

Synod 15 – Final Report of the Synod of Bishops for the Holy Father Francis
(October 24th, 2015), 10. 24.2015

In the following National Catholic Register working translation of the original Italian document, we publish the text of the Final Report of the Synod of Bishops for the Holy Father Francis, at the end of the 14th General Ordinary Assembly (4th-25th of October, 2015) on the subject “The vocation and the mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world.” The Vatican is expected to publish an official translation in a few weeks.

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Paul VI

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA

[Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem \(November 18, 1965\)](#)

AG

[Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree Ad Gentes \(December 7, 1965\)](#)

CCC

[Catechism of the Catholic Church \(August 15, 1997\)](#)

CiV

[Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate \(June 29, 2009\)](#)

DC

[Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Instruction Dignitas Connubii \(January 25, 2005\)](#)

DCE

[Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est \(December 25, 2005\)](#)

DeV

[Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Dominum et Vivificantem \(May 18, 1986\)](#)

GS

[Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Constitution Pastoral Gaudium et Spes \(December 7, 1965\)](#)

EdE

[Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia \(April 17, 2003\)](#)

EG

[Francis, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium \(November 24, 2013\)](#)

EN

[Blessed Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi \(December 8, 1975\)](#)

[Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae \(March 25, 1995\)](#)

FC

[Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio \(November 22, 1981\)](#)

IL

[III General Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Instrumentum Laboris \(June 24, 2014\)](#)

LF

[Francis, Encyclical Letter Lumen Fidei \(June 29, 2013\)](#)

LG

[Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium \(November 21, 1964\)](#)

LS

[Francis, Encyclical Laudato Si' \(May 24, 2015\)](#)

MV

[Francis, Bull Misericordiae Vultus \(April 11, 2015\)](#)

NA

[Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, Decree Nostra Aetate \(October 28, 1965\)](#)

NMI

[Saint John Paul II, Apostolical Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte \(January 6, 2001\)](#)

RM

Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio (7th of December, 1990)
http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html

VS

[Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor \(August 6, 1993\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

1. We Fathers, brought together in the Synod around Pope Francis, thank Him for having called us together to reflect with Him, and under His leadership, on the vocation and mission of the family today. We offer to Him the fruit of our work with humility, in awareness of the limits that this presents. We can, above all, affirm that we have constantly held before us the families of the world, with their joys and hopes, with their hardships and anxieties. The disciples of Christ know that “nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.” (GS, 1). We thank the Lord for the generous fidelity with which many Christian families respond to their vocation and mission, even before obstacles, incomprehension, and suffering. To these families belongs the encouragement of the entire Church which, united to its Lord and sustained by the action of the Spirit, knows it has a word of truth and hope to give to all men. Pope Francis reminded us of this in the celebration with which the last leg of this synodal journey dedicated to the family was opened: “God has not created the human being to live in sadness or to be alone, but for happiness, to share his journey with another person who completes him [...]. It is the same design which Jesus [...] summarizes in these words: “From the beginning of creation [God] made them man and woman; for this man will leave his father and mother and will unite himself to his wife and the two will become one flesh. Thus, they are no longer two, but one flesh alone” (Mk 10,6-8; cf. Gen 1,27; 2,24). God “unites the hearts of a man and woman who love each other and unites them in unity and indissolubility. This means that the objective of the conjugal life is not only to live together forever, but to love each other forever! Jesus thus reestablishes the original and originating order. [...] only in light of the gratuitousness of the paschal love of Jesus will the folly of the gratuitousness of a single conjugal love even unto death appear comprehensible” (Homily of the opening Mass of the Synod, 4th of October, 2015).

2. Birthplace of joys and trials, the family is the first and fundamental “school of humanity” (cf. GS, 52). Notwithstanding the signs of crisis in the familial institution, in various contexts, the desire for family remains alive in the young generations. The Church, experienced in humanity and faithful to its mission, announces with profound conviction the “Gospel of the family”: received with the Revelation of Jesus Christ and uninterruptedly taught by the Fathers, by Masters of spirituality and by the Magisterium of the Church. The family assumes for the journey of the Church a special importance: “So great was the love

that [God] began to walk with humanity, he began to walk with his people, until the ripe moment arrived and he gave the greatest sign of his love: his Son. And where did he send his Son? Into a mansion? Into a city? To make business? He sent him into a family. God entered into the world in a family. And he was able to do it because that family was a family which had its heart open to love and had its doors open” (Francis, Discourse at the Festival of the Family, Philadelphia, September 27, 2015). The families of today are sent as “missionary disciples” (cf. EG, 120). In this sense it is necessary that the family is rediscovered as a subject necessary for evangelization.

3. The Pope called the Synod of Bishops to reflect on the reality of the family. “Already, coming together as one around the Bishop of Rome is an event of grace, in which the episcopal collegiality is manifested in a spiritual and pastoral journey of discernment” (Francis, Discourse on the occasion of the Vigil of prayer in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the family, October 4, 2014). In the arc of two years, the General Extraordinary Assembly (2014) and the General Ordinary Assembly (2015) took place, which assumed the task of listening to the signs of God and of the history of mankind, in fidelity to the Gospel. The fruit of the first synodal appointment, to which the People of God gave its important contribution, flowed together into the Report of the Synod. Our dialogue and our reflection were inspired by a three-fold orientation. Hearing the reality of the family today, within the perspective of the faith, with the complexity of its lights and its shadows. Eyes on Christ, to rethink, with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, the revelation transmitted in the faith of the Church. Dialogue in the Holy Spirit, in order to discern the ways with which to renew the Church and society in their commitment to the family founded on the marriage between man and woman. The Christian announcement with regard to the family is truly good news. The family, beyond being pushed to respond to contemporary problems, is above all called by God to take an always new consciousness of its own missionary identity. The Synodal Assembly was enriched by the presence of couples and families in a debate which affects them directly. Conserving the precious fruit of the previous Assembly, dedicated to the challenges of the family, we have turned our gaze to its vocation and mission in the Church and in the contemporary world.

PART I

THE CHURCH LISTENING TO THE FAMILY

4. The mystery of the creation of life on the earth fills us with enchantment and wonder. The family based on the marriage of man and woman is the magnificent and irreplaceable location of the personal love which transmits life. Love is not reduced to the illusion of the moment, love is not an end in itself, love seeks the trustworthiness of a personal “you.” In the reciprocal promise of love, in good and bad fortune, love wants continuity of life, until death. The fundamental desire of forming the loving solid, and intergenerational bond of the family presents itself as significantly constant, beyond cultural and religious confines and social changes. In the liberty of the “yes” exchanged by the man and woman for their whole lives, the love of God is made present and is experienced. For the Catholic faith, marriage is a sacred sign in which the love of God for his Church becomes efficacious. The Christian family as such is part of the lived Church: a “domestic Church”.

The couple and married life are not abstract realities, they remain imperfect and vulnerable. For this reason the will for conversion is always necessary, of pardoning and beginning again.

As part of our responsibility as Pastors, we are concerned about the life of families. We want to pay attention to the reality of their lives and to their challenges and accompany them with the loving eyes of the Gospel. We want to give them strength and help them to receive their mission today. We want to accompany them with a large heart even in their worries, giving them the courage and hope coming from the mercy of God.

Chapter I

The family and the anthropological cultural context

The socio-cultural context

5. Docile to what the Holy Spirit asks of us, we approach the families of today in their diversity, knowing that “Christ, the final Adam [...] fully reveals man to man himself” (GS, 22). We want to turn our attention to the contemporary challenges which influence many aspects of life. We are aware of the principal orientation of the anthropological-cultural changes, because of which individuals are not as well supported as in the past by social structures in their affective and family lives. On the other hand, it is equally necessary to consider the development of an exaggerated individualism which distorts the familial bonds, causing the idea of a subject constructed according to his own desires to prevail, stripping the force of all bonds. Our thoughts go out to the mothers and fathers, the grandparents, the

brothers and sisters, to relatives near and far, and to the bond between two families which every marriage creates. We ought not to forget, however, the concrete reality: the solidity of familial bonds continues everywhere to keep the world alive. Dedication to the care of the dignity of every person remains great — man, woman, and child, of ethnic groups and of minorities, as does the defense of the rights of every human being to grow up in a family. Their fidelity is not honored if a clear conviction of the value of family life is not reaffirmed, in particular entrusting ourselves to the light of the Gospel even in diverse cultures. We are aware of the great shift that the anthropological-cultural changes in effect causes in all aspects of life, and we remain firmly persuaded that the family is a gift of God, the place in which He reveals the power of his salvific grace. Today the Lord also calls man and woman to marriage, accompanies them in their family life and offers Himself to them as an ineffable gift; it is one of the signs of the times that the Church is called to examine and interpret “in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (GS, 4).

The religious context

6. The Christian faith is strong and alive. In some regions of the world, a significant decline of the impact of religion in the social sphere is observed, which influences the life of families.

This orientation tends to relegate the religious dimension to the private and familial sphere, and risks obstructing the witness and the mission of Christian families in the contemporary world. In the social context of advanced wealth, people run the risk of entrusting their every hope to the exaggerated search for social success and economic prosperity. In other regions of the world, the negative effects of an unjust global economic order induce some to forms of religiosity tending to sectarian and radical extremism. It is fitting also to mention the movements animated by political-religious fanaticism, often hostile to Christianity. Creating instability and sowing disorder and violence, these are a cause of much misery and suffering in the life of families. The Church is called to accompany the practice of religion in families in order to orient it in an evangelical direction.

The anthropological change

7. In many different cultures, relationship and belonging are important values which forge the identity of individuals. The family offers the possibility for the person to realize himself and to contribute to the growth of others in the broader society. The Christian and ecclesial identity itself, received in baptism, blossoms in family life. In contemporary society, a multiplicity of challenges are observed which manifest themselves to a lesser or greater degree in various parts of the world. In the different cultures, not a few young people show resistance to definitive commitments regarding affective relationships, and often choose to cohabit with a partner or simply to have occasional relations. The diminution of births is the result of various factors, among which are industrialization, the sexual revolution, fear of overpopulation, economic problems, and the growth of a contraceptive and abortive mentality. The consumerist society can also dissuade people from having children even if only to maintain their freedom and their own style of life. Some Catholics have difficulty conducting their lives in accord with the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage and the family, and to see in such teaching the goodness of the creative plan of God for them. The number of marriages in some parts of the world diminishes, while separations and divorces are not rare.

The cultural contradictions

8. The cultural conditions which act upon the family present, in many areas of the world, a contrary picture, also under the massive influence of the media. On one side, marriage and the family enjoy great respect, and the idea that the family represents the secure door to the profoundest and most gratifying sentiments is even still dominant. On the other side, such an image has at times the traits of excessive expectations and, consequently, of exaggerated reciprocal claims. The tensions brought on by an exaggerated individualistic culture of consumerism and of enjoyment generate, within families, dynamics of impatience and aggressiveness. One can mention, also, a certain vision of feminism, which denounces maternity as a pretext for the exploitation of the woman, as an obstacle to her full self-realization. Then, one notes the growing tendency to think of having a child as a mere instrument of self-affirmation, to be obtained by any means whatsoever. A modern challenge standing out emerges from the “gender” ideology which denies the difference and the natural reciprocity of man and woman. This ideology looks for a society without sexual difference and nullifies the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology induces educational projects and legislative orientations which promote a personal identity and affective intimacy radically unconnected to the biological diversity between man and woman. Human identity becomes consigned to an individualistic option, even mutable over time. In the vision of the faith, human sexual difference brings in itself the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1,26-27).

“This tells us that not only is man in himself the image of God, not only is the woman in herself the image of God, as a couple, they are the image of God. [...] We can say that, without the reciprocal enrichment of this relationship — in thought and action, in affection and work, and also in the faith — the two are not even able to understand in full what it signifies to be man or woman. Modern and contemporary culture has opened new spaces, new liberties, and new depths for enriching the comprehension of this difference. But it has also introduced many doubts and skepticism. [...] The removal of the difference [...] is the problem, not the solution.” (Francis, General Audience, 15th of April, 2015).

Social conflicts and tensions

9. The affective and spiritual quality of family life is gravely menaced by the multiplication of conflicts, by the impoverishment of resources, and migratory processes. Violent religious persecutions, particularly with regard to Christian families, devastate entire areas of our planet, creating movements of exodus and immense waves of refugees which exercise great pressures on the capacities of the lands welcoming them. The families tried in this way, very often, are forced to uproot and are led to the brink of dissolution. The fidelity of Christians to their faith, their patience and their attachment to their countries of origin is in every way admirable. The efforts of all politicians and religious authorities to spread and protect the culture of human rights are still insufficient. It is still necessary to respect liberty of conscience and promote the harmonious coexistence of all citizens based on citizenship, equality, and justice. The burden of economic, political, and social injustices, even in well to do communities, gravely threatens the maintenance of children and the care of the sick and elderly. The addiction to alcohol, drugs, and gambling is sometimes the expression of these social contradictions and of the unease which results in the lives of families. The accumulation of riches in the hands of a few and the diverting of resources destined to the familial project increase the impoverishment of families in many regions of the world.

Fragility and strength of the family

10. The family, the fundamental human community, in the current cultural and social crisis, painfully suffers its weakening and its fragility. Nonetheless, it shows the ability to find within itself the courage to face the inadequacy and absence of institutions in regards to the formation of the person, of the quality of the social bond, and of the care of the most vulnerable. It is, therefore, particularly necessary to adequately appreciate the strength of the family, its ability to sustain the fragile. Such a strength resides essentially in its capacity to love and to teach how to love. However much a family may be wounded, it is always able to grow, starting with love.

Chapter II

The family and the socio-economic context

The family, irreplaceable resource of society

11. “The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity [...] it is the foundation of society” (GS, 52). The entirety of the relationships between family members, over and above the restricted nuclear family, offers precious help in the education of children, in the transmission of values, in the guarding of bonds between the generations, in the enriching of a lived spirituality. While in some regions of the world this fact holds profoundly true in the social culture at large, elsewhere it seems subject to decay. Certainly, in an epoch of accentuated fragmentation of life situations, the multiple levels and facets of the relationships between family members and relatives often constitute the only points of contact with familial origins and bonds. The support of the familial network is still more necessary where moving for work, immigration, catastrophes, and fleeing one’s native land compromise the stability of the family nucleus.

Politics in favor of the family

12. The authorities responsible for the common good ought to be seriously engaged in regard to this primary social good which is the family. The preoccupation which ought to guide the administration of civil society is that which permits and promotes familial policies which sustain and encourage families, first of all the more disadvantaged. It is necessary to recognize more concretely the compensatory action of the family in the context of modern “systems of welfare”: it redistributes resources and undertakes tasks indispensable to the common good, contributing to the equalizing of the negative effects of social inequality. “The family merits special attention on the part of those responsible for the common good, because it is the fundamental cell of society, which brings the solid bonds of union on

which human cohabitation is based and, with the generation and education of its children, assures the renewal and the future of society” (Francis, Discourse at the Airport of El Alto in Bolivia, July 8, 2015).

Solitude and precariousness

13. In the cultural contexts in which relationships are made fragile by egoistic styles of life, solitude becomes always more diffused. Often, only the consciousness of the presence of God sustains people before this void. The general sensation of impotence in the face of an oppressive socio-economic reality, of growing poverty and a precarious work situation, imposes a search for employment always farther from the family, for the sake of supporting it. Such a necessity dictates long absences and separations which weaken relationships and isolate members of the family from each other.

It is the responsibility of the State to create the legislative conditions and work which guarantees the prospects of the young and help them to realize their project of starting a family. Corruption, which at times undermines these institutions, hacks away deeply at the trust and hope of new generations, and not only these. The negative consequences of this lack of trust are evident: from the demographic crisis to educative difficulties, from the fatigue of welcoming newborn life to the perceiving of the elderly as a burden, to the point that an affective uneasiness spreads which at times flows out in aggressiveness and violence.

Economy and equity

14. Material and economic condition has an influence on family life in two ways: it may contribute to its growth and facilitate its blossoming or block its flowering, its unity and coherence. Economic coercion excludes the access of families to education, to cultural and active social life. The current economic system produces diverse forms of social exclusion. Families suffer in a particular way the problems which regard work. The opportunities for the young are few and the offer of work is very selective and precarious. The work days are very long and burdened by long travel time. This does not help family members to stay together and with the children, in such a way as to nourish their relationships on a daily basis. The “growth in equity” requires “decisions, programmes, mechanisms and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income” (EG, 204) and an integral effective promotion of the poor. Adequate familial politics are necessary for family life as the condition of a livable, harmonious, and worthy prospect.

Poverty and exclusion

15. Some social and religious groups are found everywhere on the margins of society: immigrants, gypsies, homeless, fugitives, refugees, the untouchables according to the caste system and those affected by illnesses with a social stigma. Even the Holy Family of Nazareth knew the bitter experience of marginalization and of rejection (cf. Lk 2,7; Mt 2,13-15). The words of Jesus on the final judgment, with regard to that subject, are unequivocal: “Whenever you have done these things to only one of these my littlest brothers, you have done them to me” (Mt 25,40). The current economic system produces new types of social exclusion, which often render the poor invisible in the eyes of society. The dominant culture and the media contribute to the aggravation of this invisibility. This happens because: “in this system, man, the human person, has been removed from the center of things and replaced by another. Because it is rendered an idolatrous cult of money. Because indifference is globalized!” (Francis, Discourse to participants of the World Meeting of Popular Movements, October 28, 2014). In such a picture arises a particular concern for the condition of children: innocent victims of exclusion, which renders them true and proper “social orphans” and marks them tragically for the entire lives. Notwithstanding the enormous difficulties which they encounter, many poor and marginalized families struggle to live with dignity their daily life, entrusting themselves to God who does not delude and does not abandon anyone.

Ecology and family

16. The Church, thanks to the impulse of the papal magisterium, looks for a rethinking of the orientation of the global system. In this perspective, it joins in the work for the development of a new ecological culture: a thought, a policy, a program of education, a style of life and a spirituality. Since all things are intimately connected, as Pope Francis affirms in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of a “holistic ecology” which includes not only environmental dimensions, but also the human, social, and economic ones, for the sustainable development and guardianship of creation. The family, which plays a relevant part in human ecology, has to be adequately protected (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 38). By means of the family, we belong to the whole of the creation, we contribute in a specific way in promoting the care of the environment, we learn the meaning of corporality and the loving language of the male-female difference, and we collaborate in the design of the Creator (cf. LS, 5, 155). The awareness of all this demands a true and proper conversion to be realized in the family. In it “we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and

cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity” (LS, 213).

Chapter III **Family, inclusion and society**

The elderly

17. One of the most important and urgent tasks of the Christian family is to guard the links between the generations for the transmission of the faith and the fundamental values of life. The greater part of families respects the elderly, surrounds them with affection and considers them a blessing. A special note of appreciation goes to the associations and familial movements which work in favor of the elderly, on the spiritual and social side, particularly in collaboration with priests in the care of souls. In some contexts, the elderly are perceived as a treasure trove inasmuch as they guarantee the stability, the continuity and the memory of families and of the society. In highly industrialized societies, where their number tends to increase while the birthrate decreases, they risk being perceived as a burden. On the other hand, the care which they demand often becomes a difficult trial for their loved ones. “The elderly are men and women, fathers and mothers, who were there before us on the same road, in the same house, in our day to day battle for a respectable life. They are men and women from whom we have received much. The old person is not an alien. We are the elderly: in a little while, in a long while, inevitably however, even if we do not believe it. And if we do not learn to treat the elderly well, thus they will also treat us” (Francis, General Audience, March 4, 2015).

18. The presence of grandparents in the family deserve peculiar attention. They constitute the binding link connecting the generations, and they guarantee psychological and affective balance through the transmission of traditions and habits, of values and virtues, in which the more youthful may recognize their roots. Moreover, grandparents often collaborate with their children on economic and educational questions and in the transmission of the faith to their grandchildren. Many people can say that they owe to them their initiation in the Christian life. As the book of Sirach says: “Do not neglect the speech of the elders, because these also have learned from their fathers; from them you will learn discernment and how to respond in the moment of need” (Sir 8,9). We hope that in the family, in the passing of the generations, the faith is communicated and guarded as a precious inheritance new families.

Widowed persons

19. Losing a spouse is a particularly difficult experience for those who have lived the matrimonial choice and familial life as a gift. It nevertheless presents, from the perspective of the faith, diverse possibilities of being valued. In the moment in which they find themselves living this experience, some show themselves capable of knowing how to dispense their energy with even more dedication for their children and grandchildren, finding in this expression of love a new educational mission. The void left by the deceased spouse, in a certain sense, is calmed by the affection of the family members who care about the widowed persons, allowing them to safeguard, thus, the precious memory of their marriage. Those who cannot count on the presence of family members to whom they may dedicate themselves and from whom they may receive affection and who will stay close to them, ought to be supported by the Christian community with special care and availability, especially if they find themselves in precarious situations. Widowed persons are able to celebrate a new sacramental union without at all taking anything away from the importance of the previous marriage (cf. 1 Cor 7,39). At the beginning and in the development of its history, the Church has shown special care in regard to widows (cf. 1Tim 5,3-16), arriving even to the point of instituting the “ordo viduarum”, which could be reestablished today.

The last season of life and mourning in the family

20. Illness, mishap, or old age which lead to death have repercussions on the whole life of the family. The experience of mourning becomes especially cutting when the loss regards infants and the young. This painful experience demands special pastoral attention also through the involvement of Christian community. The valuing of the conclusive phase of life is today all the more necessary as, in every way, the greater postponement of the moment of passing is attempted. The fragility and dependence of the elderly are sometimes exploited unjustly for mere economic advantage. Numerous families teach us that it is possible to face the last stages of life valuing the sense of completion and of the integration of one's whole existence in the paschal mystery. A great number of elderly people are hosted in ecclesial structures where they are able to live in a serene and familial environment on the material and spiritual levels. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are grave menaces for the families of the whole world. Their practice is legal in many States. The Church, while firmly opposed to these practices, feels the obligation to help the families which take care of their elderly and ill members, and of promoting in every way the dignity and worth of the person up until the natural end of life.

Persons with special needs

21. It is necessary to give special attention to the families of persons with disabilities, in which the handicaps which break in on their lives, create a profound, and unexpected challenge, and interrupt their equilibrium, desires, and expectations. This produces contrary emotions and decisions difficult to manage and elaborate, while it imposes tasks, necessities, and new responsibilities. The familial image and the whole cycle of life is profoundly disturbed. The families who lovingly accept the difficult trials of a disabled child merit great admiration. They give to the Church and to society a precious witness of fidelity to the gift of life. The family will be able to discover, together with the Christian community, new gestures and languages, forms of comprehension and of identity, in the journey of hospitality and care in the mystery of fragility. The persons with disabilities constitute for the family a gift and an opportunity to grow in love, in mutual aid and unity. The Church, the family of God, desires to be a welcoming home for the families with disabled persons (cf. John Paul II, Homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of the community of with the disabled, 3rd of December, 2000). It collaborates in support of their familial relationships and education, and offers ways of participating in the liturgical life of the community. For many disabled, abandoned or left without a family, ecclesial care institutions often constitute their only family. To these, the Synod expresses its heartfelt gratitude and profound appreciation. Such a process of integration is more difficult in those societies in which stigma and prejudice persists — even theorized in eugenic terms. On the other hand, many families, communities, and ecclesial movements uncover and celebrate the gifts of God in persons with special needs, particularly their singular capacity for communication and bringing people together. Special attention needs to be given to disabled persons who survive the loss of their parents and wider family who had sustained them throughout their lives. The death of those by whom they were loved and that they loved renders them particularly vulnerable. The family which accepts, with the perspective of the faith, the presence of persons with disabilities will be able to recognize and guarantee the quality and value of very life, with its needs, its rights and its opportunities. It will seek services and care, and will promote companionship and affection, in every phase of life.

Unmarried persons

22. Many people who are not married not only dedicate themselves to their own family of origin, but often render great services within their circle of friends, in the ecclesial community and in their professional lives. Nonetheless, their presence and their contribution are often ignored, and this garners them a certain sense of isolation. Among them, not unusually, are found noble ideals because of which they often engage themselves entirely in art, in science, and for the good of humanity. Many, then, put their talents to work for the Christian community in the way of charity and volunteering. There are those then who do not marry because they consecrate their lives for love of Christ and of their brothers. From their dedication, the family, in the Church and society, is greatly enriched.

Immigrants, refugees, and the persecuted

23. The effect of the migratory phenomenon on the family merits particular attention. It touches, with different modalities, whole populations, in different parts of the world. The Church has exercised a role in this field on the highest level. The necessity of maintaining and developing this evangelical witness (cf. Mt 25,35) appears more urgent today than ever. The history of humanity is a history of immigrants: this truth is etched in the life of peoples and families. Our faith also confirms it: we are all pilgrims. This conviction ought to excite in us comprehension, openness, and responsibility before the challenge of immigration, as much for that lived in suffering, as for that thought of as an opportunity in life. Human mobility, which corresponds to the natural historical movement of peoples, can reveal itself an authentic source of wealth as much for the family which immigrates as for the country which hosts them. However, the forced immigration of families, the fruit of situations of war, persecution, poverty, and injustice, marred by the vicissitudes of a voyage which often puts their lives in danger, traumatizes persons and destabilizes families. The accompanying of immigrants necessitates a specific kind of pastoral care adapted to immigrant families, but also to the members of nuclear families who remain in their place of origin. This needs to be realized with respect for their cultures, for the religious and human formation from which they come, for the richness of their rites and traditions, and through a specific pastoral care. "It is important to see the immigrants not only on the basis of their regular or irregular condition, but above all as persons who, having their dignity safeguarded, are able to contribute to the wellbeing and to the progress of all, in a particular way when they responsibly assume their duties towards those who welcome them, respecting with recognition the material and spiritual patrimony of the Country that hosts them, obeying its laws and assisting with its burdens" (Francis, Message for the World day of immigrants and refugees 2016, 12th of September, 2015). Migration appears particularly dramatic and devastating for families and individuals when it takes place outside the law and undertaken by international rings of human traffickers. The same may be said when they are women or unaccompanied children, forced to undergo long stays in the places of passage, in refugee camps, where it is impossible to begin the process of integration. Extreme poverty and other situations of disintegration sometimes reduce families to the point of selling their children for prostitution or the traffic of organs.

24. The encounter with a new country and a new culture is made much more difficult when there are not the conditions of authentic hospitality and acceptance, in respect of the rights of all and of a peaceful and sympathetic coexistence. This task directly obliges the Christian community: “the responsibility of offering hospitality, solidarity, and assistance to refugees is, before all, that of the local Church. It is called upon to give flesh to the demands of the Gospel, going out to meet, without distinction, persons in their moment of need and solitude” (Pontifical Council Cor Unum and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of immigrants and travelers, Refugees, a challenge for solidarity, 26). The meaning of leaving one’s country, nostalgia for lost roots, and the difficulties of integration show us today, in many contexts, to not have been overcome and reveal new suffering even in the second and third generation of immigrant families, feeding the phenomenon of fundamentalism and of violent rejection by the hosting culture. The encounter between families reveals a precious resource for the overcoming of these difficulties, and a key role in the processes of integration is often carried out by women, through sharing in the experience of raising their children. In effect, even in their precarious situation, they give witness to a culture of familial love which encourages other families to transmit to new generations the living faith in Christ, which has sustained them in the difficult experience of immigration and been reinforced by it. The persecution of Christians, as also of those of ethnic and religious minorities, in diverse parts of the world, especially in the Middle East, represents a great trial: not only for the Church, but also for the entire international community. Every effort in favor of the permanence of families and Christian communities in their native lands should be supported. Benedict XVI has affirmed: “A Middle East without or with only a few Christians is no longer the Middle East, because the Christians are part, with other believers, of the very particular identity of the region” (Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 31).

Some peculiar challenges

25. In some societies the practice of polygamy still flourishes; in other contexts, arranged marriages endure. In countries in which the Church is a minority there are many mixed marriages and those with disparity of worship, with all the difficulties that these bring with them in regard to their juridical form, Baptism, education of children and the mutual respect from the point of view of their diversity of faith. In these marriages there may exist the danger of relativism and indifference, but there may also be the possibility that it favors the ecumenical spirit and interreligious dialogue in a harmonious communal coexistence with those who live in the same place. In many contexts, and not only in the west, the practice of living together before marriage or even that of living together without the intention of forming an institutional bond is widely spreading. To this is often added civil legislation which compromises marriage and the family. Because of secularization, in many parts of the world, reference to God is strongly diminished and the faith is no longer shared in public.

The children

26. Children are a blessing of God (cf. Gen 4,1). They ought to be put first in family and social life, and constitute a priority in the pastoral action of the Church. “In effect, from how the children are treated one may judge the society, not only morally, but also sociologically, whether it is a free society or a society enslaved to international interests. [...] Children remind us [...] that we are always children [...]. And this always brings us back to the fact that we have not given ourselves life, but we have received it” (Francis, General Audience, March 18, 2015). However, often children become objects contested by the parents and are the true victims of wounded families. The rights of children are neglected in many ways. In some areas of the world, they are considered true and proper merchandise, treated as low price labor, used to make war, objects of every type of physical and psychological violence. Migrant children become exposed to various types of suffering. The sexual exploitation of children constitutes then one of the most scandalous and perverse realities of contemporary society. In societies that have gone through the violence of war, terrorism and the presence of organized crime, degraded familial situations are increasing. In the great cities and on their outskirts, the so-called phenomenon of children of the street is dramatically worsening.

The woman

27. The woman has a determinate role in the life of a person, of the family, and of the society. “Every human person owes its life to a mother, and almost always owes to her much of its successive existence, of its human and spiritual formation” (Francis, General Audience, 7th of January, 2015). The mother guards the memory and the meaning of birth for her entire life: “Mary, for her part, kept all these things in her heart, meditating on them in her heart” (Lk 2,19.51). It remains true, however, that the condition of the woman in the world is subject to great differences which derive prevalently from socio-cultural factors. It is not simply a matter of a problem of economic resources, but of a different cultural perspective, as the difficult condition of women in various recently developed countries proves. In numerous contexts, even today, being a woman provokes discrimination: the gift itself of maternity is penalized instead of prized. On the other hand, being sterile for a woman, is a condition socially

discriminated against. One ought not either forget the growing phenomenon of violence of which women are victims within families. The exploitation of women and the violence exercised upon their bodies are often united to abortion and to forced sterilization. To this are added the negative consequences of practices connected to procreation, like uterus for rent or the market for their eggs and embryos. Female emancipation requires a rethinking of the tasks of the spouses in their reciprocity and in their common responsibility to the life of the family. The desire for the child at any cost has not brought happier and more solid family relations, but in many cases it has in fact aggravated the inequality between women and men. A greater appreciation of their responsibility in the Church may contribute to the social recognition of the important role of women: their intervention in decision making processes, their participation in the governing of some institutions, their involvement in the formation ordained ministers.

The man

28. The man covers a role equally decisive in the life of the family, with particular reference to the protection and support of wife and children. The model of this figure is St. Joseph, a just man, who in the hour of danger "took with him the baby and his mother in the night" (Mt 2,14) and he took them to safety. Many men are aware of the importance of their role in the family and they live it with the peculiar attributes of the masculine nature. The absence of the father gravely mars the life of the family, the education of the children and their insertion into society. His absence may be physical, affective, cognitive and spiritual. This lack deprives the children of an adequate model of paternal behavior. The growing working commitment of the woman outside the home has not found sufficient compensation in a greater commitment by the man in the domestic environment. In today's context, the sensitivity of the man to the task of the protection of the spouse and of the children from every form of violence and debasement is weakened. "The husband — Paul says — has to love the wife "as his own body" (Eph 5,28); to love her as Christ "has loved the Church and has given himself for it" (v. 25). But do you husbands [...] understand this? Love your wife as Christ loves the Church? [...] The effect of this radical dedication asked of the man, for the love and the dignity of the woman, upon the example of Christ, must have been enormous, in the Christian community itself. This seed of the evangelical news, which reestablishes the original reciprocity of dedication and respect, slowly matured in history, but in the end has prevailed" (Francis, General Audience, 6th of May, 2015).

The youth

29. Many young people continue to see marriage as the great longing of their life and the project of a proper family as the realization of their aspirations. In actuality, however, they assume a different orientation in the face of marriage. Often they are induced to postpone marriage for problems, economic, work related, or of study. Sometimes even for other motives, like the influence of ideologies which do not value marriage and the family, the experience of the failure of other couples which they do not want to risk, fear towards something which they consider too great and sacred, the social opportunities and economic advantages that come from cohabitation, a merely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing freedom and autonomy, the rejection of something considered institutional and bureaucratic. The Church looks with apprehension upon the lack of trust many young people have of marriage, and suffers for the precipitousness with which many faithful decide to put an end to the conjugal endeavor in order to start another. The young baptized ought to be encouraged not to hesitate before the richness which the sacrament of marriage brings to their plans for love, strong in the support they receive from the grace of Christ and from the possibility of participating fully in the life of the Church. It is therefore necessary to discern more carefully the profound motivations of the renunciation and discouragement. The young are able to acquire greater faith in the face of the matrimonial choice thanks to those families who, in the Christian community, offer them the trustworthy example of a witness lasting through time.

Chapter IV

Family, affectivity and life

The relevance of the affective life

30. "Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. Jn 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. Jn 19:34)" (DCE, 7).

The need to take care of one's own person, of knowing oneself interiorly, of living in greater harmony with one's emotions and sentiments, of seeking affective relationships of quality, ought to open us to the gift of the love of another and to the desire of constructing creative reciprocities, those making one responsible and loyal, like those in family life. The challenge for the Church is to help couples in the maturation of the emotional dimension and in affective development through the promotion of dialogue,

of virtue and of trust in the merciful love of God. The full engagement of dedication, demanded in Christian marriage, is a strong antidote to the temptation of an individualistic existence folded in on itself.

The formation of the gift of self

31. The style of familial relations shapes, in a primary way, the affective formation of young generations. The velocity with which the changes in contemporary society take place renders the accompanying of the person in their affective formation on the road to maturity more difficult. This also demands an appropriate pastoral action, rich in knowledge which has looked into the depths of the Scripture and of Catholic doctrine, and gifted with adequate educational instruments. An opportune knowledge of the psychology of the family will be of help in ensuring that the Christian vision is transmitted efficaciously: this educational effort is already begun in the catechesis of Christian initiation. This formation will take care to render the virtue of chastity, understood as the integration of affectivity, which favors the gift of self, appreciated.

Fragility and immaturity

32. In today's world, cultural tendencies which aim at imposing a sexuality without limits of which all directions are to be explored, even the most complex, are not missing. The question of effective fragility is very current: a narcissistic affectivity, unstable and mutable does not help the person to reach greater maturity. They should be firmly condemned: the great diffusion of pornography and of the commercialization of the body, also fed by a distorted use of the Internet; forced prostitution and its exploitation. In this context, couples are at times uncertain, hesitant and they struggle to find the paths by which to grow. Many are those who remain in the first stages of the emotional and sexual life. The crisis of the couple destabilizes the family and may produce, through separations and divorces, serious consequences for adults, children and society, weakening the individual and social bonds. The demographic collapse, caused by an anti-birth mentality and promoted by the world politics of "reproductive health," menaces the bond between the generations. From it also arises economic impoverishment and a general loss of hope.

Technology and human procreation

33. The biotechnological revolution in the field of human procreation has introduced the possibility of manipulating the generative act, rendering it independent of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. In this way, human life and parenthood have become things to be constructed or broken apart, subject prevalently to the desires of singles or couples, not necessarily heterosexual or regularly married. This phenomenon has presented itself in the last few years as something completely new on the human scene, and is acquiring an ever greater diffusion. All this has profound repercussions on the dynamic of relationships, on the structure of social life and on juridical ordinances, which intervene in the attempt to regulate practices already in effect and divergent situations. In this context, the Church perceives the necessity of saying a word of truth and hope. It behooves us to start from the conviction that man comes from God and lives constantly in His presence: "Human life is sacred because, from its beginning, it brings with it 'the creative action of God' and always remains in a special relationship with the Creator, his only end. Only God is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end: no one, under no circumstance, can claim for himself the right of directly destroying an innocent human being" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Donum vitae*, Introd., 5; cf. John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 53).

The challenge for pastoral care

34. A reflection capable of re-proposing the great questions about what it means to be human, finds fertile ground in the most profound expectations of humanity. The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to the search which passes through human existence even in a time marked by individualism and hedonism. It is necessary to receive people, with comprehension and sensitivity, in their concrete existence, and to know how to support their search for meaning. The faith encourages the yearning for God and the desire to feel oneself fully part of the Church even in those who have experienced failure or find themselves in the most difficult situations. The Christian message always has within it the reality and the dynamic of mercy and of truth, which converge in Christ: "The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident" (MV, 12). In formation for conjugal and familial life, pastoral care will take account of the plurality of concrete situations. If on one hand, it is necessary to promote paths which guarantee the formation of young people for marriage, on the other, it is necessary to accompany those who live alone or without constituting a new family nucleus, remaining frequently bound to the family of origin. The couples who are not able to have children also have to be the object of a particular pastoral care on the part of the Church, which helps them to discover the plan of God for

their situation, in the service of the whole community. All need an expression of comprehension, taking account of the fact that situations of separation from ecclesial life are not always desired by them, often they are induced or even suffered. From the point of view of faith they are not excluded: all are loved by God and are at the heart of the pastoral action of the Church.

PART II THE FAMILY IN THE PLAN OF GOD

35. The discerning of the vocation of the family in the multiplicity of situations which we have met in the first part requires a secure orientation for the journey and the accompaniment. This compass is the Word of God in history, which culminates in Jesus Christ the "Way, Truth, and Life" for every man and woman who constitute a family. We are attentive, therefore, to the teaching of the Church on the family in the light of Sacred Scripture and Tradition. We are convinced that this Word responds to the most profound human expectations for love, truth and mercy, and reawakens capacities for gift and caregiving even in broken and humiliated hearts. In this light, we believe that the Gospel of the family begins with the creation of man in the image of God, who is love, and calls the man and woman to love according to His likeness (cf. Gen 1,26-27). The vocation of the couple and of the family to the communion of love and life endures in all the stages of the plan of God notwithstanding the limits and sins of men. This vocation is founded from the beginning on Christ the redeemer (cf. Eph 1,3-7). He restores and perfects the original matrimonial covenant (cf. Mk 10,6), He heals the human heart (cf. Jn 4,10), He gives it the capacity to love as He loves the Church, offering Himself for it (cf. Eph 5,32).

36. This vocation receives its ecclesial form and mission from the sacramental bond which consecrates the indissoluble conjugal relationship between the spouses. The exchange of consent, which institutes it, signifies for the spouses the duty of reciprocal gift of self and care, total and definitive, in "one flesh" (Gen 2,24). The grace of the Holy Spirit makes the union of the spouses a living sign of the bond of Christ with the Church. Their union thus becomes, for the entire course of life, a source of many graces: of fecundity and witness, of healing and pardon. Marriage is realized in the community of life and love, and the family becomes evangelizing. The spouses, having been made His disciples, are accompanied by Jesus in the journey to Emmaus, they recognize Him in the breaking of bread, they return to Jerusalem in the light of the resurrection (cf. Lk 24,13-43). The Church announces to the family its bond with Jesus, in virtue of the incarnation through which He is a part of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The faith recognizes in the indissoluble bond of the spouses a reflection of the divine Trinity, which is revealed in the unity of truth and mercy proclaimed by Jesus. The Synod renders itself an interpreter of the witness of the Church, which clearly announces to the people of God the truth of the family according to the Gospel. No distance impedes the family from being reached by this mercy and sustained by this truth.

Chapter I The family in the history of salvation

The divine pedagogy

37. Given that the order of creation is determined by its orientation to Christ, it is necessary to distinguish without separating the different degrees through which God communicates to humanity the grace of the covenant. Because of the divine pedagogy, according to which the design of creation is completed in that of the redemption through successive stages, it is necessary to understand the novelty of the nuptial sacrament in continuity with the original natural marriage, based on the order of creation. In this perspective, the mode of the salvific action of God in the Christian life must be understood. Because everything was made by means of Christ and in view of Him (cf. Col 1,16), Christians "gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows. At the same time, however, let them look to the profound changes which are taking place among nations" (AG, 11). The incorporation of the believer within the Church through baptism is fully completed with the other sacraments of Christian initiation. In that domestic Church which is the family, he undertakes "a dynamic process develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (FC, 9), through the continual conversion to love which saves from sin and grants fullness of life. In the contemporary challenges of society and culture, the faith turns its gaze upon Jesus Christ in contemplation and adoration of his face. He looked upon the men and women he met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with truth, patience and mercy, in announcing the demands of the Kingdom of God. "Every time that we return to the source of Christian experience, new paths and unthought-of possibilities open up" (Francis, Discourse in occasion of the Vigil of prayer in preparation of the Synod on the family, October 4, 2014).

The icon of the Trinity in the family

38. The Scripture and Tradition open up for us access to a knowledge of the Trinity which reveals itself with familial traits. The family is the image of God which "in its most intimate mystery, is not solitude, but a family, given that it has in itself paternity, sonship, and the essence of the family which is love" (John Paul II, Homily during the Holy Mass in the Seminary Palafoxiano of Puebla de Los Angeles, January 28, 1979). God is a communion of persons. In baptism, the voice of the Father designates Jesus as his beloved Son, and in this love we recognize the Holy Spirit (cf. Mk 1,10-11). Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself and redeemed man from sin, not only did He bring marriage and the family back to its original form, but He also elevated marriage to be the sacramental sign of his love for the Church (cf. Mt 19,1-12; Mk 10,1-12; Eph 5,21-32). In the human family, reunited by Christ, the "image and likeness" of the Holy Trinity is restored (cf. Gen 1,26), the mystery from which flows all true love. From Christ, through the Church, the marriage and the family receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, to give witness of the Gospel of the love of God up until the completion of the Covenant on the last day at the wedding feast of the Lamb (cf. Ap 19,9; John Paul II, Catechesis on human love). The covenant of love and fidelity, which the Holy Family of Nazareth lives, illuminates the principle which gives form to every family and renders it capable of better facing the vicissitudes of life and history. On this foundation, every family, even in its weakness, is able to become a light in the darkness of the world. "Here we understand the way of living in family. Nazareth reminds us what the family is, what the communion of love is, its austere and simple beauty, its sacred and inviolable character; it allows us to see how sweet and irreplaceable formation in the family is, it teaches us its natural function in the social order" (Paul VI, Discourse held in Nazareth, January 5, 1964).

The family in Sacred Scripture

39. The man and woman, with their fruitful and generative love, continue the work of creation and collaborate with the Creator in salvation history through the succession of generations (cf. Gen 1,28; 2,4; 9,1.7; 10; 17,2.16; 25,11; 28,3; 35,9.11; 47,27; 48,3-4). The marital reality in its exemplary form is treated in the book of Genesis, to which Jesus also refers in his vision of nuptial love. Man feels himself incomplete because of the lack of a helper who "corresponds" to him, who "faces him" (cf. Gen 2,18.20) in equal dialogue. The woman partakes, therefore, of the same reality as the man, represented symbolically by the rib, or of the same flesh, as is proclaimed in the love song of the man: "this time it is truly flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones" (Gen 2,23). The two become, thus, "one flesh alone" (cf. Gen 2,24). This foundational reality of the matrimonial experience is exalted in the formula of reciprocal belonging, present in the profession of love pronounced by the woman of the Canticle of Canticles. The formula recalls that of the covenant between God and his people (cf. Lv 26,12): "my love is mine and I am his...I am of my love and my love is mine" (Ct 2,16; 6,3). It is significant, then, in the Canticle, the constant interlinking of sexuality, of eros and of love, just as is the meeting of corporality with tenderness, sentiment, passion, spirituality and total giving. In the consciousness that there may be the night of absence and interrupted dialogue between her and him (cc. 3 e 5), there abides, nonetheless, the certitude of the power of love against every obstacle: "strong as death and love" (Ct 8,6). Biblical prophecy, to celebrate the covenant of love between God and his people, will have recourse not only to nuptial symbolism (cf. Is 54; Jer 2,2; Ez 16), but also to the whole familial experience, as, in a particular way, the prophet Hosea attests. His dramatic marital and familial experience (cf. Hos 1-3) becomes a sign of the relation between the Lord and Israel. The infidelities of the people do not cancel the invincible love of God which the prophet describes as a father, who guides and embraces to himself "with chains of love" his son (cf. Hos 11,1-4).

40. In the words of eternal life which Jesus left for his disciples, with his teaching on marriage and the family, we are able to recognize three fundamental stages in the design of God. In the beginning, there is the original family, when God the creator instituted the primordial marriage between Adam and Eve, as a solid foundation for the family. God not only created the human being male and female (cf. Gen 1,27), but he also blessed them so that they might be fruitful and multiply (cf. Gen 1,28). Therefore, "The man will leave his father and mother and will unite himself to his wife and the two will be one flesh" (Gen 2,24). This union, then, wounded by sin, in the historical form of marriage in the tradition of Israel has known various oscillations: between monogamy and polygamy, stability and divorce, reciprocity and subordination of the woman to the man. The concession of Moses on the possibility of repudiation (cf. Dt 24,1ss), which persisted at the time of Jesus, is understood within this picture. In the end, the reconciliation of the fallen world, with the coming of the Savior, not only restores the original divine plan, but leads the history of the People of God to a new consummation. The indissolubility of marriage (cf. Mk 10,2-9) is not, above all, to be understood as a yoke imposed upon men but rather as a gift given to persons united in marriage.

Jesus and the family

41. The example of Jesus is paradigmatic for the Church. The Son of God came into the world in a family. In his thirty years of hidden life in Nazareth — on the social, religious and cultural periphery of the Empire (cf. Jn 1,46) — Jesus saw, in Mary and Joseph, fidelity lived in love. He inaugurated his public life with the sign of Cana, which took place at a marriage banquet (cf. Jn 2,1-11). He proclaimed

the gospel of marriage as the fullness of the revelation which recovers the original project of God (cf. Mt 19,4-6). He shared the everyday moments of friendship with the family of Lazarus and his sisters (cf. Lk 10,38) and with the family of Peter (cf. Mt 8,14). He heard the cries of parents for their children, returning them to life (cf. Mk 5,41; Lk 7,14-15) and so manifesting the true significance of mercy, which implies the reestablishment of the Covenant (cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 4). This appears clearly in the meetings with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4,1-30) and the adulterer (cf. Jn 8,1-11), in which the perception of sin is aroused before the gratuitous love of Jesus. Conversion "is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, 'clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.' This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a 'contrite heart,' drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first" (CCC, 1428). God offers freely his pardon to those who open themselves to the action of his grace. This happens through repentance, united to the intention to direct their lives according to the will of God, an effect of his mercy through which He reconciles us with himself. God puts in our heart the capacity of being able to follow the path of the imitation of Christ. The words and orientation of Jesus show clearly that the kingdom of God is the horizon within which every relationship is defined (cf. Mt 6,33). Familial bonds, although fundamental, "are not absolute" (CCC, 2232). In a startling way for those who heard him, Jesus related familial relationships to the light of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mk 3,33-35; Lk 14,26; Mt 10,34-37; 19,29; 23,9). This revolution of the sentiments which Jesus introduces in the human family constitutes a radical call to universal brotherhood. No one remains excluded from the new community gathered in the name of Christ, because all are called to be a part of the family of God. Jesus shows how the divine condescension accompanies the human journey with its grace, transforms the hardened heart with its mercy (cf. Ez 36,26) and orients it to its consummation through the paschal mystery.

Chapter II

The family in the Magisterium of the Church

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council

42. On the basis of that which it has received from Christ, the Church has developed in the course of the centuries a rich teaching on marriage and the family. One of the highest expressions of this Magisterium was proposed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, in the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which dedicates an entire chapter to the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. GS, 47-52). It defines marriage and the family: "The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one" (GS, 48). The "true love between husband and wife" (GS, 49) implies the mutual gift of oneself, includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimension, in correspondence with the divine plan (cf. GS, 48-49). This makes it clear that marriage, and the conjugal love which animates it, "are ordained for the procreation and education of children" (GS, 50). Moreover, the rooting of the spouses in Christ should be underlined: Christ the Lord "comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony" (GS, 48) and remains with them (*sacramentum permanens*). He takes human love, purifies it, carries it to fullness, and gives to the spouses, with his Spirit, the capacity of living it, permeating their entire life with faith, hope, and love. In this way, the spouses are as if consecrated and, through a grace proper to them, edify the Body of Christ and constitute a domestic Church (cf. LG, 11), such that the Church, to comprehend fully its mystery, looks to the Christian family, which genuinely manifests it.

Paul VI

43. Blessed Paul VI, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, deepened the teaching on marriage and the family. In particular, with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he highlighted the intrinsic link between conjugal love and the generation of life: "conjugal love demands of the spouses that they have a proper knowledge of their mission of responsible paternity, upon which today is so much rightly insisted and this too should be precisely understood. [...] The responsible exercise of paternity implies therefore that the spouses recognize their duties to God, toward themselves, the family and the society, in a just hierarchy of values" (HV, 10). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI pointed out the relation between the family and the Church: "One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity.

At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of 'domestic Church.' This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates" (EN, 71).

John Paul II

44. Saint John Paul II dedicated to the family particular attention through his catechesis on human love and the theology of the body. In these, he offered to the Church a wealth of reflections on the spousal significance of the human body and on the plan of God with regard to marriage and the family from the beginning of creation. In particular, treating conjugal charity, he described the way in which the spouses, in their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to sanctity. In the Letter to families *Gratissimam Sane* and above all with the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II pointed to the family as the “way of the Church,” offered an overall vision of the vocation to love of the man and woman, and proposed the fundamental lines for the pastoral care of the family and for the presence of the family in society. “In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up—married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity—through which each human person is introduced into the “human family” and into the “family of God,” which is the Church” (FC, 15).

Benedict XVI

45. Benedict XVI, in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, took up again the subject of the truth of the love between man and woman, which is fully illumined only in the light of the love of Christ crucified (cf. DCE, 2). He confirms that “Marriage based on 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 the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he outlines the importance of familial love as a principle of life in society, the place in which one apprehends the experience of the common good. “It is thus becoming a social and even economic necessity once more to hold up to future generations the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person. In view of this, States are called to enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character” (CiV, 44).

Francis

46. Pope Francis, in the Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, confronts the connection between the family and the faith thus: “The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. [...] Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings” (LF, 52). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope recalls the centrality of the family among current social challenges: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple” (EG, 66). Pope Francis has moreover dedicated to themes relative to the family an organic cycle of catecheses which reflect deeply upon its subjects, experiences and the phases of its life.

Chapter III

The family in Christian doctrine

Marriage in the order of creation and sacramental fullness

47. The order of redemption illumines and fulfills that of creation. Natural marriage, therefore, is comprehended fully in the light of its sacramental consummation: only by fixing your gaze on Christ can you know fully the truth about human relationships. “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...] Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (GS, 22). It is particularly opportune to understand in a Christocentric key the natural properties of marriage, which constitute the good of the spouses (*bonum coniugum*), which include unity, openness to life, fidelity and indissolubility. In the light of the New Testament, according to which all was created by means of Christ and in view of him (cf. Col 1,16; Jn 1,1ss), the Second Vatican Council wanted to express appreciation for natural marriage and for the positive elements present in other religions (cf. LG, 16; NA, 2) and in different cultures, notwithstanding their limits and insufficiencies (cf. RM, 55). The discernment of the presence of the “seeds of the Word” in other cultures (cf. AG, 11) may also be applied to the marital and familial reality. Beyond true natural marriage, there are positive elements present in the marital forms of other religious traditions. These forms — founded however on the stable and true relation of a man and woman — are, we maintain, ordered to the sacrament. With its gaze turned to the human wisdom of peoples, the Church also recognizes this family as the fundamental, necessary and fecund cell of human coexistence.

Indissolubility and fecundity of the spousal union

48. The irrevocable fidelity of God to the covenant is the foundation of the indissolubility of marriage. The complete and profound love between spouses is not based only on their human capacities: God sustains the covenant with the force of his Spirit. The choice which God made in our regard is reflected in a certain way in the choice of the spouse: as God also maintains his promise when we fail, so conjugal love and fidelity are in force “in good fortune and in bad.” Marriage is the gift and promise of God, who hears the prayer of those who ask his aid. Man’s hardness of heart, his limits and his fragility in the face of temptation are a great challenge for the common good. The witness of couples who live their marriages faithfully highlights the value of this indissoluble union and inspires the desire to continually renew the duty of fidelity. This indissolubility corresponds to the profound desire of reciprocal and lasting love which the Creator placed in the human heart, and is the gift that He himself makes for every couple: “that which God has joined, let no man separate” (Mt 19,6; cf. Mk 10,9). The man and woman welcome and nurture this gift so that their love might last forever. In the face of the sensibility of our times and the affective difficulties for maintaining endeavors forever, the Church is called upon to propose the demands and the life-plan of the Gospel of the family and of Christian marriage. “Saint Paul, speaking of the life in the Christ, says that Christians – all of them – are called to love each other as Christ loved them, that is “submitted one to the other” (Eph 5,21), which signifies being in the service of one to the other. And here he introduces the analogy between the husband-wife couple and that of Christ-Church. It is clear that it is an imperfect analogy, but we have to gather the spiritual meaning of it, which is most high and revolutionary and at the same time simple, within the reach of every man and woman who entrust themselves to the grace of God” (Francis, General Audience, 6th of May, 2015). It is, once again, a declaration which gives hope!

The goods of the family

49. Marriage is the “community of all life, because of its nature ordered to the good of the spouses and to the generation and education of offspring” (CIC, can. 1055 - §1). In caring for each other, those to be married promise themselves a total gift, fidelity, and openness to life. In the faith and the grace of Christ, they recognize the gifts which God offers them and they engage themselves in his name before the Church. God consecrates the love of spouses and confirms the indissolubility of it, offering them his grace to live fidelity, reciprocal integration, and openness to life. We give thanks to God for marriage because, through the community of life and love, Christian spouses know happiness and experience that God loves them personally, with passion and tenderness. The man and woman, individually and as a couple — Pope Francis reminded us — “are the image of God.” Their difference “is not through contraposition, or subordination, but through communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God” (General Audience, 15th of April, 2015). The unitive end of marriage is a constant call to growth and the understanding of love. In their union in love the spouses experience the beauty of paternity and maternity; they share plans and fatigue, desires and preoccupations; they learn to take care of each other and to forgive each other. In their love, they celebrate their happy moments and sustain each other in the difficult stretches of the history of their life.

50. The fecundity of the spouses, in its full meaning, is spiritual: they are living sacramental signs, sources of life for the Christian community and for the world. The act of generation, which manifests the “inseparable connection” between the unitive and procreative goods — underlined by Blessed Paul VI (cf. HV, 12) — has to be understood from the viewpoint of the responsibility of the parents in the undertaking of the care and Christian education of the children. They are the most precious fruit of conjugal love. From the moment that the child is a person, it transcends those who have generated it. “To be a son or daughter, in fact, according to the design of God, signifies carrying in themselves the memory and the hope of a love which has realized itself properly by kindling the life of another original and new human being. And for the parents every child is itself, is different, is diverse” (Francis, General Audience, 11th of February, 2015). The beauty of the mutual and gratuitous gift of self, the joy for life which is born and the loving care of all members, from the young to elderly, are some of the fruits which make a response to the vocation of the family one of a kind and irreplaceable. Familial relationships complement in a decisive way the fraternal construction of the human society in solidarity, irreducible to the coexistence of the inhabitants of a territory or the citizens of a State.

Truth and beauty of the family

51. With intimate joy and profound consolation, the Church looks to families who are faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, thanking them and encouraging them because of the witness they offer. Thanks to them, the beauty of marriage, indissoluble and faithful forever, is credible. In the mature family is the first ecclesial experience of the communion among persons. “Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life” (CCC, 1657). The Gospel of the family also nourishes those seeds which are still awaiting maturity and ought to take care of those trees which have withered and

must not be neglected (cf. Lk 13,6-9). The Church, insofar as it is a trustworthy teacher and caring mother, although recognizing that among the baptized there is no other nuptial link than the sacramental one, and that every breaking of it is against the will of God, it is also conscious of the fragility of many of its children who struggle on the path 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 appears outwardly in order but moves through 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” (EG, 44). This truth and beauty should be guarded. In the face of difficult situations and wounded families, it is always necessary to remember a general principle: “Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations” (FC, 84). The degree of responsibility is not always the same, and there may be factors which limit the ability to choose. Therefore, while the teaching should be clearly expressed, judgments which do not take into account the complexity of various situations should be avoided, and it is necessary to pay attention to the way in which people live and suffer because of their condition.

Chapter IV

Towards the ecclesial fullness of the family

The intimate link between Church and family

52. The blessing and the responsibility of a new family, sealed in the ecclesial sacrament, entails the willingness to make of ourselves supporters and promoters, within the Christian community, of the fundamental covenant between man and woman. This willingness, in the context of the social bond, of the generation of children, of the protection of the most weak, of their shared life, entails a responsibility which has the right to be supported, recognized and appreciated. In virtue of the sacrament of marriage every family becomes in every way good for the Church. From this perspective it will certainly be a precious gift, for this day in the Church, to also consider the reciprocity between family and Church: the Church is good for the family, the family is good for the Church. The custody of the Lord’s sacramental gift not only involves the individual family, but also the Christian community itself, because it completes them. In the face of the appearance of difficulty, even grave difficulty, in protecting the marital union, the understanding of their respective successes and failures must be studied closely by the couple with the aid of the Pastors of the community.

The grace of conversion and perfection

53. The Church remains near the spouses whose bond is so weakened that they run the risk of separating. In the case in which a painful end of the relationship takes place, the Church feels the need to accompany them in this painful moment, in such a way that ruinous conflicts, at least, do not flame up. Particular attention must, above all, be paid to the children, who are the first hit by the separation, so that they might suffer as little as possible: “when papa and mama hurt each other, the soul of the children suffers much” (Francis, General Audience, 24th of June, 2015). The eyes of Christ, whose light shines upon all men (cf. Jn 1,9; GS, 22), inspires the pastoral care of the Church for the faithful who simply live together or who only have a civil marriage contract or who are divorced and remarried. In the perspective of the divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in its life imperfectly: it calls with them for the grace of conversion, encourages them to do good, to take loving care of one another and to put themselves at the service of the community in which they live and work. It is desirable that in the Dioceses, courses of discernment for and ways of involving these persons are promoted, in aid of and encouraging the maturation of a conscious and coherent choice. These couples have to be informed about the possibility of turning to the process of the declaration of the nullity of the marriage.

54. When the union reaches a notable stability through a public bond — and is accompanied by profound affection, by responsibility in relation to the offspring, by a capacity to overcome trials — it may be seen as the occasion to accompany them toward the sacrament of marriage, where this is possible. Different, however, is the case in which cohabitation is not established in view of a possible future marriage, but in the absence of the intention of establishing an institutional relationship. The reality of civil marriages between a man and a woman, of traditional marriages and, with its differences, also of cases of cohabitation is an emerging phenomenon in many countries. Moreover, the situation of the faithful who have established a new union requires special pastoral attention: “In these decades [...] the awareness has very much grown that fraternal and attentive care, with love and truth, towards the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of their sacramental marriage is necessary; in effect, these persons are not, in fact, excommunicated” (Francis, General Audience, 5th of August, 2015).

The mercy at the heart of revelation

55. The Church departs from the concrete situations of families today, all needing mercy, beginning with those who suffer most. With the merciful heart of Jesus, the Church has to accompany her most fragile children, scarred by wounded and lost love, giving them new trust and hope, like the light from the lighthouse of a port or a torch carried in the midst of the people to shine upon those who have lost the way or find themselves in the midst of the storm. Mercy is “the center of the revelation of Christ” (MV, 25). In it shines the sovereignty of God, with which He is ever faithful to his being, which is love (cf. 1 Jn 4, 8), and his pact. “It is properly in his mercy that God manifests his omnipotence” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, art. 4; cf. Messale Romano, Collect from the XXVI Sunday of Ordinary Time). To declare the truth with love is itself an act of mercy. In the Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis affirms: “Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses God’s way of reaching out to the sinner.” And he continues: “God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice” (MV, 21). Jesus is the face of the mercy of God the Father: “God so loved the world [...] that the world might be saved through Him (the Son)” (Jn 3,16-17).

PART III THE MISSION OF THE FAMILY

56. From the beginning of history, God has been prodigious in his love with regard to his children (cf. LG, 2), so that they might be able to have the fullness of life in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 10,10). Through the sacraments of Christian Initiation, God invites families to enter into this life, to proclaim it and communicate it with others (cf. LG, 41). As Pope Francis forcefully reminds us, the mission of the family always extends outward in the service of our brothers and sisters. It is the mission of the Church to which each family is called upon to participate in a unique and privileged way. “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples” (EG, 120). In the whole world, in the reality of families, we can see great happiness and joy, but also much suffering and many anxieties. We want to see this reality with the eyes with which Christ also saw it when he walked among the men of his time. Our stance must be one of humble comprehension. Our desire is to accompany each and every family so that they may discover the best way to overcome the difficulties they encounter on their paths. The Gospel is always also a sign of contradiction. The Church does not ever forget that the paschal mystery is central to the Good News that we proclaim. It seeks to help families to recognize and embrace the cross when it is presented to them, so that they are able to carry it with Christ on the path to the joy of the resurrection. This work demands “a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (EG, 25). Conversion therefore touches profoundly upon one’s style and language. It is necessary to adopt a language which is meaningful. The proclamation has to make those who hear experience that the Gospel of the family is a response to the deepest expectations of the human person: to its dignity and full realization in reciprocity, in communion and fecundity. It does not just include the presenting of a norm, but also the proclaiming of the grace which gives us the ability to live the blessings of the family. The transmission of the faith today more than ever renders necessary a language capable of reaching all, especially the young, to communicate the beauty of familial love and to make known the meaning of terms like gift, conjugal love, fidelity, fecundity, and procreation. The need for a new and more adequate language appears first of all when introducing young children and adolescents to the subject of sexuality. Many parents and persons engaged in pastoral care have difficulty finding a language appropriate and at the same time respectful, which puts together the nature of biological sexuality with the complementarity which enrich each other reciprocally, with friendship, love and the donation of self of the man and woman.

Chapter I The formation of the family

The preparation for marriage

57. Christian marriage cannot be reduced to a cultural tradition or a simple juridical convention: it is a true calling of God which demands careful discernment, constant prayer and adequate maturity. For this, formative courses are necessary which accompany the person and the couple in a way which unites the communication of the contents of the faith with the experience of life offered by the entire ecclesial community. The efficacy of this aid also demands the improvement of pre-matrimonial catechesis – at times, poor in content – which is a unifying part of ordinary pastoral care. The pastoral care of those to be married ought to also be inserted in the general endeavor of the Christian community to present in an adequate and convincing way the evangelical message with regard to the dignity of the human person, its liberty and respect for its rights. The three stages indicated by *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 66) ought to be held well in mind: remote preparation, which passes through the transmission of the faith and Christian values within one’s own family; proximate preparation, which coincides with the paths of catechesis and the formative experiences lived within the ecclesial community; the immediate preparation for marriage, part of a broader journey determined by the vocational dimension.

58. Within the current cultural changes, models in contrast with the Christian vision of the family are often presented. Sexuality is often untied from a project of authentic love. In some countries formational projects are even imposed by the public authority which present contents contrary to the human and Christian vision: in this regard, the liberty of the Church to teach her own doctrine and the right of conscientious objection on the part of educators ought to be decisively affirmed. However, the family, although remaining the primary pedagogic space (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3), cannot be the only place for sexual education. It is necessary, for this, to create true and proper modes of pastoral support, geared both to singles and couples, with particular attention to the ages of puberty and adolescence, in which to help them discover the beauty of loving sexuality. Christianity proclaims that God created man male and female, and blessed them so that they might form a single flesh and transmit life (cf. Gen 1, 27-28; 2, 24). Their differences, with equal personal dignity, are the seal of the goodness of the creation of God. According to the Christian principle, soul and body, as also biological sex and the social-cultural role of sex (gender), may be distinguished but not separated.

Therefore, the need for a widening of the formative subjects in the pre-matrimonial itineraries emerges such that they become courses of education in the faith and in love, integrated in the journey of Christian education. In this light, it is necessary to remember the importance of the virtues, among which is chastity, the precious condition for the genuine growth of interpersonal love. The formative itinerary ought to assume the character of a journey oriented to personal and conjugal vocational discernment, nurturing a better synergy among the various pastoral fields. Courses of preparation for marriage may also be presented by married couples capable of accompanying those to be married before they are wed and in the first years of their married life, prizing thus the conjugal ministry. The valuing of personal relationships in the pastoral field will favor the gradual opening of minds and hearts to the fullness of the plan of God.

The nuptial celebration

59. The nuptial liturgy is a one of a kind event, which is lived in the familial and social context of a feast. The first of the signs of Jesus takes place at the wedding feast of Cana: the good wine of the miracle of the Lord, which delights the birth of a new family, is the new wine of the Covenant of Christ with men and women of every age. The preparation of the wedding occupies the attention of those to be married for a long time. It represents a precious time for them, for their families and their friends, who ought to be enriched by its properly spiritual and ecclesial dimension. The nuptial celebration is the propitious occasion for inviting many to the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Christian community, through a cordial and joyful participation, will welcome in its embrace the new family until, as a domestic Church, it feels a part of the greater ecclesial family. The nuptial liturgy ought to be prepared for through a mystagogic catechesis which causes the couple to understand that the celebration of their covenant has its consummation "in the Lord." Frequently, the celebrant has the opportunity to address himself to an assembly composed by persons who participate little in ecclesial life or belong to another Christian confession or religious community. It is held a precious occasion for the proclaiming of the Gospel of Christ, which may excite, in the families present, the rediscovery of the faith and of the love which come from God.

The first years of family life

60. The first years of marriage are a vital and delicate period during which couples grow in the awareness of their vocations and missions. For this reason, there is need of pastoral accompaniment which continues after the celebration of the sacrament. The parish is the place where experienced couples may be made available to those younger ones, with the eventual participation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. It is necessary to encourage spouses to have a fundamental stance of openness to the great gift of children. The importance of the spirituality of the family, of prayer and of participation in the Sunday Eucharist ought to be underlined, inviting couples to come together regularly to promote the growth of the spiritual life and solidarity before the concrete demands of life. The personal meeting with Christ through the reading of the Word of God, in the community and at home, especially in the form of "lectio divina," constitutes a source of inspiration for daily action. Liturgies, devotional practices and Eucharists celebrated for families, above all, on the anniversary of marriages, nourish the spiritual life and the missionary witness of the family. Not rarely, in the first years of conjugal life, there is a certain introversion of the couple, with the consequent isolation from the communal context. The consolidation of the relational network between couples and the creation of meaningful bonds are necessary for the maturing of the Christian life of the family. Movements and ecclesial groups often guarantee such moments of growth and formation. The local Church, integrating such contributions, assumes the initiative in coordinating the pastoral care of young families. In the initial phase of the conjugal life a marked loss of heart frustrates the desire to have children. Not rarely, in this, the motives of crisis are announced which rapidly flow into separation. For such reasons, also, the nearness of the community to the young spouses is particularly important, through the affectionate and discreet support of trustworthy families.

The formation of priests and of other pastoral workers

61. A renewal of pastoral care in the light of the Gospel of the family and of the teaching of the magisterium is necessary. For this reason, it is necessary to provide for a more adequate formation of priests, deacons, religious and nuns, catechists and of other pastoral workers, who must promote the integration of the families in the parish community, above all in courses of formation in the Christian life in view of the sacraments. In particular the seminaries, in their courses of human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation, ought to prepare future priests to become apostles of the family. In the formation for the ordained ministry affective and psychological development cannot be neglected, even participating directly in adequate courses. Itineraries and courses of formation destined specifically for pastoral workers will be able to render them more capable of inserting the course of preparation for marriage itself into the wider dynamic of the ecclesial life. In the period of formation, the candidates to the priesthood should live appropriate periods with their families and led to having experiences of the pastoral care of families to acquire an adequate knowledge of the situation of families today. The presence of laypeople and families, in particular the feminine presence, in priestly formation, favors the appreciation of the variety and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church. The dedication of this precious ministry will receive vitality and concreteness from a renewed alliance between the two principal forms of vocation to love: that of marriage, which flows into the Christian family, based on the love of choice, and that of the consecrated life, image of the communion of the Kingdom, which departs from the unconditioned care of the other as a gift of God. In the communion of the vocations a fertile exchange of gifts takes place, which renews and enriches the ecclesial community (cf. Acts 18,2). The spiritual direction of the family may be considered one of the parish ministries. It is advisable that the diocesan office for the family and the other pastoral offices may intensify their collaboration in this field. In the permanent formation of the cleric and of pastoral workers, it is desirable to continue taking care, with appropriate instruments, of the maturation of the affective and psychological dimension, which will be indispensable for them in the pastoral accompaniment of families, also in view of the particular emergency situations determined by cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Chapter II

Family, procreation, education

The transmission of life

62. The presence of the numerous families in the Church is a blessing for the Christian community and for society, because the openness to life is an intrinsic demand of conjugal love. In this light, the Church expresses intense gratitude to the families that take care of, educate, surround with affection and transmit the faith to their children, especially the more fragile and those marked by disability. These children, born with special needs, attract the love of Christ and ask the Church to care for them as a blessing. A mentality unfortunately has spread which reduces the generation of life to gratification alone, whether of the individual or of the couple. The factors of economic, cultural, and educational order exercise at times a decisive weight contributing to the drastic collapse in births which weakens the social fabric, compromising the relations between the generations and rendering the outlook of the future more uncertain. Also in this regard it is necessary to depart by listening to people and explaining the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life as that which human love requires to be lived in full. Here one perceives the necessity of disseminating ever more widely the documents of the magisterium of the Church which promote the culture of life. The pastoral care of families ought to more greatly involve Catholic biomedical specialists in the courses of preparation for marriage and in the accompanying of spouses.

The procreative responsibility

63. According to the order of creation, conjugal love between a man and a woman and the transmission of life are ordered to each other (cf. Gen 1,27-28). In this way, the Creator has made the man and woman participants in the work of his creation and has at the same time made them instruments of his love, entrusting to their responsibility the future of humanity through the transmission of human life. The spouses open themselves to life forming for themselves "common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself." (GS, 50; cf. VS, 54-64). Conforming to the personal and humanly compete character of conjugal love, the right path for the planning of the family is that of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect of the times and consideration of the dignity of the partner. In this way, the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 10-14) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14; 28-35) ought to be rediscovered in order to reawaken the openness to procreation in contrast to a mentality often hostile to life. It is necessary repeatedly to exhort young couples to give the gift of life. In this way the openness to life may grow in the family, in the Church and in society. Through its numerous institutions for children the Church may contribute to the creation of a society, but also a community of faith, which will be more adapted to children. The

courage to transmit life is notably reinforced where an atmosphere adapted to children is created, in which aid and accompaniment is offered in the work of educating offspring (cooperation between parishes, children and families).

The responsible choice of parenthood presupposes the formation of the conscience, which is “the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths” (GS, 16). As much more as spouses try to listen to God and his commandments in their consciences (cf. Rm 2,15), and to be accompanied spiritually, so much more will their decision be intimately free from a subjective arbitrariness and adaptation to the ways of behaving in their surroundings. For love of this dignity of conscience the Church rejects with all of its force the coercive interventions of the State in favor of contraception, sterilization or even abortion. Recourse to the methods founded on the “natural rhythms of fertility” (HV, 11) will be encouraged. It will be highlighted that “these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them, and favor the education of an authentic freedom” (CCC, 2370). It should always be emphasized that children are a marvelous gift of God, a joy for the parents and the Church. Through them the Lord renews the world.

The value of life in all its phases

64. Life is a gift of God and mystery which transcends us. For this reason, its beginnings and final stage ought not be discarded. On the contrary, it is necessary to guarantee these phases special attention. Today, too easily “human beings are themselves 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, it is the duty of the family, sustained by the whole society, to welcome newborn life and to take care of its final phase. With regard to the drama of abortion, the Church above all affirms the sacred and inviolable character of human life and engages itself concretely in favor of it (cf. EV, 58). Thanks to its institutions, it offers counsel to the pregnant, sustains teen mothers, assists abandoned babies, is close to those who have suffered an abortion. Those who work in health industries are reminded of the moral obligation of the conscientious objection. In the same way, the Church does not only feel the urgency of affirming the right for a natural death, avoiding harmful therapy and euthanasia, but it takes care also of the elderly, protects persons with disabilities, assists the terminally ill, comforts the dead, and firmly rejects the death penalty (cf. CCC, 2258).

Adoption and foster parents

65. The adoption of babies, orphans and the abandoned, embraced as one’s own children, in the spirit of the faith assumes the form of an authentic familial apostolate (cf. AA, 11), many times recalled and encouraged by the Magisterium (cf. FC, 41; EV, 93). The choice of adoption and of becoming foster parents expresses a particular fecundity of the conjugal experience, above and beyond those cases in which it happens that the couple is painfully marked by sterility. Such a choice is an eloquent sign of embracing procreation, witness of faith and consummation of love. This gives back the reciprocal dignity to an interrupted bond: to the spouses who do not have children and to children who do not have parents. Therefore, all the initiatives ordered to rendering the procedures of adoption easier are to be supported. The trafficking of babies between countries and continents should be barred by fitting legislative interventions and controls of the State. The continuity of the generative and educational relationship has as its necessary foundation the sexual difference of the man and woman, just as in procreation. In the face of those situations in which the child is demanded at any cost, as a right to one’s own completion, adoption and foster parenthood rightly understood demonstrate an important aspect of parenthood and of being a son or daughter, in as much as they help us to recognize that children, both natural and adopted or those entrusted to foster parents, are another self and it is necessary to welcome them, love them, and take care of them and not only bring them into the world. The prevailing interest of the child must always inspire the decisions about adoption and entrusting them to foster parents. As Pope Francis reminds us, “children have the right to grow up in a family, with a father and a mother” (Audience with the Participants of the International Conference on the complementarity between man and woman, promoted by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 17th of November, 2014). Nonetheless, the Church must proclaim that, where it is possible, children have the right to grow up in their birth family with the greatest possible support.

The education of children

66. One of the fundamental challenges, among those which are before the families of today, is surely that of education, made more difficult and complex by the contemporary cultural reality and the great influence of the media. The needs and expectations of families capable of being, in daily life, places of growth, of concrete and essential transmission of the faith, of spirituality and of the virtues which give form to existence, ought to be held duly in mind. The family of origin is often the cradle of the vocation to the priesthood and to consecrated life: therefore parents are exhorted to ask the Lord for the inestimable gift of a vocation for some of their children. In the educational field let the right of parents to choose freely the type of education to give to their children, in accord with their convictions, accessible

conditions, and its quality, be guarded. It is necessary to help them live the affection, also in the conjugal relationship, as a journey of maturation, in ever deeper welcoming and care of the other and ever fuller giving. In this way, the necessity of offering formative courses which nourish conjugal life and the importance of a laity which offers an accompaniment made of living witness must be confirmed. The example of a faithful and profound love composed of tenderness and respect, capable of growing over time and in its concreteness opened to the generation of life, creating the experience of a mystery which transcends us, is very helpful.

67. In the various cultures, the adults of the family conserve an irreplaceable educational function. However, in many contexts, we are witnessing a progressive weakening of the educational role of the parents, because of the invasive presence of the media within familial sphere, beyond the tendency to delegate or reserve to others this task. On the other hand, the media (especially social media) unite family members even though distant. The use of e-mail and of other social media may keep members of the family united over time. Above all, the media may be an occasion for the evangelization of the youth. It is necessary that the Church encourage and sustain families in their work of vigilant and responsible participation in relation to the scholastic and educational programs which involve their children. There is unanimous consent in confirming that the first school of formation is the family and that the Christian community stands in support and integration of this irreplaceable formative role. It is held necessary to set places and times of encounter apart for the encouragement of the formation of parents and the sharing of experiences among families. It is important that parents are actively involved in the courses of preparation for the sacraments of Christian initiation, in the role of the first teachers and witnesses of the faith for their children.

68. Catholic schools carry out a vital function in assisting the parents in their duty to educate the children. Catholic education assists the role of the family: it assures a good preparation, educates in the virtues and values, and instructs in the teachings of the Church. Catholic schools ought to be encouraged in their mission to help their students to grow into mature adults who are able to see the world through the loving eyes of Jesus and understand life to be a call to serve God. Catholic schools are thus relevant for the evangelizing mission of the Church. In many regions Catholic schools are the only ones to guarantee authentic opportunities for the children of poor families, especially for the young, offering them an alternative to poverty and a way to give a true contribution to the life of society. Catholic schools ought to be encouraged to carry out their activity in the poorest communities, serving the less fortunate and most vulnerable members of our society.

Chapter III **Family and pastoral accompaniment**

Complex situations

69. The sacrament of marriage, as a faithful and indissoluble union between a man and a woman called to take care of one another and to embrace life, is a great grace for the human family. The Church has the joy and the duty of proclaiming this grace to every person and in every context. It feels today, in an even more urgent way, the responsibility of helping the baptized rediscover how the grace of God works in their lives — even in the most difficult situations — to lead them to the fullness of the sacrament. The Synod, while it appreciates and encourages families who honor the beauty of Christian marriage, intends to promote pastoral discernment of the situations in which the embracing of this gift struggles to be appreciated, or is in various ways compromised. To keep the pastoral dialogue with these faithful alive, to allow the maturation of a coherent openness to the Gospel of marriage and the family in its fullness, is a grave responsibility. Pastors must identify the elements which may favor the evangelization and human growth of those who are entrusted by the Lord to their care.

70. Pastoral care clearly proposes the evangelical message and gathers the positive elements in those situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to it. In many countries a growing number of couples live together, outside of marriage, either canonical or civil. In some countries there exists traditional marriage, contracted by the families and often celebrated in different stages. In other countries, however, the number is growing of those who, after having lived together for a long time, ask to be married in church. Simple cohabitation is often chosen because of a general attitude contrary to institutions and definitive commitments, but also in the expectation of existential security (work or a fixed salary). Lastly, in other countries, casual unions become ever more numerous, not only through the rejection of the values of the family and marriage, but also because of the fact that marrying is perceived as a luxury, because of social conditions, such that material misery pushes them to live in these unions. All these situations ought to be confronted in a constructive manner, trying to transform them into opportunities for journeys of conversion towards the fullness of marriage and the family in the light of the Gospel.

71. The choice of civil marriage or, in other cases, of simple cohabitation, is very often not motivated by prejudices or resistance in relation to the sacramental union, but by cultural or contingent situations. In

many circumstances, the decision to live together is the sign of a relationship which really wants to direct itself toward a perspective of stability. This desire, which translates into a lasting bond, trustworthy and open to life may be considered an endeavor upon which to graft a journey toward the nuptial sacrament, discovered as the design of God for their lives. The journey of growth, which may lead to sacramental marriage, will be encouraged by the recognition of the proper traits of generous and lasting love: the desire to seek the other's good before our own; the experience of forgiveness asked for and given; the aspiration to construct a family not closed in on itself and open to the good of the ecclesial community and of the whole society. Along this journey those signs of love which properly correspond with the reflection of the love of God in an authentic conjugal project can be useful.

72. The problems relative to mixed marriages require specific attention. The marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons "have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement." To such an end "an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony" (FC, 78). About the sharing of the Eucharist, it is remembered that "the decision to admit, or not, the non-Catholic part of the marriage to Eucharistic communion is taken in conformity with the general norms existing on the matter, as much for oriental Christians as for other Christians, and taking account of this particular situation, that is, that two baptized Christians receive the sacrament of Christian marriage. Although the spouses of a mixed marriage have in common the sacraments of baptism and marriage, the sharing of the Eucharist can be nothing but exceptional and, in any case, the dispositions indicated are to be observed [...]" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, Directions for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, March 25, 1993, 159-160).

73. Marriages with differences of worship represent a privileged place of interreligious dialogue in daily life, and they are able to be a sign of hope for religious communities, especially where situations of tension exist. The members of the couple share their respective spiritual experiences, or a journey in search of religious truth if one of the two is a non-believer (cf. 1 Cor 7, 14). The spouses are called upon to continually transform their initial sentiment of attraction into the sincere desire for the other's good. This openness transforms even diversity of religion into an opportunity to enrich the spiritual quality of the relationship. The number of families composed of conjugal unions with differences of worship, growing in mission territories and also in countries with a long Christian tradition, gives rise to the urgency of providing a pastoral care differentiated in accord with different social and cultural contexts. In some countries, where the liberty of religion does not exist, the Christian spouse is obliged to change religion in order to marry, and is not able to celebrate a canonical wedding with difference of cult or baptize the children. We must emphasize therefore the necessity of respecting religious liberty in relation to all.

74. Mixed marriages and marriages with difference of worship present aspects of fecund potential and many critical issues not easily resolvable, more at the pastoral than the normative level, like the religious education of the children, the participation in the liturgical life of the spouses, the sharing of the spiritual experience. To confront constructively the differences with regard to the faith, it is necessary to give particular attention to persons who are united in such marriages, not only in the period leading up to the wedding. Particular challenges confront couples and families in which one partner is Catholic and the other is a non-believer. In such cases it is necessary to witness to the capacity of the Gospel to descend in these situations so as to make the education in the Christian faith possible.

75. The situations with regard to access to baptism of persons who find themselves in a complex matrimonial condition presents particular difficulty. It involves persons who have contracted a stable marital union at a time in which one at least of them still did not know the Christian faith. The Bishops are called upon to exercise, in these cases, a pastoral discernment measured to their spiritual good.

76. The Church conforms its orientation to the Lord Jesus which in a love without limits offered himself for every person without exceptions (MV, 12). In the face of families who live the experience of having within themselves persons with homosexual tendencies, the Church emphasizes that every person, independently from their sexual tendency, should be respected in his dignity and met with respect, taking care to avoid "every mark of unjust discrimination" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations on the plans for the legal recognition of unions among homosexual persons, 4). Specific attention is reserved also to the accompanying of families in which live persons with homosexual tendencies. With regard to the plans of some to equate unions between homosexual persons with marriage, "there does not exist any foundation to assimilate or establish analogies, not even remote, between homosexual unions and the design of God for marriage and the family" (Ibidem). The Synod judges it, in all cases, entirely unacceptable that local churches suffer pressure on this subject and that international organisms condition their financial aid to poor countries by the introduction of laws which institute "marriage" between persons of the same sex.

Accompaniment in diverse situations

77. The Church makes its own, sharing with affection, the joys and hopes, the pains and anxieties of every family. Staying close to the family as a partner in the journey signifies, for the Church, taking up a stance wisely differentiated: at times, it is necessary to stay near and listen in silence; other times, it must go ahead to indicate the way to go; still others, it is fitting to follow, sustain, and encourage. "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this 'art of accompaniment' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life" (EG, 169). The principal contribution to the pastoral care of families is that given by parishes, which is the family of families, in which the contributions of small communities, movements and ecclesial associations are harmonized. The institution of specialized centers where priests, religious and lay people learn to take care of every family, with particular attention towards those in difficulty.

78. A ministry dedicated to those whose marital relationship is broken appears particularly urgent. The drama of separation often arrives at the end of long periods of conflict, which cause to fall upon the children the greatest sufferings. The solitude of the abandoned spouse, or who was constrained to interrupt a cohabitation characterized by continuous and grave maltreatment, asks for particular care on the part of the Christian community. Prevention and care in cases of violence in the family require a strict collaboration with the forces of the law in order to act against those responsible and to adequately protect the victims. Moreover, it is important to promote the protection of minors from sexual abuse. In the Church, let zero tolerance be maintained in these cases, together with the accompanying of the families. It would seem, then, opportune to hold in consideration the families in which some members carry out activities which carry particular needs, such as soldiers, who find themselves in a state of material separation and a prolonged physical distance from the family, with all the consequences this carries with it. Returned from zones of war, not rarely they are struck by post-traumatic syndrome and are disturbed in their consciences which address to them serious moral questions. A particular pastoral attention is here necessary.

79. The experience of marital failure is always painful for all. The failure itself, on the other hand, may become the occasion for reflection, conversion and trusting in God: becoming conscious of our own responsibility, everyone can find in Him trust and hope. "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). Forgiveness for injustice suffered is not easy, but is a journey which grace renders possible. This is why a pastoral care centered on conversion and on reconciliation through counseling centers and centers specialized in mediation, to be established in Dioceses, are necessary. However, justice in regard to all parties involved in the failure of the marriage (spouses and children) ought to be promoted. The Christian community and its Pastors have the duty to ask the separated and divorced spouses to treat each other with respect and mercy, above all for the good of the children, to whom one must not bring further suffering. The children cannot be objects to be fought over and the best forms ought to be sought such that they may be able to overcome the trauma of the familial break up and grow in the most serene manner possible. In any case the Church will always have to put in relief the injustice which derives most often from the situation of divorce.

80. Single parent families have different origins: biological mothers and fathers who did not want to integrate themselves in familial life, situations of violence from a parent has had to flee with the children, death of a parent, abandonment of the family on the part of one of the parents, and other situations. Whatever is the cause, the parent who lives with the child must find support and comfort with the other families who form the Christian community, as with the parish pastoral organisms. These families are often further afflicted by the gravity of economic problems, by the uncertainty of a precarious work situation, by the difficulty of maintaining the children, by the lack of a house. The same pastoral solicitude will have to be manifested with regard to widowed persons, child mothers and their children.

81. When the spouses experience problems in their relations, they ought to be able to count on the aid and accompaniment of the Church. Experience shows that with sufficient help and with the reconciling action of the grace of the Holy Spirit a great percentage of marital crises are overcome in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel oneself forgiven is a fundamental experience in family life. Forgiveness between spouses permits them to rediscover the truth of a love which is forever and does not ever pass away (cf. 1 Cor 13,8). Within the limits of family relations, the necessity of reconciliation is practically day to day. Misunderstandings due to relations with the families of origin, conflict between diverse cultural and religious habits, disagreement over the education of the children, anxiety over economic difficulties, tension which surges from addictions and the loss of work — these are some of the recurring motives of tension and conflict. The exhausting art of reconciliation, which necessitates the support of grace, has need of the generous collaboration of relatives and friends, and at times also of

external and professional help. In the most painful cases, like that of conjugal infidelity, it is necessary to render oneself available for true and proper reparation. A wounded union may be healed: for this hope it is necessary to be educated from time of the preparation for marriage. The action of the Holy Spirit in the care of persons and of wounded families, the reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation and the necessity of spiritual paths accompanied by experienced ministers is fundamental.

82. For many faithful who have lived in an unhappy marital experience, the verification of the invalidity of the marriage represents a path to run. The recent *Motu Proprio's Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* and *Mitis et Misericors Iesus* have led to a simplification of the procedures for the eventual declaration of the nullity of the marriage. With these texts, the Holy Father wanted also "to make evident that the Bishop himself in his Church, of which he constitutes the pastor and head, is for this reason itself the judge among the faithful entrusted to him" (MI, preamble, III). Putting these documents into effect constitutes therefore a great responsibility for the diocesan Ordinaries, called themselves to judge some causes and, in every way, to guarantee easier access of the faithful to justice. This implies the preparation of sufficient personnel, composed of clerics and lay people, who are consecrated primarily to this ecclesial service. Therefore it will be necessary to put at the disposition of separated persons or couples in crisis services for information, counsel and mediation, tied to the pastoral care of families, which will be able to welcome persons in view of the preliminary investigation for the marital process (cf. MI, Art. 2-3).

83. The witness of those who, even in difficult conditions, do not undertake a new union, remaining faithful to the sacramental link, merits appreciation and support on the part of the Church. This means showing them the face of a God faithful to his love and always capable of giving strength and hope anew. The separated or divorced but not remarried, who are often witnesses of marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the food which sustains them in their state of life.

Discernment and integration

84. The baptized who are divorced and civilly remarried should be more integrated into Christian communities in the various ways possible, avoiding every occasion of scandal. The logic of integration is the key to their pastoral accompaniment, so that they know not only that they belong to the Body of Christ which is the Church, but that they may have a joyous and fruitful experience of this. They are baptized, they are brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit pours into them gifts and charisms for the good of everyone. Their participation can be expressed in various ecclesial services: it is therefore necessary to discern what are the various forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional areas can be overcome. They must not only not feel excommunicated, but they can live and mature as living members of the Church, feeling that she is a mother who always welcomes them, takes care of them with affection and encourages them in the walk of the life of the Gospel. This integration is also necessary for the care of Christian formation of their children, who must be considered the most important. For the Christian community, taking care of these people is not a weakening of its own faith and witness regarding the indissolubility of marriage: indeed, the Church expresses her charity precisely in this care.

85. St. John Paul II offered overall criteria which remain the basis for the evaluation of these situations: "Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations. There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing, and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid." (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84). It is therefore the task of pastors to accompany interested persons on the way of discernment in keeping with the teaching of the Church and the guidance of Bishops. In this process it will be useful to make an examination of conscience through times of reflection and penitence. The divorced and remarried should ask themselves how they behaved toward their children when the conjugal union entered into crisis; if there were attempts at reconciliation; how is the situation with the abandoned partner; what consequences the new relationship has on the rest of the family and the community of the faithful; what example it offers to young people who must prepare for marriage. A sincere reflection can strengthen the trust in the mercy of God which is never denied to anyone.

Furthermore, it cannot be denied that in some circumstances "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) for reasons of various conditions. Consequently, the judgment of an objective situation should not lead to a judgment about the "subjective imputability" (Pontifical Council for legislative texts, Declaration June 24, 2000, 2a). In specific circumstances people find great difficulty in acting a different way. Therefore, while upholding a general norm, it is necessary to recognize that the responsibility regarding certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking account of the rightly formed conscience of

persons, must take responsibility for these situations. Even the consequences of the acts carried out are not necessarily the same in all cases.

86. The process of accompaniment and discernment directs these faithful to an awareness of their situation before God. Conversation with the priest, in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and the steps that can foster it and make it grow. Given that for the same law there is no graduality (cf. FC, 34), this discernment can never prescind from the demands of truth and charity of the Gospel proposed by the Church. For this to happen, the necessary conditions of humility, confidence, love for the Church and her teaching, in the sincere search for God's will and the desire to achieve a more perfect response to it, must be secured.

Chapter IV Family and evangelization

The spirituality of the family

87. The family, in its vocation and mission, is truly a treasure of the Church. However, as Saint Paul affirms with regard to the Gospel, "we have this treasure in vessels of clay" (2 Cor 4,7). Over the entrance of family life, Pope Francis affirms, "are written three words [...]: "may I?", "thanks", "excuse me". In fact these words open the way to living well in the family, to living in peace. They are simple words, but not so simple to put in practice! They enclose great power: the power of safeguarding the home, even through a thousand difficulties and trials; on the other hand, when they are missing, little by little cracks open up which are able even to cause it to collapse" (Francis, General Audience, 13th of May, 2015). The teaching of the Pontiffs invites us to study deeply the spiritual dimension of family life departing from the rediscovery of prayer in the family and listening together to the Word of God, from which flows the duty of charity. The principal nourishment of the spiritual life is the Eucharist, especially on the Lord's Day, as a sign of his being profoundly rooted in the ecclesial community (cf. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 52:66). Domestic prayer, participation in the liturgy and practice of popular and Marian devotions are efficacious means of meeting with Jesus Christ and of evangelizing the family. This will make evident the special vocation of the spouses to realize, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, their sanctification through the marital life, even participating in the mystery of the cross of Christ, which transforms the difficulties and the sufferings into love offerings.

88. In the family tenderness is the bond which unites the parents among themselves and with the children. Tenderness means giving with joy and bringing out in the other the joy of feeling himself loved. This is expressed in particular in the turning of oneself with exquisite care to the limits of the other, especially when they emerge in an evident manner. To treat with delicacy and respect signifies taking care of wounds and giving hope again, in such a way as to revive the other's trust. Tenderness in the relations of the family is the day to day virtue which helps to overcome interior and relationship conflicts. In this regard, Pope Francis invites us to reflect: "Do we have the courage of accepting with tenderness the difficult situations and problems of those who stand beside us, or do we prefer impersonal solutions, efficient perhaps but lacking the warmth of the Gospel? How much need of tenderness the world today has! Patience of God, nearness of God, tenderness of God" (Homily on occasion of the Holy Mass of the Night on the Solemnity of Christmas, 24th of December, 2014).

The family, subject of pastoral care

89. If the Christian family wants to be faithful to its mission, it will have to understand well from where it flows: it cannot evangelize without being evangelized. The mission of the family embraces the fruitful union of the spouses, the education of the children, the witness of the sacrament, the preparation of other couples for marriage and the friendly accompanying of those couples or families who encounter difficulty. From here the importance of an evangelizing and catechetical effort directed at the interior of the family. In this regard, take care to utilize couples, the mothers and fathers, as active subjects of catechesis, especially in regard to children, in collaboration with priests, deacons, consecrated persons and catechists. This effort begins from the first serious meetings with the couple. The catechesis of the family is a great help, insofar as it is an effective method of forming young parents and for rendering them aware of their mission as evangelizers of their own family. Moreover, it is very important to underline the nexus between familial experience and Christian initiation. The whole Christian community ought to become the place in which families are born, meet each other, and dialogue with each other, walking in the faith and sharing journeys of growth and of reciprocal exchange.

90. The Church must instill in families a sense of belonging in the Church, a sense of the "we" in which no member is forgotten. All are encouraged to develop their capacities and to realize the project of their own life in service of the Kingdom of God. Every family, inserted in the ecclesial context, rediscovers the

joy of communion with other families for serving the common good of society, promoting a policy, an economy, and a culture in service of the family, even through the use of social networks and the media. One hopes for the possibility of creating small communities of families as living witnesses of evangelical values. The need is perceived of preparing, forming and delegating some families who are able to accompany others in Christian living. The families who are willing to live the mission “ad gentes” must also be remembered and encouraged. Finally, the importance of connecting the pastoral care of the youth with that of families is noted.

The relationship with cultures and institutions

91. The Church “which has known in the course of the centuries diverse conditions of existence, makes use of different cultures to spread and explain in its preaching the message of Christ for all people, for studying and reflecting deeply upon it, for better expressing it in the liturgical life and in the life of the multiform communities of the faithful” (GS 58). It is important therefore to take account of these cultures and respect each of them in its uniqueness. It is also fitting to recall that which Blessed Paul VI wrote: “The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures” (EN, 20). The pastoral care of marriages and families necessitates the respect of those positive elements which are met in the various religious and cultural experiences, which represent a “preparatio evangelica.” Nevertheless, in the encounter with cultures, an evangelization attentive to the requirements of the human advancement of the family cannot fail to denounce frankly cultural, social, political and economic conditioning. The growing hegemony of the logic of the market, which kills the spaces and times of authentic familial life, concurs also in aggravating discrimination, exclusion, violence. Among the various families who live in conditions of economic indigence, because of joblessness or precarious work situations or because of the lack of socio-medical assistance, not unusually it happens that some, not being able to access credit, find themselves victims of usury and are seen at times constrained to abandon their homes and even their children. As such, it is suggested to create supportive economic structures sufficient to help these families or capable of promoting the solidarity of the family and society.

92. The family is “the first and vital cell of society” (AA, 11). It has to rediscover its vocation in support of social life in all its aspects. It is indispensable that families, by coming together as a group, find the modalities to interact with political, economic and cultural institutions, for the sake of constructing a more just society. Thus, dialogue and cooperation with social structures need to be developed, and lay people who are engaged, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political spheres need to be encouraged and supported. Politicians must respect, in particular, the principle of subsidiarity and not limit the rights of families. It is for this reason important to consider the “Charter of the rights of the Family” (cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, 22nd of October, 1983) and the “Universal declaration of the Rights of man” (10th of December, 1948). For the Christians who work in politics activity for life and family have to have priority, because a society which neglects the family has lost its openness to the future. Familial associations, engaged in work in common together with groups of other Christian traditions, have among their principal aims, among others, the promotion and the defense of life and the family, liberty of education and religious liberty, balancing of time for work and time for family, defense of women in the work place, protecting the objection of conscience.

Openness to mission

93. The family of the baptized is by its nature missionary and increases its faith in the act of giving it to others, first of all to its own children. The fact itself of living in familial communion is its first form of preaching. In effect, evangelization begins from the family, in which is transmitted not only physical life, but also the spiritual life. The role of grandparents in the transmission of the faith and religious practices ought not to be forgotten: they are the witnesses of the bond between the generations, guardians of traditions of wisdom, prayer and good example. The family is thus constituted as a subject of pastoral action through the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and the heredity of multiple forms of witness: solidarity with the poor, openness to the diversity of persons, stewardship of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, above all with the most needy, engagement in the promotion of the common good also through the transformation of unjust social structures, departing from the territory in which it lives, practicing the works of corporal and spiritual mercy.

CONCLUSION

94. In the course of this Assembly we Fathers of the synod, united around Pope Francis, have experienced the tenderness and the prayer of the whole Church, we have walked like the disciples of Emmaus and recognized the presence of Christ in the breaking of bread at the Eucharistic table, in fraternal communion, in the sharing of pastoral experiences. We hope that the fruit of this work, now consigned into the hands of the Successor of Peter, gives hope and joy to many families in the world, direction to pastors and pastoral workers and stimulus to the work of evangelization. Concluding the

Report, we humbly ask the Holy Father to use this opportunity to offer a document on the family, so that in it, the Domestic Church, shines ever more Christ, the light of the world.

Prayer to the Holy Family

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

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make also our families
places of communion and banquets of prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and little domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
never again in families may there be the experience
of violence, closure and division:
whoever has been wounded or scandalized
may they soon know consolation and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
reawaken in all the awareness
of the sacred and inviolable character of the family,
its beauty in the plan of God.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
hear, grant our supplication.

Amen.

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Votes on the individual numbered chapters of the Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy
Father Francis

Fathers present: 265

[Two thirds: 177]

The abstentions are not indicated.

Number	Yes	No
1	260	0
2	257	0
3	255	1
4	256	2
5	256	3
6	249	9
7	248	9
8	245	9
9	254	4
10	253	7
11	256	1
12	253	5
13	255	5
14	256	5
15	255	5
16	254	8
17	259	1
18	258	1
19	255	5
20	257	3
21	256	4
22	252	4
23	253	4

24	255	5
25	242	15
26	256	2
27	251	9
28	257	4
29	249	8
30	250	7
31	253	7
32	249	6
33	246	12
34	245	11
35	259	2
36	256	3
37	252	6
38	251	5
39	255	3
40	255	6
41	253	7
42	257	2
43	254	6
44	247	11
45	249	6
46	254	5
47	246	11
48	253	6
49	253	5
50	252	6
51	250	11
52	252	5
53	244	15
54	236	21
55	243	14
56	248	10
57	257	2
58	247	14
59	258	3
60	259	1
61	254	7
62	259	0
63	237	21
64	247	11
65	252	7
66	258	0
67	259	0
68	253	3
69	236	21
70	213	47
71	218	42
72	229	29
73	236	24
74	223	36
75	205	52
76	221	37
77	247	11
78	250	8
79	246	14
80	253	6
81	253	7
82	244	16
83	248	12
84	187	72
85	178	80
86	190	64
87	255	3
88	252	4
89	257	2
90	255	5

91	248	12
92	256	4
93	255	2
94	253	5

Original Text: Italian / Working translation by Evan Simpkins