through the Church's prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture. The Word of God is not only good news in a person's private life but also a criterion of judgment and a light in discerning the various challenges that married couples and families encounter.*

81. In light of the Word of God, which requires discernment in various situations, pastoral care ought to take into consideration the need of communicating with others in a manner open to dialogue and free from prejudice, especially in cases where Catholics, in matters of marriage and family life, do not live or are in no condition to live in full accord with the Church's teaching

A Symphony of Differences

82. (35) *At the same time, many synod fathers insisted on a more positive approach to the richness of various religious experiences, without overlooking the inherent difficulties. In these different religious realities and in the great cultural diversity that characterizes countries, positive possibilities should be appreciated first, and then, on this basis, limitations and deficiencies should be evaluated.*

83. Based on the existence of religious and cultural pluralism, some wish that the Synod retain and value the image of a "symphony of differences." Generally speaking, there are indications that pastoral care on behalf of marriage and family needs to appreciate the positive elements present in different cultural and religious experiences, which are a *præparatio evangelica*, that is, "a preparation for the Gospel." An encounter with people who have chosen the path of awareness and responsibility towards the authentic goods of marriage can establish an effective collaboration for the promotion and defense of the family.

Chapter II

The Family and Formation

Marriage Preparation

84. (36) *Christian marriage is a vocation that is undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discernment and is not to be considered only a cultural tradition or social or legal requirement. Therefore, formation is needed to accompany the person and couple in such a way that the life experience of the entire ecclesial community can be united with the teaching of the contents of the faith.*

85. To make the vocation of Christian marriage understood requires improving marriage preparation, particularly the catechesis before marriage — sometimes poor in content presently — which is an essential part of ordinary pastoral care. It is important that the spouses responsibly cultivate their faith, based on the teaching of the Church, which needs to be presented in a clear, understandable manner.

The pastoral care of engaged couples also ought to be a part of the overall commitment

of the Christian community to present the Gospel message concerning the dignity of the person, a person's freedom and a respect for human rights, in a proper and convincing way.

86. In the cultural change taking place, models running contrary to the Christian vision of the family are oftentimes presented, if not actually imposed. Consequently, training courses are to provide educational programs which can help people express adequately their desire for love in a proper language of sexuality. In today's social and cultural context, where sexuality is often separated from the overall workings of true love, the family, while maintaining its privileged spot in education, cannot be the only place for teaching sexuality. This calls for devising, within the framework of the pastoral support of families, true and proper programmes which are addressed to both individuals and couples — with special attention to those at the age of puberty and adolescence — so they can discover the beauty of sexuality in love.

Indications in some countries point to the presence of formation programmes imposed by public authority whose content is contrary to a properly human and Christian conception. In this regard, conscientious objection on the part of educators is decidedly a right to be upheld.

The Formation of Future Priests

87. (37) *The synod fathers repeatedly called for a thorough renewal of the Church's pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Family and for replacing its current emphasis on individuals. For this reason, the synod fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.*

88. A priestly vocation is born within a man's own family and is nourished by that family's witness to the faith. A widely held perception indicates a growing need to include families, particularly the presence of women, in priestly formation. Some recommend that, in the course of their formation, seminarians spend congruent periods of time living with their families, receive guidance in gaining experience in the pastoral care of the family and acquire adequate knowledge of the situation of the family in these times. That some seminarians come from difficult family backgrounds also needs to be taken into consideration. The presence of the laity and families, even in the years of seminary formation, is seen as beneficial, so that candidates for the priesthood might understand the distinctive value of the two different vocations. Formation for the ordained ministry cannot overlook emotional and psychological development as well as the seminarian's direct participation in adequate related programmes.

The Formation of the Clergy and Pastoral Workers

89. In the ongoing formation of the clergy and pastoral workers, some wish that appropriate means be employed in achieving the emotional and psychological development which will be indispensable for them in the pastoral care of families. Some suggest that a diocesan office for the family and other pastoral offices intensify their collaboration for a more effective pastoral activity.

The Family and Public Institutions

90. (38) *They equally highlighted the fact that evangelization needs to denounce with clarity cultural, social, political and economic factors, such as the excessive importance given to market logic, that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be developed with the social entities and encouragement given to Christian lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields.*

91. Given that the family is "the first and vital cell of society" (AA, 11), the family ought to rediscover its vocation of involvement in all aspects of living in society. Essentially, families, in gathering together, need to find ways to interact with public, economic and cultural institutions so they can build a more just society.

An evaluation of all areas of society indicates that collaborating with public institutions is not always easy. Indeed, many institutions promote conceptions of the family which are not in keeping with the Christian view or the sense of the family based on nature. The Church's members come in contact with different anthropological models which often affect and radically change their way of thinking.

Family associations and Catholic movements ought to work together to bring to the attention of social and civic institutions the authentic needs of the family and speak out against those practices which affect its stability.

The Socio-Political Commitment on Behalf of the Family

92. Christians ought to engage directly in the socio-political life by actively participating in the decision-process and introducing the Church's social doctrine into discussions with institutions. This commitment would foster the development of appropriate programmes to assist young people and needy families at risk of social isolation and exclusion.

At various national and international levels, reproposing the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* might prove useful, as well as highlighting its connection to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Indigence and the Danger of Usury

93. Many families living in economic poverty as a result of unemployment or job insecurity or the unusually high number of children or the lack of social assistance and healthcare as well as families often unable to receive credit, fall victim to usury. This situation prompted the suggestion that economic structures of support be created to assist these families.

Accompanying Engaged Couples in their Preparation for Marriage

94. (39) *The complex social reality and the changes affecting the family today require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included. Among these, chastity proves invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the synod fathers jointly insisted on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by favouring the witness of*

families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the course of Christian Initiation as well as emphasizing the connection between marriage, Baptism and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that specific programmes were needed in preparing couples for marriage, programmes that create a true experience of participation in ecclesial life and thoroughly treat the various aspects of family life.

95. Some hope that more topics be included in programmes of marriage preparation so they can better provide instruction for people in matters of faith and love. These programmes ought to be planned so individuals and married couples can discern their vocation. This calls for better collaboration among various pastoral initiatives — youth, family catechesis, movements and associations — so as to give more of an ecclesial sense to the formation process.

Others emphasize the need for a renewal of the pastoral care of the family in the context of a broader pastoral programme which can provide comprehensive formation at every stage in life, including the act and value of witnessing. Marriage preparation programmes might also include married couples who are in a position to give guidance to engaged couples before their wedding and in the initial years of married life, thereby giving special value to the service of married people.

Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage

96. (40) *The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the Sacrament (FC, Part III). In this regard, experienced couples are of great importance in any pastoral activity. The parish is the ideal place for these experienced couples to be of service to younger couples, with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. Married couples need encouragement in a basic openness to the great gift of children. The importance of family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist needs emphasis so couples might be encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Meaningful liturgies, devotional practices and the Eucharist celebrated for families, especially on the wedding anniversary, were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family.*

97. In the initial years of married life, couples often tend to keep to themselves, resulting in isolation from the society. For this reason, newlyweds need to experience the nearness of the community. Everyone agrees that sharing experiences of married life might help younger families develop a greater awareness of the beauty and challenges of marriage. The growth of a family to maturity calls for a strengthening of the network of relationships among couples and their creating meaningful ties. Since movements and Church groups principally offer and ensure these moments of growth and formation, some wished that these associations make a greater effort to accompany young, newly married couples in a consistent manner, especially at the diocesan level.

Chapter III

The Family and Accompaniment by the Church

Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together

98. (41) *While continuing to proclaim and foster Christian marriage, the Synod also encourages pastoral discernment of the situations of a great many who no longer live this reality. Entering into pastoral dialogue with these persons is needed to distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of Marriage in its fullness. Pastors ought to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth. A new element in today's pastoral activity is a sensitivity to the positive aspects of civilly celebrated marriages and, with obvious differences, cohabitation. While clearly presenting the Christian message, the Church also needs to indicate the constructive elements in these situations that do not yet or no longer correspond to it.*

99. Since the Sacrament of Matrimony is an indissoluble and exclusively faithful union between a man and a woman who are called to receive one another and welcome life, Christian marriage is a great grace for the human family. The Church has the duty and the mission to proclaim this grace to each person in every circumstance. The Church also ought to accompany those in a civil marriage or those living together in a gradual discovery of "the seeds of the Word" which lie hidden, so as to value them until the fullness of union in the Sacrament might be achieved.

The Path Leading towards the Sacrament of Marriage

100. (42) *The synod fathers also noted that in many countries "an increasing number of people live together ad experimentum, in unions that have not been religiously or civilly recognized" (IL, 81). In some countries, this occurs especially in traditional marriages that are arranged between families and often celebrated in different stages. Other countries are witnessing a continual increase in the number of those who, after having lived together for a long period, request the celebration of marriage in Church. Simply to live together is often a choice based on a general attitude opposed to anything institutional or definitive; it can also be done while awaiting more security in life (a steady job and steady income). Finally, in some countries de facto marriages are very numerous, not only because of a rejection of values concerning the family and matrimony but primarily because celebrating a marriage is considered too expensive in the social circumstances. As a result, material poverty leads people into de facto unions.*

101. (43) *All these situations require a constructive response, seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the fullness of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel. These couples need to be provided for and guided patiently and discreetly. With this in mind, the witness of authentic Christian families is particularly appealing and important as agents in the evangelization of the family.*

102. The choice of civil marriage or, in some cases, simply "living together" is very often not a result of prejudice or an aversion to sacramental union but instead linked to cultural or contingent situations. In many circumstances, the decision to live together is a sign of a relationship which wants to be built and opened to the prospects of personal fulfilment. The determination of a couple, which becomes translated into an enduring bond, stable and open to life, can be considered a condition for embarking on a journey of growth which can perhaps lead to a sacramental marriage — a possible good which ought to be

proclaimed as a gift to enrich and strengthen married life and the family, instead of as a difficult ideal to achieve.

103. To address this pastoral need, the members of the Christian community, especially at the local level, might work together on reinforcing how they receive people in their midst. The dynamics of pastoral relationships on a personal level can provide a solid basis for a sound teaching method which, inspired by grace and in a respectful manner, might foster the gradual opening of minds and hearts to the fullness of God's plan. In this regard, Christian families who bear witness with their lives to the truth of the Gospel have an important role to play.

Caring for Wounded Families (Persons who are Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried and Single-Parent Families)

104. (44) *Married couples with problems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. The pastoral work of charity and mercy seeks to help persons recover and restore relationships. Experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life. Forgiveness between husband and wife permits a couple to experience a never-ending love that does not pass away (cf. 1 Cor 13:8). At times, this is difficult, but those who have received God's forgiveness are given the strength to offer a genuine forgiveness that regenerates persons.*

Forgiveness in the Family

105. In family relations, the need of reconciliation is practically a daily occurrence for various reasons. Misunderstandings due to the relationships within one's family, friction because of different ingrained habits, diverse approaches to bringing up the children, anxiety over economic difficulties and tensions arising from a loss of work are just a few of the reasons which presently create conflict. Resolving these situations requires a continual willingness to understand others and forgive each other. The arduous art of restoring calm to relationships calls for not only the support of grace but also the willingness to seek outside help. In this regard, the Christian community ought to demonstrate a real readiness to offer assistance.

The most painful situations, such as marital infidelity, require a true and proper work of repair, which both consider possible. A broken spousal relationship can be re-established; this hope needs to be taught from the very beginning of marriage preparation.

In this case, the importance of the action of the Holy Spirit needs to be mentioned in the care of such people and wounded families. At the same time, this spiritual journey needs to be accompanied by duly prepared ministers. Indeed, the truth is that the Spirit, "whom the Church calls 'the light of consciences' penetrates and fills 'the depths of the human heart.' Through just such a conversion in the Holy Spirit a person becomes open to forgiveness" (*DeV*, 45).

"The Great River of Mercy"

106. (45) *The necessity for courageous pastoral choices was particularly evident at the Synod. Strongly reconfirming their faithfulness to the Gospel of the Family and acknowledging that separation and divorce are always wounds that cause deep suffering to the married couple and to their children, the synod fathers felt the urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course based on the present reality of weaknesses within the family, knowing oftentimes that these are more "endured" with suffering than freely chosen. These situations vary because of personal, cultural and socio-economic factors. Therefore, solutions need to be considered in a variety of ways, as suggested by Pope St. John Paul II (cf. FC, 84).*

107. Almost everyone agrees that taking care of wounded families and allowing them to experience the infinite mercy of God is fundamental. People differ, however, on the approach to be used. On the one hand, some consider it necessary to encourage those who live in non-marital partnerships to undertake a road of return, leading backward. On the other hand, others support inviting these people to look forward, to leave their prison of anger, disappointment, pain and loneliness and to continue on the road ahead. Of course, others say, the art of accompaniment requires a prudent and merciful discernment process, not to mention an ability to grasp the real diversity in individual situations.

108. Everyone needs to remember that the failure of a marriage is always a defeat for everyone. Consequently, after becoming aware of one's proper responsibility, each needs to regain trust and hope. Everyone has a need to give and receive mercy. In every case, justice is to be promoted for all parties involved in a failed marriage (spouses and children).

The Church has the duty to ask the spouses who are separated and divorced to conduct themselves with respect and mercy, especially for the good of the children, who should not have to endure further suffering. Some call for the Church to show a similar attitude towards those who have failed in marriage. "From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends" (MV, 25).

The Art of Accompaniment

109. (46) *All families should, above all, be treated with respect and love and accompanied on their journey as Christ accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In a particular way, the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: "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 a closeness and compassion which, at the same time, heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life" (EG, 169).*

110. Many were pleased with the synod father's reference to the figure of Jesus who accompanies the disciples on the road to Emmaus. For the Church, drawing near to the family as a companion on a journey means to adopt a prudent and differentiated mentality. At times, this means to be at one's side and to listen in silence; at other times,

to stand in front to indicate the way forward; and at still other times, to stand behind to support and to encourage. The Church makes this way of acting her own in sharing the joys and the hopes, the sorrows and the anxieties of each family.

111. Indications in the pastoral care of the family reveal major support being offered by movements and ecclesial associations, where the aspect of community is greatly emphasized and expressed in life. At the same time, preparing priests specifically for this ministry of consolation and care is important. Many expressed the desire that specialized centres be established, where priests and/or religious might learn how to care for families, especially those enduring hardship, and might commit themselves to accompanying them within the Christian community, which is not always prepared to support this task adequately.

Persons who are Separated and Divorced but Remain Faithful to their Marriage Vows

112. (47) *A special discernment is indispensable for pastorally guiding persons who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect needs to be primarily given to the suffering of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral activity, then, needs to be geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, which might even take place in specialized "listening centres" established in dioceses. At the same time, the synod fathers emphasized the necessity of addressing, in a faithful and constructive fashion, the consequences of separation or divorce on children, in every case the innocent victims of the situation. Children must not become an "object" of contention. Instead, every suitable means ought to be sought to ensure that they can overcome the trauma of a family break-up and grow as serenely as possible. In each case, the Church is always to point out the injustice that very often is associated with divorce. Special attention is to be given in the guidance of single-parent families, so that women who have to bear alone the responsibility of providing a home and raising their children can receive assistance.*

God Never Abandons Anyone

113. From various parts of the world, many noted that a merciful attitude towards those whose marital relationship has failed requires paying attention to the different objective and subjective aspects which led to the break-up. Many indicate that the dramatic effects of separation can often go so far as to result in long periods of conflict which, in the case of children, also produce great suffering. Such a situation is further exacerbated by loneliness which is caused by abandonment or from mustering the strength to discontinue living together because of continuous, grave mistreatment. These situations stand in need of the special care and concern of the Christian community, especially with regard to single-parent families, where economic problems can arise due to job insecurity, the difficulty of raising a child or for want of a place to live.

Those who do not enter into a new relationship and remain faithful to their marriage vows, deserve acknowledgment and support from the Church, which must reveal to them

the face of a God who never abandons anyone and is always ready to restore strength and hope.

Streamlining the Annulment Procedure and the Importance of Faith in Cases of Nullity

114. (48) *A great number of synod fathers emphasized the need to make the procedure in cases of nullity more accessible and less time-consuming, and, if possible, at no expense. They proposed, among others, the dispensation of the requirement of second instance for confirming sentences; the possibility of establishing an administrative means under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop; and a simple process to be used in cases where nullity is clearly evident. Some synod fathers, however, were opposed to these proposals, because they felt that they would not guarantee a reliable judgment. In all these cases, the synod fathers emphasized the primary character of ascertaining the truth about the validity of the marriage bond. Among other proposals, the role which faith plays in persons who marry could possibly be examined in ascertaining the validity of the Sacrament of Marriage, all the while maintaining that the marriage of two baptized Christians is always a sacrament.*

115. There is strong agreement on the opportunity of making annulment procedures for marriage more accessible, less time-consuming and possibly free of charge.

Regarding expenses, some suggest that dioceses provide a continuing service of marriage counselling at no expense. On the question of second instance for confirming sentences, a significant number are in favour of eliminating it, yet leaving the possibility of appeal to the defender of the bond or either of the parties concerned. On the contrary, no agreement exists on whether the diocesan bishop might assume responsibility for the procedure; some point out problem areas. Nevertheless, a significant number agree on the possible use of the summary process in canon law in clear cases of nullity.

In cases of the validity of consent in marriage, most agreed on the importance of the faith of those to be married and suggested a variety of approaches to be examined further.

The Preparation of Workers and an Increase in the Number of Tribunals

116. (49) *With respect to marriage cases, the streamlining of the procedure, requested by many synod fathers, in addition to the preparation of a sufficient number of persons — clerics and lay people — primarily dedicated to this work will require increased responsibility of the diocesan bishop. This work could be done through specially trained counsellors who would be able to offer free advice to the concerned parties on the validity of their marriage. This work could be done in an office or by qualified persons (cf. DC, art. 113, 1).*

117. One proposal wanted each diocese to provide, at no charge, information, counselling and mediation in matters related to the pastoral care of families, especially for those in troubled marriages and those who are separated. An effective service of this kind could help people undertake a judicial process, which in the history of the Church seems to be the most reliable way of discerning and ascertaining the true validity of a marriage.

In addition, the request came from various parts of the world for an increased number of ecclesiastical courts and greater decentralization in their regard and for providing them with qualified and competent personnel.

Pastoral Approaches in Common

118. (50) *Divorced people who have not remarried, who oftentimes bear witness to their promise of faithfulness in marriage, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life. The local community and pastors ought to accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty.*

119. In addition to attention to concrete situations, many feel the added necessity of fostering pastoral initiatives in common, the absence of which leads to greater confusion and division and produces grave suffering in those enduring a failed marriage, who sometimes feel unfairly judged. For example, some persons in the Church, who are separated and have not entered into a new relationship, wrongfully think that their separation is a sin which keeps them from receiving the sacraments. Furthermore, persons who are divorced and civilly remarried and are living in continence for various reasons, do not know that they can receive the sacraments in a place where their condition is unknown. Some of those in situations of irregular unions who have chosen, in the internal forum, a life of continence, can have access to the sacraments, while being careful to avoid scandal. These examples show the Church's need to offer clear guidance, so that her children, who are in special situations, do not feel a sense of discrimination.

The Integration of Divorced and Civilly Remarried Persons in the Christian Community

120. (51) *Likewise, those who are divorced and remarried require careful discernment and an accompaniment of great respect. Language or behaviour that might make them feel an object of discrimination should be avoided, all the while encouraging them to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage, but, precisely in this way, the community is seen to express its charity.*

121. Many parties request that the attention to and the accompaniment of persons who are divorced and civilly remarried take into account the diversity of situations and be geared towards a greater integration of them into the life of the Christian community. Without prejudice to the recommendations made in *Familiaris Consortio* 84, some suggest that the forms of exclusion currently followed in liturgical and pastoral practice be re-examined as well as those in education and charitable activity. Since these persons are still part of the Church, the aim is to reflect on the opportunity to eliminate these forms of exclusion. Furthermore, to promote a greater integration of these persons into the Christian community, specific attention needs to be given to the best interest of their children, given the irreplaceable role parents have in raising their children.

Before integrating persons who are divorced and civilly remarried into pastoral life, some recommend that: pastors duly discern the impossibility of abandoning their situation and

the life of faith of the couple in the new relationship; the process be accompanied by raising the sensitivity of the Christian community to receive these persons; and this work be done according to the law of gradualness (cf. *FC*, 34), while respecting the maturation of consciences.

A Way of Penance

122. (52) *The synod fathers also considered the possibility of giving the divorced and remarried access to the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Various synod fathers insisted on maintaining the present discipline, because of the constitutive relationship between participation in the Eucharist and communion with the Church as well as her teaching on the indissoluble character of marriage. Others proposed a more individualized approach, permitting access in certain situations and with certain well-defined conditions, primarily in irreversible situations and those involving moral obligations towards children who would have to endure unjust suffering. Access to the sacraments might take place if preceded by a penitential practice, determined by the diocesan bishop. The subject needs to be thoroughly examined, bearing in mind the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances, given that "imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors" (CCC, 1735).*

123. Concerning the aforementioned subject, a great number agree that a journey of reconciliation or penance, under the auspices of the local bishop, might be undertaken by those who are divorced and civilly remarried or those living together. In reference to *Familiaris Consortio*, 84, the suggestion was made to follow a process which includes: becoming aware of why the marriage failed and the wounds it caused; due repentance; verification of the possible nullity of the first marriage; a commitment to spiritual communion; and a decision to live in continence.

Others refer to a way of penance, meaning a process of clarifying matters after experiencing a failure and a reorientation which is to be accompanied by a priest who is appointed for this purpose. This process ought to lead the party concerned to an honest judgment of his/her situation. At the same time, the priest himself might come to a sufficient evaluation as to be able to suitably apply the power of binding and loosing to the situation.

In order to examine thoroughly the objective situation of sin and the moral culpability of the parties, some suggest considering *The Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Reception of Holy Communion by the Divorced and Remarried Members of the Faithful* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (4 September 1994) and *The Declaration concerning the Admission to Holy Communion of the Faithful who are Divorced and Remarried* of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts (24 June 2000).

Spiritual Participation in Church Communion

124. (53) *Some synod fathers maintained that divorced and remarried persons or those living together can have fruitful recourse to a spiritual communion. Others raised the question as to why, then, they cannot have access to sacramental Communion. As a*

result, the synod fathers requested that further theological study in the matter with a view to making clear the distinctive features of the two forms and their connection with the theology of marriage.

125. The Church's work of incorporating her members in Christ, begun in Baptism — even in the case of those who are divorced and civilly remarried — takes place in stages through a continual conversion. In this process people are invited in different ways to conform their lives to the Lord Jesus, who, with his grace, sustains them in ecclesial communion. In reference again to *Familiaris Consortio*, 84, the recommended forms of participation are: listening to the Word of God, participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, perseverance in prayer, works of charity, initiatives in the community fostering justice, the formation of children in the faith and a spirit of penance, all of which are supported by the Church's prayer and kindhearted witness. The fruit of this participation is the communion of believers with the whole community, which is an expression of being incorporated into the Church as the Body of Christ. It is important to remember that spiritual communion, which presupposes conversion and the state of grace, is connected to sacramental communion.

Mixed Marriages and Marriages of Disparity of Cult

126. (54) *The problems relative to mixed marriages were frequently raised in the interventions of the synod fathers. The differences in the matrimonial regulations of the Orthodox Churches creates serious problems in some contexts, which require due consideration from the point of view of ecumenism. Analogously, the contribution of the dialogue with other religions would be important for interreligious marriages.*

127. Mixed marriages and marriages of disparity of cult have many critical aspects which are not easily resolved, not so much at the legislative level as the pastoral level. These marriages pose a series of problems to be confronted; for example, the religious upbringing of children; participation in the liturgical life of the spouse, as is the case in mixed marriages with persons baptized in other Christian confessions; and sharing spiritual experiences with a spouse belonging to another religion or even an unbeliever in search of God. Such situations would call for formulating a policy of behaviour in which neither spouse would impede the journey of faith of the other. Consequently, dealing constructively with differences regarding the faith would necessitate paying particular attention to people who are actually living in these marriages and not simply to couples during the period of preparation before the wedding.

128. Some suggest that mixed marriages might be considered as cases of "grave necessity," in which it is possible that a baptized person who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church, yet shares the Church's faith in the Eucharist, be allowed to receive the Eucharist, when their pastors are not available and taking into account the criteria of the ecclesial community to which they belong (cf. *EdE*, 45-46; Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 25 March 1993, 122-128).

The Special Nature of the Orthodox Tradition

129. Those who make reference to the matrimonial practice of the Orthodox Churches ought to bear in mind the difference in these Churches' theological understanding of marriage. The Orthodox Churches link the practice of blessing a second union to the notion of "economy" (*oikonomia*), understood to be a pastoral accommodation towards failed marriages, without calling into question the ideal of an absolute monogamous relationship or the uniqueness of marriage. In itself, this blessing is a penitential celebration to invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that human weakness might be healed and the penitent might be restored to communion with the Church.

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies

130. (55) *Some families have members who have a homosexual tendency. In this regard, the synod fathers asked themselves what pastoral attention might be appropriate for them in accordance with Church teaching: "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." Nevertheless, men and women with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity. "Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, 4).*

131. The following point needs to be reiterated: every person, regardless of his/her sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his/her human dignity and received with sensitivity and great care in both the Church and society. It would be desirable that dioceses devote special attention in their pastoral programmes to the accompaniment of families where a member has a homosexual tendency and of homosexual persons themselves.

132. (56) *Exerting pressure in this regard on the Pastors of the Church is totally unacceptable: it is equally unacceptable for international organizations to link their financial assistance to poorer countries with the introduction of laws that establish "marriage" between persons of the same sex.*

Chapter IV

The Family, Procreation and Upbringing

The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of a Declining Birthrate

133. (57) *Today, the diffusion of a mentality that reduces the generation of human life to one variable of an individual's or couple's plans is easily observable. Sometimes, economic factors are burdensome, contributing to a sharp drop in the birthrate that weakens the social fabric, compromises relations between generations and renders a future outlook more uncertain. Openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love. In this regard, the Church supports families who accept, raise and surround with affection children with various disabilities.*

134. Some see a need to continue to make known the documents of the Church's Magisterium which promote the culture of life in the face of the increasingly widespread

culture of death. In this regard, great importance is given to some centres engaged in research in human fertility and infertility, research which is fostering a dialogue between Catholic bio-ethicists and scientists adept in bio-medical technology. Pastoral activity on behalf of the family should involve more Catholic bio-medical specialists in preparing couples for marriage and in accompanying married people.

135. Some urgently call for Christians involved in the political life to make appropriate and responsible choices in passing laws which promote and defend life. Just as the Church's voice on these issues is heard at the socio-political level, every effort should be made to establish a dialogue with international bodies and policy makers in order to promote respect for human life, from conception to natural death. In this regard, special care needs to be given to families with disabled children.

Responsible Parenthood

136. *(58) Pastoral work in this area needs to start with listening to people and acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life, which is needed, if human love is to be lived fully. This serves as the basis for an appropriate teaching regarding the natural methods for responsible procreation, which allow a couple to live, in a harmonious and conscious manner, the loving communication between husband and wife in all its aspects along with their responsibility at procreating life. In this regard, we should return to the message of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Blessed Pope Paul VI, which highlights the need to respect the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods in regulating births. The adoption of children, orphans and the abandoned and accepting them as one's own is a specific form of the family apostolate (cf. AA, III, 11), and has oftentimes been called for and encouraged by the Magisterium (cf. FC, III, II; EV, IV, 93). The choice of adoption or foster parenting expresses a particular fruitfulness of married life, not simply in the case of sterility. Such a choice is a powerful sign of family love and an occasion to witness to one's faith and to restore the dignity of a son or daughter to a person who has been deprived of this dignity.*

137. In relation to the rich content of *Humanae Vitae* and the issues it treats, two principal points emerge which always need to be brought together. One element is the role of conscience as understood to be God's voice resounding in the human heart which is trained to listen. The other is an objective moral norm which does not permit considering the act of generation a reality to be decided arbitrarily, irrespective of the divine plan of human procreation. A person's over-emphasizing the subjective aspect runs the risk of easily making selfish choices. An over-emphasis on the other results in seeing the moral norm as an insupportable burden and unresponsive to a person's needs and resources. Combining the two, under the regular guidance of a competent spiritual guide, will help married people make choices which are humanly fulfilling and ones which conform to God's will.

Adoption and Foster Parenting

138. To provide families for the many children who are abandoned, many ask that more attention be given to the importance of adoption and foster care. In this regard, it must be emphasized that raising a child has to be based on the differences between the sexes

as in procreation, which also takes place in the act of conjugal love between a man and a woman, both of whom are indispensable for the integral formation of a child.

In those cases where a child is sometimes wanted "as one's own" and in whatever way possible — as if the child were simply an extension of one's own wishes and desires — adoption and foster care, properly understood, illustrate an important aspect of parenting and raising children, in that they help parents recognize that children, whether natural, adopted or in foster care, are "persons other than one's self" and, therefore, need to be accepted, loved, and cared for and not just "brought into the world."

On this basis, adoption and foster care should be appreciated and further treated, even within the theology of marriage and the family.

Human Life: An Intangible Mystery

139. (59) *Affectivity needs assistance, also in marriage, as a path to maturity in the ever-deepening acceptance of the other and an ever-fuller gift of self; in this sense, the necessity of offering programmes of formation that nourish married life and the importance of the laity, providing an accompaniment that consists in a vibrant witness, was reiterated. Undoubtedly, the example of a faithful and deep love is of great assistance; a love shown in tenderness and respect; a love that is capable of growing over time; and a love that, in the very act of opening itself to the generation of life, gives an experience of a mystery that transcends us.*

140. Life is a gift of God and a transcendent mystery. Consequently, in no manner must persons at the beginning of life or its end be "discarded". On the contrary, steps ought to be taken to ensure that these stages of human life receive special attention. Today, "human beings themselves are (too easily) being considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a 'throw away' culture which is now spreading." (EG, 53). In this regard, the task of the family, supported by everyone in society, is to welcome an unborn human life and take care of human life in its final stage.

141. With regard to the tragedy of abortion, the Church affirms, above all, the sacred and inviolable character of human life and is actively committed to defend life. Her institutions provide counsel to pregnant women, support to single, teenage mothers and assistance to abandoned children, and are close to those who have suffered through abortion. The Church reminds those who work in healthcare facilities of the moral obligation of conscientious objection.

Similarly, the Church not only feels the urgency to assert the right to a natural death, avoiding overly aggressive treatments and euthanasia, but also provides care for the elderly, protection for people with disabilities, assistance to the terminally ill and comfort to the dying.

The Challenge of Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization

142. (60) *One of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today's cultural reality and the great influence of the media. Consideration, then, needs to be given to the needs and*

expectations of families, capable of being places of growth in daily life, places of a concrete and essential transmission of the virtues that give form to our existence. Parents, then, are able freely to choose the type of education for their children, according to their convictions.

143. Everyone agrees that the first school in raising a child is the family and that the Christian community offers support and assistance in the family's irreplaceable role in upbringing. Many see the need to provide places and opportunities where families can meet so as to encourage parental formation and the sharing of experiences among families. Since parents are the primary educators and witnesses of the faith for their children, it is important that they are actively involved in their preparation for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

144. In different cultures, the adults in the family retain an irreplaceable role in education. However, many places are witnessing a progressive weakening in the role of parents in upbringing, because of an invasive presence of the media in the family as well as the tendency to delegate this task to other entities. This requires that the Church encourage and support families in their vigilant and responsible supervision in a school's academic and formative programmes which affect their children.

145. (61) *The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian Initiation, by being welcoming communities. More than ever, these communities today are to offer support to parents, in complex situations and everyday life, in their work of raising their children, accompanying children, adolescents and young people in their development through personalized pastoral programmes, capable of introducing them to the full meaning of life and encouraging them in their choices and responsibilities, lived in the light of the Gospel. Mary, in her tenderness, mercy and maternal sensitivity can nourish the hunger of humanity and life itself. Therefore, families and the Christian people should seek her intercession. Pastoral work and Marian devotion are an appropriate starting point for proclaiming the Gospel of the Family.*

146. Christian families have the duty to pass on the faith to their children, a duty which is founded on the commitment made in the celebration of marriage. It's implementation, required at every stage of family life, is supported by the Christian community. In particular, preparing children for the Sacraments of Christian Initiation is an invaluable opportunity for parents to rediscover their faith, as they return to the very foundation of their Christian vocation and see in God the source of their love, which he consecrated in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The role of grandparents in the transmission of the faith and religious traditions and devotions must not be forgotten. As apostles, they are irreplaceable in families, because of their wise counsel, prayer and good example. Participating in the Sunday liturgy, listening to the Word of God, frequenting the sacraments and living a life of charity will ensure that parents give a clear and credible witness of Christ to their children.

CONCLUSION

147. This *Instrumentum Laboris* comes in the course of time between two synodal

assemblies which is the fruit of the pastoral creativity of Pope Francis, who, in a year's time, convoked two synodal assemblies on the same topic to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of Second Vatican Council and the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Blessed Pope Paul VI. If the III Extraordinary General Assembly, last Fall, helped the entire Church focus on *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, the XIV Ordinary General Assembly, scheduled for October 2015, will be called upon to reflect on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*. Moreover, the celebration of the next Synod is to take place on the eve of the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis and set to begin on 8 December 2015.

As was the case at the previous synod, the large number of responses and observations received by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops is indicative of the extraordinary interest and active participation of the People of God everywhere. Although the summary of the proposals in this document are unable to give a full account of the richness of the material which arrived from every continent, the text, nevertheless, can serve as a dependable reflection of the insights and perceptions of the whole Church on the crucial subject of the family.

The work of the next Synodal assembly is entrusted to the Holy Family of Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who urge "us to rediscover the vocation and mission of the family" (Francis, *General Audience*, 17 December 2014).

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendour of true love,
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again
experience violence, rejection and division:
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may the approaching Synod of Bishops
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.

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