The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World

Preface

At the conclusion of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, celebrated in 2014 to treat the topic, The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization, Pope Francis decided to make public the Relatio Synodi, that document which concluded the synod’s work. At the same time, the Holy Father indicated that this document would be the Lineamenta for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly to take place from 4 to 25 October 2015 to treat the topic, The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World.

The Relatio Synodi, which is sent as the Lineamenta, concludes in the following words: “These proposed reflections, the fruit of the synodal work that took place in great freedom and with a spirit of reciprocal listening, are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view that will later be developed and clarified through reflection in the local Churches in the intervening year leading to the XIV Ordinary Assembly “with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church’s faith, tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family” (Relatio Synodi, n. 62).

The Lineamenta has a series of questions aimed at knowing how the document is received and to generate an in-depth examination of the work initiated during the Extraordinary Assembly. It is a number of restricted, “with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church’s faith, tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family” (Relatio Synodi, n. 4). From this vantage point, we have “one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront” (Pope Francis, Concluding Discourse, 18 October 2014). The results of this consultation, together with the Relatio Synodi, will serve as the basis for the Instrumentum Laboris of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of 2015.

For this purpose, the episcopal conferences are asked to choose a suitable manner of involving all components of the particular churches and academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations.

Introduction

1. The Synod of Bishops, gathered around the Holy Father, turned its thoughts to the families of the world, each with its joys, difficulties and hopes. In a special way, the Assembly felt a duty to give thanks to the Lord for the generosity and faithfulness of so many Christian families in responding to their vocation and mission, which they fulfill with joy and faith, even when living as a family requires facing obstacles, misunderstandings and suffering. The entire Church and this Synod express to these families our appreciation, gratitude and encouragement. During the prayer vigil held in St Peter’s Square on 4 October 2014 in preparation for the Synod on the family, Pope Francis evoked, in a simple yet concrete way, the centrality [of the experience] of the family in everyone’s lives: “Evening falls on our assembly. It is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table, in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received, of the encounters which warm the heart and make it grow, good wine which anticipates the unending feast in the days of man. It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the bitter twilight of shattered dreams and broken plans; how many people trudge through the day in the blind alley of resignation, of abandonment, even resentment; in how many homes the wine of joy has been less plentiful, and therefore, also the zest — the very wisdom — for life […]. Let us make our prayer heard for one another this evening, a prayer for all.”

1. Within the family are joys and trials, deep love and relationships which, at times, can be wounded. The family is truly the “school of humanity” (Gaudium et Spes, 52), which is much needed today. Despite the many signs of crisis in the family institution in various areas of the “global village”, the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and serves as the basis of the need of the Church, an expert in humankind’s spiritual and pastoral discernment, the pro-
misunderstandings and suffering. The entire Church and this Synod express to these families our appreciation, gratitude and encouragement. During the prayer vigil held in St Peter’s Square on 4 October 2014 in preparation for the Synod on the family, Pope Francis evoked, in a simple yet concrete way, the centrality of the family in everyone’s lives: “Evening falls on our assembly. It is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table, in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received, of the encounters which warm the heart and make it grow, good wine which anticipates the unending feast in the days of man. It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the bitter twilight of shattered dreams and broken plans; how many people trudge through the day in the blind alley of resignation, of abandonment, even resentment; in how many homes the wine of joy has been less plentiful, and therefore, also the zest — the very wisdom — for life […]. Let us make our prayer heard for one another this evening, a prayer for all.”
help them realize their plan of forming a family.

6. Some cultural and religious contexts pose particular challenges. In some places, war is still being practiced and in places with long traditions, the custom of “marriage in stages”. In other places, people have to take care of themselves, to know themselves better, to live in greater harmony with their emotions and feelings and to seek affective relationships of quality and meaning in their lives. These proper aspirations can lead to a desire to give greater effort into building relationships of stability, love, respect, which are empowering and supportive like those within a family. In this case, however, individualism and living only for one’s self are a real danger. The challenge for the Church is to assist couples in their emotive maturation and affective development through fostering dialogue, virtue and trust in the merciful love of God. The full commitment required in marriage can be a strong antidote to the temptation of a selfish love for oneself.

9. Cultural tendencies in today’s world seem to set no limits on a person’s affectivity in which every aspect needs to be explored, even those that are highly complex. Indeed, nowadays the question of affective fragility is a pressing one; a narcissistic, unstable or changeable way of loving easily allows a person to grow to maturity. Particularly worrisome is the spread of pornography and its frequent use, which is often because of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet and reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution. In this context, couples suffer from being hesitant and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life. A crisis in a couple’s relationship may arise because the relationship may and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds. The decline in population, due to a mentality against having children and promoted by the world policies of population control, creates not only a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured but also the danger that our common civil coexistence will lead to economic im- poverishment and a loss of hope in the future. The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on us and our reality.

Pastoral Challenges

10. In this regard, the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of hope, which is based that man comes from God, and that, consequently, a reflection of capable reframing the great questions about the meaning of marriage and the Christian family correspondence to the search that characterizes human exist- ence, those who have experienced fail- ure or find themselves in a variety of situations. The Christian message always contains in itself the reality of marriage and the words of mercy and truth that meet in Christ.

Looking at the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation

11. In order to “walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pray and to respond to the revelation of his Face. … Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibil- ities open up” (Pope Francis, Discourse, 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tender- ness, calling into question, with patience and mercy, in pro- claiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.

12. Since the order of creation is determined by its orientation towards Christ, a distinction needs to be made without separating the various levels through which God expresses his action. The adoration of his Face. … Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up” (Pope Francis, Discourse, 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men he met with love and tender- ness, calling into question, with patience and mercy, in pro- claiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.

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13. Jesus himself, referring to the original plan of the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between a man and a woman. To the Pharisees that “for your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to di- vorce your wives, but from the be- ginning of the creation God said…” (Mt 19:6), is to be understood not as a “yoke” imposed on persons but as a “gift” to a husband and wife united in marriage. In this way, Jesus shows how God’s “humble” act of coming to earth might always accompany the human journey and might heal and transform a hardened heart with his grace, orientating it to- wards its principle, by way of the cross. The Gospels make clear that Jesus’ example is paradigmatic for the Church. In fact, after leaving the Vatican City, he began to work his signs at the wedding of Cana and he an- nounced the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that radiates from the community (Mt 19:13). At the same time, how- ever, he put what he taught into practice and manifested the true meaning of mercy, clearly illustrated in his meeting with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-30) and with the adulteress (Jn 8:1-11). By looking at the sinner with love, Jesus treated the issue of repentance and conversion (“Go and sin no more”), which is the basis for forgiveness.

The Family in God’s Salvific Plan

14. The words of eternal life, which Jesus gave to his disciples, were addressed to all married couples and the family, Jesus’ teaching al- lows us to distinguish three basic stages in God’s plan for marriage and the family. In the beginning, Jesus says to the man and the woman he created the first marriage between Adam and Eve as the solid foundation of the fam- ily. God not only created human beings male and female (Gen 1:27), but he also blessed them so they might be fruitful and multi- ply (Gen 1:28). For this reason, “a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). This union was supposed to remain in the union of the People of God, for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce (cfDt 24:1). The time then passed into the practice in the time of Jesus. With Christ’s coming and his reconcil- ing a fallen world through his re- demption, the period begun by Moses ended.

15. Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and the family to their origi- nal dignity. He established a bond that Jesus deemed by Christ (Eph 5:21-32), restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which every true love flows. The spousal covenant and the mutual gift of life in creation were made known and revealed in the history of salvation, receives its full meaning in Christ and his Church. Through his deeds and words, marriage and the family the grace necessary to witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion. The Gospel of the Family spans the history of the world from the creation of man in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gn 1:26-27) until it reaches, at the end of time, the fulfillment of the mystery of the Christ’s Covenant with the wedding of Lamb (cf. Rev 19:9) (cf. John Paul II, Cate- chesis on Human Love).

The Family in the Church’s Documents

16. “Throughout the centuries, the Church has sustained a constant teaching on marriage and family. One of the highest expres- sions of this teaching was pro- posed by the Second Vatican Council, in the Decree on the Christ- ian Family Gaudium et Spes, which de- votes an entire chapter to promot- ing the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 47-52). This document defined marriage as a community of life and love (cf. Gaudium et Spes, 48), placing love at the center of human relations. At the same time, the truth of this love in counter distinction to the various forms of reductionism present in contemporary culture. The ‘true love between husband and wife’ (Gaudium et Spes, 49) implies a mutual gift of self and includes and integrates the sexual and af- fectionate aspects of loving and the family. Jesus’ teaching al- lows us to distinguish three basic stages in God’s plan for marriage and the family. In the beginning, Jesus says to the man and the woman he created the first marriage between Adam and Eve as the solid foundation of the fam- ily. God not only created human beings male and female (Gen 1:27), but he also blessed them so they might be fruitful and multi- ply (Gen 1:28). For this reason, “a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). This union was supposed to remain in the union of the People of God, for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce (cfDt 24:1). The time then passed into the practice in the time of Jesus. With Christ’s coming and his reconcil- ing a fallen world through his re- demption, the period begun by Moses ended.

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17. “In the wake of Vatican II, the Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes refined the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a special way, Blessed Pope Paul VI, in his En- cyclical Humanae Vitae, displayed the meaning of a married life and the conjugal love and the generation
The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Broken and Fragile Families

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

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

24. In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of the God’s plan for them. Looking to Christ, whose light illumines every person (cf. In 1,9; Gaudium et Spes, 22), the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work.

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

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

27. In accordance with Christ’s mercy, the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and lost love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a
storm. Conscious that the most merciful thing is to tell the truth in love, we go beyond compas- sion. Merciful love, as it attracts and unites, transforms and elevates. It is an invitation to conver- sation. We understand the Lord’s at- titude in the same way; he does not condone a woman being battered by a man. He asks her to sin no more (Jn 8:11).

PART III: CONFRONTING THE SITUATION: PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Con- texts

28. Discussion at the synod fo- cused on some of the more urgent pastoral needs to be addressed in the local Churches, in communion with the Synod. The Gospel of the Family is ur- gently needed in the work of evangelization. The Church must carry this out with the tenderness and unity which the Son of God has requested. The Church does this without fear, but in espousing values that re- spond to the needs of those who find themselves today even in the most secularized of countries.

29. The Word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family. All pastoral work on behalf of the family must allow people to savor the beauty of their own family life and to become members of the domes- tic church through the Church’s prayerful reading of Sac- cred Scripture. The Word of God is not only the word of a son’s private life but also a criteri- on of judgment and a light in dis- cerning the various challenges that new couples and families encounter.

30. At the same time, in many families, anxiety about the future often leads to an overestimation of difficulties. In these different reli- gious realities and in the great cultural diversity that character- izes countries, positive possibili- ties should be appreciated first, and then, on this basis, limitations and deficiencies should be evalu- ated.

31. Christian marriage is a vocation that is undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discern- ment. It is not merely a mat- tery of legal requirements or a cultural and socio-political field. There is a need for every pastoral activity on be- half of the family.

32. The primacy of grace needs to be highlighted and, conse- quently, the possibilities that the Spirit provides in the Sacrament. It is a question of allowing people to experience that the Gospel of the Family is a joy that “fills hearts and lives”, because in Christ we “are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneli- ness” (Evangelii Gaudium, 11). In light of the Parable of the Sower (cf. Mt 13:3), our task is to coop- erate in the sowing; the rest is God’s work, now we forget that, in preaching about the fam- ily, the Church is a sign of contra- diction.

33. Consequently, this work calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, not stopping at proclaiming a merely theoretical message with no contact with the concrete problems. We must continually bear in mind that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in marriage and the family and that, consequently, the Church, from parents to children has often been interrupted. In the face of a strong faith, the imposition of cer- tain cultural perspectives which weaken the family and marriage will cause no harm.

34. Conversion also needs to be seen in the language we use, so that it might prove to be effective- ly a sign of missionary conversion in prepar- ing the people who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needed to support and live out marriage proves invaluable in the gen- uine growth of love between per- sons. In this regard, the synod fathers insisted on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by favouring the witness of families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the work of the Christian Initiation as well as em- phasizing the connection between marriage, Baptism and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that married couples needed to be prepared for marriage, programmes that create a true experience of participation in the liturgy, and thoroughly treat the various aspects of family life.

Accompanying Married Couples during the Initial Years of Mar- riage

35. The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Conse- quently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual ceremonial moment of the marriage. Many couples need to be of service to younger couples, with the possible cooper- ation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communi- ties. Married couples need en- couragement in a basic openness to the great gift of children. The importance of family spirituality, prayer and membership of associations, especially on the anniver- sary of the marriage, was recognized as vital factors in fostering evange- lization through the family.

36. The synod fathers repeated- ly called for a thorough renewal of the Church’s pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Fam- ily and the situation of young people. To foster emphasis on individuals. For this reason, the synod fathers repeat- edly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, cate- chists and pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.

37. They equally highlighted the fact that the synod’s preparation was aimed at denouncing with clarity cultural, so- cial, political and economic fac- tors, such as the excessive impor- tance given to market logic, that perpetuated structures that lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Conse- quently, dialogue and cooperation need to be developed with the so- cial entities and encouragement given to Christian lay people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields.

Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage

38. The complex social reality and the changes affecting the fam- ily today require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needed to support and live out marriage proves invaluable in the gen- uine growth of love between per- sons. In this regard, the synod fathers insisted on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by favouring the witness of families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the work of the Christian Initiation as well as em- phasizing the connection between marriage, Baptism and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that married couples needed to be prepared for marriage, programmes that create a true experience of participation in the liturgy, and thoroughly treat the various aspects of family life.

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40. While continuing to pro- claim and foster Christian mar- riage, the Synod also encourages the use of “accompanying” in the pastoral discernment of the situa- tion of a great many who no longer live this reality. Entering into pastoral dialogue with these persons is needed to distinguish elements in their situation that lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of Marriage in its fullness. Pastors ought to identify elements in these situations that call for a constructive response, seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the fullness of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel. These couples need to be provided for and guid- ed patiently and discreetly. With this in mind, the witness of au- thentic Christian families is par- ticularly appealing and im- portant in this context. This is not a solution in a satisfying man- ner. A material or legal requirem ent is needed in preparing couples for marriage, but primar- ily because celebrating an insignia that has led to a crisis in marriage and the family will cause no harm.

41. The synod fathers also noted that in many countries “an in- creasing number of people live to- gether ad experimentum, in unions that have not been reli- giously or civilly recognized” (In- stitutio fidei, 1). In many countries, this occurs especially in traditional marriages that are arranged between families and often celebrated in different countries. Other countries have seen a continual increase in the number of those who, after having lived together for a long period, requested the celebration of mar- riage in Church. Simply to live to- gether is often a choice based on a general attitude opposed to any- thing institutional or definitive; it can also be done while awaiting more security in life (a steady job and steady income). Finally, in some countries de facto marriages are very numerous, not only be- cause of a rejection of values con- cerning the family and marriage but primarily because celebrating a marriage is considered too ex- pensive, complicated or impor- tant in the cultural and socio-political fields. As a result, material poverty leads people into de facto unions.

42. All these situations require a constructive response, seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the fullness of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel. These couples need to be provided for and guided patiently and discreetly. With this in mind, the witness of au- thentic Christian families is par- ticularly appealing and im- portant in this context. This is not a solution in a satisfying man- ner. A material or legal requirem ent is needed in preparing couples for marriage, but primar- ily because celebrating an insignia that has led to a crisis in marriage and the family will cause no harm.

43. Married couples with prob- lems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. The elements in their life that the church mercy seeks to help people re- cover and restore relationships. Experience shows that with prop- er assistance and acts of reconcili- ation, much good can come through. Particularly appealing and im- portant in this context is the case of people who have been forced by mali- cious or de facto marriage, seeking a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life. Forgiveness be- tween spouses helps a couple to experience a never-end- ing love that does not pass away (cf. 1 Cor 13:8). At times, this is difficult for those who have re- ceived God’s forgiveness are given the strength to offer a gen- uine forgiveness that regenerates persons.

44. The necessity for coura- geous pastoral choices was partic- ularly evident at the Synod. Strongly reaffirming their faith- fulness to the Gospel of the Fam- ily and acknowledging that separa- tion and divorce are always wounds that cause deep suffering to the married couple and to their children, the synod fathers felt the urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course based on the pres- ent reality of weaknesses within the family and the society, that these are more “endured” with suffering than freely chosen. These situations vary because of personal, cultural and socio-econo- mic factors. Therefore, solu- tions need to be considered in a variety of ways, as suggested by Pope St John Paul II (cf. Familiaris Consortio, 84). 

45. All families should, above all, be treated with respect and love and accompanied on their journey as Christ accompanied the family of Jacob, Joseph’s fam- ily. In a particular way, the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: “The Church will have to initiate everyone — priests, religious and laity — into this ‘art of accompaniment’, which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the families. The task of accom- paniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting a closeness and compassion which, at the same time, heals, liberates and promotes the growth in ‘the Christian life’” (Evangelii Gaudi- um, 169).

46. A special discernment is in- dispensable for pastorally guiding persons who are separated, div- orced or abandoned. Respect needs to be primarily given to the suffering of those who have un- dertaken separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to inter- rupt or abandon their marriage. This is not to say that such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pas- toral activity, then, needs to be geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, which might even take place in special- ized “listening centres” estab- lished in every diocese. At the same time, the synod fathers empha- sized the necessity of addressing, in a faithful and constructive fash- ion, the consequences of separa- tion and divorce. In every case the innocent victims of
the situation. Children must not become an “object” of contention. Instead, every suitable means ought to be sought to ensure that they can overcome the trauma of a family break-up and grow as serenely as possible. In each case, the Church is always to point out the injustice that very often is associated with divorce. Special attention is to be given in the guidance of single-parent families, so that women who have to bear alone the responsibility of providing a home and raising their children can receive assistance.

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

48. With respect to marriage cases, the streamlining of the procedure, requested by many synod fathers, in addition to the preparation of a sufficient number of persons — clerics and lay people — financially difficult.

50. Likewise, those who are divorced and remarried require careful discernment and an accurate assessment of conscience. Language or behavior that might make them feel an object of discrimination should be avoided, all the more so since they have the dignity to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community’s care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its fidelity to the indissolubility of marriage, but, precisely in this way, the community is seen to express its charity.

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

52. Some synod fathers maintain that divorced and remarried persons or those living together can have fruitful recourse to a spiritual communion. Others raised the question as to why, then, they cannot have access to sacramental Communion. As a result, the synod fathers requested that further theological study in the Church be undertaken with a view to making clear the distinctive features of the two forms and their connection with the theology of marriage.

53. The synod fathers recognized that mixed marriages were frequently raised in the interventions of the synod fathers. The differences in the matrimonial regulations of the Orthodox Church create serious problems in some contexts, which require due consideration from the point of view of ecumenical dialogue. The contribution of the dialogue with other religions would be important for interreligious marriages.

54. Some families have members who have a homosexual tendency. In this regard, the synod fathers asked themselves what pastoral attention might be appropriate for them in accordance with Church teaching: “There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family.” Nevertheless, in situations where sexual orientation and sexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity, “Every sign of unjust discrimination in the church’s attitude toward homosexual persons should be avoided” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, 4). Exerting pressure in this regard on the Pastors of the Church is totally unacceptable: it is equally unacceptable for international organizations to link their financial assistance to poorer countries that, in the very act of opening itself to the generation of life, gives an experience of a mystery that transcends us.

The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of a Declining Birthrate

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

56. Pastoral work in this area needs to be conducted with listening people and acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life, which is needed, if human love is to be lived fully. This serves as the basis for an appropriate teaching regarding the natural methods for responsible procreation, which attach a couple to live, in a harmonious and conscious manner, the loving communication between husband and wife in all its aspects along with their responsibility in procreating life. In this regard, we should return to the message of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae of Blessed Pope Paul VI, which highlights the need to respect the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods in regulating births. The adoption of children, orphanages and related to fostering the family as a son or daughter to a person who has been deprived of this dignity.

58. Affection needs assistance, also in marriage, as a path to maturity in the ever-deepening acceptance of the other and an ever fuller gift of self, in this sense, the necessity of offering programmes of family planning in order to ensure that, in the very act of opening itself to the generation of life, gives an experience of a mystery that transcends us.

Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization

59. One of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today’s cultural and reality and the great influence of the media. Observers sometimes need, to be given to the needs and expectations of families, capable of being places of growth in daily life, places of a concrete and essential transmission of the virtues that give form to our existence. Parents, then, are able freely to choose the type of education and upbringing of their children, according to their convictions.

60. The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian Initiation, by being a calling for all communities.

Conclusian

61. These proposed reflections, from the synodal work that took place in great freedom and 2015 WORLD SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE FAMILY 5
with a spirit of reciprocal listening, are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view that will later be developed and clarified through reflection in the local Churches in the intervening year leading to the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2015 to treat The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World. These are not decisions taken nor are they easy subjects. Nevertheless, in the collegial journey of the bishops and with the involvement of all God's people, the Holy Spirit will guide them in finding the road to truth and mercy for all. This has been the wish of Pope Francis from the beginning of our work, when he invited us to be courageous in faith and humbly and honestly to embrace the truth in charity.

Does the description of the various familial situations in the Relatio Synodi correspond to what exists in the Church and society today? What missing aspects should be included?

Part I

Listening: The Context and Challenges of the Family

As indicated in the introduction (ns. 1 - 4), the Extraordinary Synod was intended to address all the families of the world in a desirous to share their joys, struggles, and hopes. At the same time, considering the many Christian families who faithfully live their vocation, the Synod expressed to them a sense of gratitude and encouragement to become more decisively, as the Church strives to “go out of herself”, and to rediscover the family’s vital character in the work of evangelization, primarily in nourishing for themselves and for families in difficulty the “desire to form a family”, which endures and unites them in the marriage and open to the God of life (ns. 9 - 10).

5. How do Christian families bear witness, for succeeding generations, to the development and growth of a life of sentiment? (cf. Gospel of the Family)

The Gospel of the Family, faithfully preserved by the Church from the time of Christ’s Revelation, both written and transmitted through the ages, needs to be proclaimed in today’s world with renewed joy and hope, continuing all-the-while to look at Jesus Christ. The vocation and mission of the family is fully configured to the order of creation which develops into that of redemption, as summarized by the desire of the Council, “let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification.

Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising to life again” (Gaudium et Spes, 52; cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1533-1535). From this vantage point, the questions arising from the Relatio Synodi are devised to prompt a faithful and bold response from the Pastors and the People of God in a renewed proclamation of the Gospel of the Family.

Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation (ns. 12 - 14)

Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, the Church looks to Christ in his enduring truth and inexhaustible newness, which also sheds light on the family. “Christ is the ‘eternal Gospel’ (Rev 14:6-7), he is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is for ever young and revealing newness of his person and source of newness” (Gaudium Evangelii, 11).

A fixed gaze on Christ opens up new possibilities. “Indeed, every new step is a new direction of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up” (n. 12). How is the teaching from Sacred Scripture utilized in pastoral activity on behalf of families. To what extent does “fixing our gaze on Christ” nourish a pastoral care of the family which is courageous and faithful?

8. What marriage and family values can be seen to be realized in the life of young people and married couples? What form do they take? Are there values which can be highlighted? (cf. n. 13) What sinful aspects are to be avoided and overcome?

9. What human pedagogy needs to be taken into account — in keeping with divine pedagogy — so as to better understand what is required in the Church’s pastoral activity in light of the maturation of a couple’s life together which would lead to marriage in the future? (cf. n. 13)

10. What is being done to demonstrate the greatness and beauty of the gift of indissolubility so as to prompt a desire to live it and strengthen it more and more? (cf. n. 14)

11. How can people be helped to understand that a relationship with God can assist couples in overcoming the inherent weaknesses in marital relations? (cf. n. 14) How do people bear witness to the fact that divine blessings accompany every true marriage? How do people manifest that the grace of the Sacrament sustains married couples throughout their life together?

The Family in God’s Savific Plan (ns. 15 - 16)

In creation, the vocation of the love between a man and woman draws its full realization from the Paschal Mystery of Christ the Lord, who, in his total gift of self, makes the Church his Mystical Body. Christian marriage, in drawing on the grace of Christ, thus becomes, for those who call the path, leading to the perfection of love, which is holiness.

12. How can people be made to understand that Christian marriage corresponds to the original plan of God and thus, one of fulfilling and not merely “completing” or “securing” a life for the couple? (cf. n. 13)

13. How can the Church be conceived as a “domestic Church” (Lumen Gentium, 11), an agent of the object of the work of evangelization in service to the Kingdom of God?

14. How can an awareness of the spiritual mission of the family be fostered?
The Family in the Church’s Documents (ns. 17 - 20)

The Church’s Magisterium in all its richness needs to be better known by the People of God. Marital spirituality is nourished by the constant teaching of the Pastors, who seek to present to the faithful all that enables them to grow through their continual attentiveness to the Word of God and to the sacraments of faith and charity.

15. The Lord looks with love at the Christian family and through him the family grows as a true community of life and love. How can a family pastoral be developed and how can families become places of new life in Christ? (cf. n. 21)

16. What initiatives in catechesis can be developed and fostered to make known and offer assistance to persons in living the Church’s teaching on the family, above all in surmounting any possible discrepancy between what is lived and what is professed and in leading to a process of conversion?

The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together (ns. 21 - 22)

“Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may effectively lead the spouses to God and may aid and strengthen them in the sublime mission of being father and mother. For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and required to receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God” (Gaudium et Spes, 48).

17. What initiatives can lead people to understand the value of an indissoluble and fruitful marriage as the path to complete personal fulfillment? (cf. n. 21)

18. What can be done to show that the family has many positive aspects for experiencing the joys of human existence?

19. The Second Vatican Council, returning to an ancient ecclesial tradition, expressed an appreciation for natural marriage. To what extent does diocesan pastoral activity acknowledge the value of this popular wisdom as fundamental in culture and society? (cf. n. 22)

The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Wounded and Fragile Families (ns. 23 - 28)

After having considered the beauty of successful marriages and strong families and shown appreciation for the generous witness of those who remain faithful to the bonds of marriage, even when abandoned by their spouses, the Pastors at the Synod asked themselves — in an open and courageous manner but not without concern and caution — how the Church is to regard Catholics who are united in a civil bond, bold and more insistent manner.

23. How is the family emphasized in the formation of priests and other pastoral workers? How are families themselves involved?

24. Are people aware that the rapid evolution in society requires a constant attention to language in pastoral communication? Is there an effective testimony given to the priority of grace in a way that family life is conceived and lived as welcoming the Holy Spirit?

25. In proclaiming the Gospel of the Family, how can the conditions be created so that each family might actually be as God wills and that society might acknowledge the family’s dignity and mission? What “pastoral conversion” and what further steps towards an in-depth examination are being done to achieve this?

26. Are people aware of the importance of the collaboration of social and civil institutions on behalf of the family? How is this collaboration actually done? What criteria are used to inspire it? In this regard, what role can be played by family associations? How can this collaboration be sustained even in a bold repudiation of the cultural, economic and political processes which threaten the family?

27. How can relations between family, society and civil life be fostered for the benefit of the family? How can the support of the State and the international community be fostered on behalf of the family?

Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage (ns. 29 - 40)

The Synod recognized the steps taken in recent years to facilitate an effective preparation of young people for marriage, stressing, however, a need for a greater commitment of the entire Christian community in not only the preparation but also the initial years of family life.

28. How is marriage preparation proposed in order to highlight the vocation and mission of the family according to faith in Jesus Christ? Is it proposed as an authentic ecclesial experience? How can it be renewed and improved?

29. How does the catechesis of Christian initiation and the Church’s pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile? (cf. n. 28)

30. What can be done so that persons in various forms of union between a man and a woman — in which human values can be present — might experience a sense of respect, trust and encouragement to grow in the Church’s good will and be helped to arrive at the fulness of Christian marriage? (cf. n. 25)

Part III Confronting the Situation: What are the most significant initiatives already being undertaken? What elements need further development in parishes, dioceses or associations and movements?

Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married or Living Together (ns. 41 - 43)

The Synod discussed diverse situations resulting from a multiplicity of cultural and economic factors, practices grounded in tradition, and the difficulty of young people to make lifetime commitments.

31. What criteria in a proper pastoral discernment of individual situations are being considered in light of the Church’s teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, on which the primary elements of marriage are unity, indissolubility and openness to life?

32. How can the Christian community be able to be pastorally involved in these situations? How can it assist in discerning the positive and negative elements in the life of persons who are civilly married so as to guide and sustain them on a path of growth and conversion towards the Sacrament of Matrimony? How can those living together be assisted to decide to marry?

34. In a particular way, what response is to be given to problems arising from the continuity of the pastoral forms of marriage in stages or between those families?

Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Single-Parent Families) (ns. 44 - 54)

Synod discussion highlighted the need for a pastoral based on the art of accompaniment, “the pace of [which] must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze, our presence and our concern to enable and encourage growth in the Christian life” (Evangelii Gaudium, 169).

Harrying/Catholic News Service

Paul Haring
POPE FRANCIS’ OPENING REMARKS TO THE SYNOD

Eminences, Beatitudes, Excellences, Brothers and Sisters, I give you my cordial welcome to this meeting and my heartfelt thanks for your solicitous and qualified presence and attendance.

In your name, I would like to express my earnest and profound gratitude to all the persons who worked for long months, with dedication, patience and competence, reading, evaluating and elaborating the topics, texts and works of this Extraordinary General Assembly.

Allow me to address my particular and cordial gratitude to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General of the Synod; to Monsignor Fabio Fabene, Under-Secretary, and, together with them, all the reporters, writers, advisers, translators and all the staff of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops. They worked tirelessly, and continue to work, for the good outcome of the present Synod: thank you, truly, so much and may the Lord recompense you! Likewise, I thank the Post-Synodal Council, the reporter and the Secretary General; the Episcopal Conferences that truly worked so much and, with them, I thank the three Presidents Delegate.

I also thank you, dear Cardinals, Patriarchs, Bishops, priests, men and women religious, laymen and laywomen for your presence and for your participation, which enriches the works and the spirit of collegiality and synodality for the good of the Church and of families! I also wanted this spirit of synodality in the choice of the reporter, the Secretary General and the Presidents Delegate. The first two were elected directly by the Post-Synodal Council, which was also elected by the participants in the last Synod. Instead, as the Presidents Delegate must be chosen by the Pope, I asked the Post-Synodal Council itself to suggest names and I appointed those that the Council proposed to me.

You carry the voice of the particular Churches, gathered at the level of local Churches through the Episcopal Conferences. The universal Church and the particular Churches are of divine institution; the local Churches thus understood are of human institution. You will carry this voice in synodality. It is a great responsibility: to carry the realities and the problems of the Churches, to help them walk on that path that is the Gospel of the family.

A basic general condition is this: to speak clearly. No one must say: “This can’t be said; he will think of me this way or that …” It is necessary to say everything that is felt with prudence. After the last Consistory (February 2014), in which there was talk of the family, a Cardinal wrote to me saying: too bad that some Cardinals didn’t have the courage to say some things out of respect for the Pope, thinking, perhaps, that the Pope thought something different. This is not good; this is not synodality, because it is necessary to say everything that in the Lord one feels should be said, with human respect, without fear. And, at the same time, one must listen with humility and receive with an open heart what the brothers say. Synodality will be exercised with these two attitudes.

Therefore, I ask you, please, for these attitudes of brothers in the Lord: to speak with prudence and to listen with humility.

And do so with much tranquility and peace, because the Synod always unfolds cum Petro et sub Petro, and the Pope’s presence is the guarantee for all and protection of the faith.

Dear Brothers, let us all collaborate so that the dynamic of synodality is clearly affirmed. Thank you.
Dear Emences, Beatitudes, Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters, With a heart full of appreciation and gratitude I want to thank, along with you, the Lord who has helped us to make it through the past days, with the light of the Holy Spirit.

From the heart I thank Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General of the Synod, Bishop Fabio Fabene, under-secretary, and with them I thank the Relators, Cardinal Peter Erdo, who has worked so much in these days of family mourning, and the Special Secretary Bishop Giorgio Pizzaballa, President delegates, the transcribers, the consultants, the translators and the unknown workers, all those who have worked with true fidelity and total dedication behind the scenes and without rest. Thank you so much from the heart.

I thank all of you as well, dear Synod fathers, Fraternal Delegates, Auditors, and Assessors, for your active and fruitful participation. I will keep you in prayer asking the Lord to reward you with the abundance of His gifts of grace!

I can happily say that – with a spirit of community and solidarity – we have truly lived the experience of “Synod,” a path of solidarity, “a journey together.”

And it has been “a journey” – and like every journey there were moments of running fast, as if wanting to conquer time and reach the goal as soon as possible; other moments of fatigue, as if wanting to say “enough”; other moments of enthusiasm and ardor. There was a profound sharing of family realities, of desolation, of tensions and shortcomings to say so many things and to say nothing! They call them “byzantisms,” I think, these things…

Dear brothers and sisters, the temptations must not frighten or discourage us, or even discourage us, because no disciple is greater than his master; so if Jesus Himself was tempted — and even called Beelzebul (cf. Mt 12:24) — His disciples should not expect better treatment.

Personally I would be very worried and saddened if it were not for these temptations and these animated discussions; this movement of the spirits, as St Ignatius called it, it is the way we have been able to find a state of agreement, or silent in a false and quietist peace. Instead, I have seen and I have heard — with joy and appreciation — speeches and interventions full of faith, of pastoral and doctrinal zeal, of wisdom, of frankness and of courage: and of parresia. And I have felt that what was set before our eyes was the good of the Church, of families, and the poor and the sentinels of the poor caring (Can. 1572). And this always — we have said it here, in the Hall — without ever putting into question the fundamental truths of the sacrament of marriage: the indissolubility, the unity, the faithfulness, the fruitfulness, that openness to life (cf. Cann. 1055, 1056; and Gaudium et spes, 48).

And this is the Church, the vineyard of the Lord, the fertile Mother spirit and kindly Teacher, who is not afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil and wine on people’s wound; who doesn’t see humanity as a house of glass to judge or categorize people. The Church, the Holy Spirit, the Apostolic and composed of sinners, needful of God’s mercy. This is the Church, the true bride of Christ, who seeks to be faithful to her spouse and to her doctrine. It is the Church that is not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church that has the doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent, and not only the just or those who believe they are perfect! The Church that is not ashamed of the fallen brother and pretends not to see him, but on the contrary feels involved and almost calls him by name to urge him up and to encourage him to take up the journey again and accompany him toward a definitive encounter with her Spouse, in the heavenly Jerusalem.

The is the Church, our Mother! And when the Church in the victory of her chastities, expresses herself in communion, she cannot err: it is the beauty and the strength of the sensus fidei, of that supernatural sense of the Church which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit so that, together, we can all enter into the heart of the Gospel and learn to follow Jesus in our life. And this should never be seen as a source of confusion and discord. Instead, we have seen and heard the Church, have imagined that they see a disputatious Church where one part is against the other, doubting even the Holy Spirit, the true promoter and guarantor of the unity and harmony of the Church — the Holy Spirit who has a long and always guided the barque, through her Ministers, even when the sea was rough and choppy, and the ministers unfaithful and sinners.

And, as I have said to you, as I told you from the beginning of the Synod, it was necessary to live through all this with tranquility, and with interior peace, so that the Synod would take place cum Petro and sub Petro (with Peter and under Peter), and the presence of the Pope is the guarantee of it all.

We will speak a little bit about the Pope, now, in relation to the Bishops [laughing]. So, the duty of the Pope is that of guaranteeing the unity of the Church; it is that of reminding the faithful of their duty to faithfully follow the Gospel of Christ; it is that of reminding the pastors that their first duty is to nourish the flock — to nourish the flock — that the Lord has entrusted them, and to seek to welcome — with fatherly care and mercy, and without false fears — the lost sheep. I made a mistake here. I said welcome: [rather] to go out and find them. His duty is to remind everyone that authority in the Church is a service, as Pope Benedict XVI clearly explained, with words I cite verbatim: “The Church is called and commits herself to exercise this kind of authority which is service and exercises it not in her own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ… through the Pastors of the Church, in fact: it is he who guides, protects and corrects them, because he loves them deeply. But the Lord Jesus, the supreme Shepherd of our souls, has willed that the Apostolic College, today the Bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter… to participate in his mission of taking care of God’s People, of teaching them in the faith and of guiding, inspiring and sustaining the Christian community, or, as the Council puts it, ‘to see to it, that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation in accordance with Gospel preaching, and to sincere and active charity’ and to exercise that liberty with which Christ has set us free (cf. Presbyterorum Ordinis, 6).” and it is through us,” Pope Benedict continues, “that the Lord reaches souls, instructs, guards and guides them. St Augustine, in his Commentary on the Gospel of St John, says: ‘let it therefore be a commitment of love to feed the flock of the Lord’ (cf. 123, 5); this is the supreme rule of conduct for the ministers of God, an unconditional love, like that of the Good Shepherd, full of joy, given to all, attentive to those close to us and solicits for those who are distant (cf. St Augustine, Discourse 340, 1; Discourse 46, 15), gentle towards the weakest, the little ones, the simple, the sinners, to manifest the infinite mercy of God with the reassuring words of hope (cf. ibid., Epistle, 95, 1).”

So, the Church is Christ’s — she is His bride — and all the bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter, have the task and the duty of guarding her and serving her, not as masters but as servants. The Pope, in this context, is not the supreme lord but rather the supreme servant — the “servant of the servants of God”; the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the Tradition of the Church, putting aside every personal whim, despite being — by the will of Christ Himself — the “supreme Pastor and Teacher of all the faithful” (Can. 749) and despite enjoying “supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church” (cf. Cann. 331-334).

Dear brothers and sisters, now we still have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas, and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that surround and suffocate families. We must confront the challenges with the strength of Christ, who calls me, who calls you, to work together toward a “Synodal Road” which is the faithful and clear summary of everything that has been said and discussed in this hall and in the small groups. It is presented to the Episcopal Conferences as “lineamenta” [guidelines].

May the Lord accompany us, and guide us in this journey for the glory of His Name, with the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of St. Joseph. And please, do not forget to pray for me! Thank you!
By Father Louis J. Cameli

Pope Francis has called the whole Church to reflect on the family. In October, 2014, he convoked an extraordinary synod of bishops from around the world to represent the Church in all her diversity. That synod was meant to identify important concerns that each family faces. And it did. The results of the synod’s discussions and questions for follow-up were gathered in a document called the Lineamenta, best translated as “a preliminary document outlining topics for a meeting.” The Lineamenta (which are printed here in another section) is the working document for another synod on the family in October, 2015. The upcoming synod will take the concerns previously identified and discern directions for responding to those concerns surrounding family life. In other words, the synod of bishops meeting in October will try to determine where God is leading the Church, as she serves family life.

The whole Church is invited to participate for the Archdiocese of Chicago, our reflections will be channeled through the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, the Archdiocesan Women’s Committee, and the parishes at large through their pastors. The point of our reflection and conversation is to inform our Archbishop, who will take the collective wisdom of this local Church and offer it to the Church Universal. The reason for publishing this special supplement is to make the Lineamenta (the conclusions from last year’s synod and questions drawn from those conclusions) accessible and to provide orientation for reading and reflecting on the Lineamenta. Some orientation or introduction to the Lineamenta seems necessary, because the language and organization of the Lineamenta are not immediately clear. The document moves in a direction to which American readers are generally not accustomed. Let me begin the orientation to the document by identifying the method that Pope Francis proposed for this synod.

WHAT IS THE METHOD THAT POPE FRANCIS PROPOSED FOR THE SYNOD?

Unlike other gatherings that employ a reasoning-debating style to arrive at conclusions, the synod envisioned by Pope Francis moves much differently. The method is spiritual and pastoral. It is a classic collective spiritual discernment process. What does this mean? It does not mean discussing, much less arguing, different positions. It does mean listening together to detect the direction that God is setting for us. The conversation or dialogue that flows from this listening is oriented more to a statement of belief but towards a way of living out the Gospel. In the process, there will inevitably be different movements and different settings of where God is leading us. That can be interpreted—as the press did in the course of last October’s synod— as arguing or even fighting over positions. Pope Francis regularly reminded everyone that the emergence of different movements in the course of dialogue was a sign of vitality and ought not to be suppressed.

WHAT IS THE GOAL THAT POPE FRANCIS PROPOSED FOR THE SYNODE?

From the onset, Pope Francis has said that the goal is not doctrinal clarification. The Church’s doctrine about marriage and family life is clear enough. The true goal is a pastoral response. This means a shift of emphasis from dealing with the truth of the message (doctrine which is clear and already set) to dealing with the persons who receive and try to live out the message. If we have this method and goal in mind, we can move forward with our prayer, reflection, and exchange in the very same way that the Holy Father hopes that the synod will do. This approach can work for the consultative bodies of the Archdiocese, such as the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, as well as for gatherings of interested parishioners with their pastors.

THE TEXT OF THE LINEAMENTA

The text of the Lineamenta and the questions that follow it can seem very wide-ranging and even disjointed. I propose that there are at least four basic points of reference or underlying convictions of faith that can help us move through the Lineamenta with deeper understanding:

1. The family is a sacred place where God is present and people can grow in holiness. That same family is a fundamental instrument of evangelization in the world. In the language of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other documents, the family is a “domestic church,” a place where all the essential elements of the Church are present. To understand the reality of the domestic church, I have appended to these notes an article that I wrote entitled “The Domestic Church: The Church in the Home—Rediscovering Who We Are.”

Karen Callaway/Catholic New World

Karen Callaway/Catholic New World
By Father Louis J. Cameli

My mother died in 1986, but she is still a steady presence in my life. In the middle of my own writing and teaching, I hear her voice summoning me to be more realistic. For example, in preparing something on the experience of the domestic church, I came across this statement in the Catechism of the Catholic Church which draws from other documents: “The Christ Church constitutes specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.” (n. 2204)

I know how she would react to this statement. “Did the people who wrote these words ever live in a family? Do they know about kids who cry and fight with each other? Do they know about barking dogs and husbands with exasperating habits? Do they know about bills to pay, laundry to do, meals to prepare, and schedules to coordinate? You call this a church?”

Her point is well taken. If there truly is a domestic church in Christian families—and I do believe that there is—it is alive in the rough and tumble of family life as it is genuinely lived, not as we might idealize it. We need not abandon the idea of families forming domestic churches, but we do need to be more precise about what we mean about that identity.

Two sentences in the General Directory for Catechesis sparked my own thinking and reflection on the identity of Christian families as domestic churches. The Directory reads: “The family is defined as a ‘domestic church,’ that is, in every Christian family the different aspects and functions of the life of the entire Church may be reflected: mission; catechesis; witness; prayer etc. Indeed in the same way as the Church, the family ‘is a place in which the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends’” (n. 255; citation from Evangelii nuntiandi, n. 71).

These words from the General Directory indicate that the family, if it is to be a true domestic church, must not only reflect the essence of the life of the Church overall. And three words capture that essence: word, sacrament, and mission. There are many ways to see and understand the life of the Church, for example, her origin in the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord and the binding power of the Holy Spirit that sustains her. In our ordinary experience, however, we live out our lives in the Church through word, sacrament, and mission. If this is so, then an important question emerges for our understanding of the domestic church. How do word, sacrament, and mission shape the Christian family and so make it a domestic church? If we can answer that question, we will be able to specify and concretize the Christian family as a domestic church and help to make it something realistic and attainable.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE FAMILY

For most of us, the family is the place where the word of God is first proclaimed, received, and studied. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium) declares that “parents… are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children.” (LG, 11) Ideally, a family would regularly read the Bible together, for example, a short selection before the evening meal. Most often, however, the word is proclaimed much less formally by telling the story of Jesus and Mary and the saints, as it is embedded and celebrated across the liturgical year, for example, at Christmas time and in Holy Week.

Once proclaimed and received, that word is also assimilated and studied but not in an academic way. Formulation in the word of God, as the General Directory describes it is “…a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods.” (n. 255) That description, I believe, realistically reflects the way families live their faith. And if the word has a place in the family, it is probably around the kitchen table. Still, despite the informality of family life, parents can appropriately foster their family’s contact with God’s word through the deliberate and regular reminders about the word of God that they offer to family members. This is the form of their proclamation of the word.

Catechesis is a more explicit and deliberate exposure to the word of God and its implications for living. As such, catechesis belongs to the whole Church, and so also in special moments it belongs to the domestic church. This happens, for example, when parents and others teach young children how to pray, or when they educate their moral conscience in the context of decision-making, or when they help prepare them to receive sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Confirmation. The domestic church collaborates with the local faith community or parish in fulfilling its catechetical responsibilities to assimilate and understand the word of God.

The domestic church does not have limited concerns bounded by the walls of its home. The domestic church shares the expansive vision and direction of the entire Church. In relationship to the word, this means that the word of God cannot be simply contained within the family. The family must be in service to bringing the word to the world. In other words, evangelization is an essential ingredient of the domestic church as it is for the Church overall. In the memorable words of Pope Paul VI, “Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize…” This is no less true of the domestic church, which must be ready through witness and explicit proclamation to alert the world to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This does not mean that the family is a cult-like cell for proselytizing. Rather, the family in its words and actions, in its hospitality and its service, makes its faith transparent to a waiting world so deeply in need of its savior. Serving food to the poor and decorating the house for Christmas are very different activities, but both are rooted in Jesus who saves us and both make him known to the world. In various ways, the domestic church brings the word of God to the world.

THE SACRAMENTS OF GOD IN THE FAMILY

The Sacrament of Marriage at the service of communion

The sacrament of marriage is the foundation of the domestic church. The sacrament that joins a man and a woman in a life-long and indissoluble union that generates new life is the beginning and ongoing sustaining force of the church in the home. The sacrament of marriage has that power, because it is, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church describes it, one of the sacraments at the service of communion. “Two other sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.” (n. 1534)

The sacrament sustains the union of husband and wife, so that their marriage can foster communion, the union of God’s people in knowledge and love that
has its roots in the most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And communion is the hallmark of the Church which we believe and know to be "in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men..." So truly, when a couple is joined in the sacrament of matrimony serve communion in their very own family and enable it—by God’s grace—to be a domestic church. And beyond this to an particular family, they contribute to communion in the whole Church and, ultimately, in the world.

The domestic church brings its members to the Church for sacraments

The domestic church brings its members to the Church for the celebration of the sacraments. Parents, for example, bring their children for baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance. Not only do they bring their children and so initiate them but they continue to bring them, so that they can fully live the sacramental life of the Church.

That same domestic church pays attention to the admonition in the Letter of James: "You among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” (James 5:14) So, the domestic church brings its ailing members forward for the anointing of the Sick. And in the final stages of our earthly life, the domestic church calls for the last sacrament, Viaticum, the Eucharist given as the food of travelers who pass over to eternal life. For these sacraments, often it is the turn of the children to call for the sake of their parents.

Although a vocation to priestly service and the sacrament of Holy Orders is a gift given to an individual, the domestic church serves as a place of preparation and formation for that calling. Similarly, the domestic church encourages and forms its members who are called to live out their Baptism in consecrated or vowed life.

The domestic church is where sacraments are lived out

Sacraments are not merely ritual events celebrated in a moment. They are encounters with the living God manifested in the mystery of Jesus Christ. And those encounters continue beyond the ritual moment, because they initiate us into a new way of living. The domestic church is a notable place where the sacraments are lived out. Some examples can illustrate this truth.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks about living out the sacrament of Baptism in this way: “It is here [in the domestic church] that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a privileged way ‘by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.” (n. 1657) Similarly, when a family returns home from the celebration of the Eucharist, they are summoned to live out the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ made present in the Mass and which they carry within themselves in virtue of their Holy Communion with him. For those who belong to a family, the primary locus where self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ is lived out can only be the domestic church.

Again, in a similar way, when family members have celebrated the sacrament of Penance and have encountered the merciful forgiveness of God, they not only live as beneficiaries of mercy but they are also summoned to extend that mercy to others (see Matthew 18:23-35). Again, the primary place family members have celebrated the gift of the sacrament of Penance with its dimensions of healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness will be the domestic church.

The extension of sacramental life in the worship of the domestic church

The sacramental life of the Church finds an extension in what can appropriately be called the liturgy of the domestic church. The family as domestic church is or certainly ought to be a praying community. In its prayer, the domestic church extends the official public worship of the whole Church, by personally extending its sacramental life and of official worship can take several forms in the domestic church.

The ordinary and common prayer. God’s living church may well be prayer at mealtimes, at night, and possibly in the morning. Other forms of prayer can be important expressions of the liturgy of the domestic church. Devotional prayers, such as the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, have been an important part of many family traditions. The rediscovery of the Liturgy of the Hours as the official daily prayer of the Church for the entire Church can lift the life and quality of prayer in the domestic church and link it with the Church universal.

The domestic church provides a place of preparation for and assimilation of the Church’s liturgy by offering an opportunity for silence and personal prayer. It is no small task in many households to create and sustain—even for a moment—silent or quiet spaces, but it can be done. This allows hearts to be open to what the Church’s liturgy will offer and to receive it personally what has been celebrated.

Finally, the domestic church extends the experience of the Church’s sacraments and liturgy by dedicating sacred space in the home and venerating the sacramental images that recall the story of our salvation and the grace that is ours through Jesus Christ. The man and woman family returns home from the celebration of the Eucharist, they are summoned to live out the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ made present in the Mass and which they carry within themselves in virtue of their Holy Communion with him. For those who belong to a family, the primary locus where self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ is lived out can only be the domestic church.

From the very beginning believing families “were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.” That presence has been, since the beginning, an evangelizing presence and mission. This witness has never been more important than today. Here is the full text from the Catechism that explains the domestic church and its mission in the world: “Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than ‘the family of God.’ From the beginning, the very core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers ‘together with all [their] household.’ [Acts 18:8] When they were converted, they desired that ‘their whole household’ should also be saved. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.” (n. 1655)

The mission of the Church cannot be fulfilled unless men and women who are called to special service respond to their vocation. Parents in the domestic church have a special role to play in the discernment and encouragement of vocations. Again, the Catechism speaking of parents says: “They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation.” (n. 1656)

The domestic church can fulfill the mission by being an agent of charity, justice, reconciliation, and peacemaking. In a particular way, the care of the poor ought to become a central and abiding concern for the family that seeks to live out its mission as a domestic church. One of the final blessings in the marriage ritual expresses this aspect of mission clearly: “May you always bear witness to the love of God in this world so that the afflicted and the needy will find in you generous friends, and welcome you into the joys of heaven.”

Finally, the domestic church fulfills its mission through the more general work of service and, within that, the particular service of hospitality. The family as domestic church opens its doors to those who need to share in its life. The Catechism speaks of this service of hospitality in this way: “Many remain without a human family, often due to conditions of poverty. Some live their situation in the spirit of the Beatitudes, serving God and neighbor in exemplary fashion. The doors of homes, the ‘domestic churches,’ and of the great family which is the Church must be open to all of them. ‘No one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone, especially those who ‘labor and are heavy laden.”’ (n. 1658)

The domestic church really and truly is an instance of the reality of the Church. It participates in those basic and constitutive elements of the Church—word, sacrament, and mission. The experience of a domestic church obviously looks and feels different than an experience of church in a parish, a diocese, or at the level of the Church universal. That difference, however, does not signal less importance. The domestic church for most of us has provided the doorway and the foundation for our participation in the Church in her larger dimensions. The domestic church has also provided us with the place where we live out our faith most directly day-to-day and most intensely in the rough and tumble of ordinary family life.

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