

## Walking with Families During the Year of *Amoris Laetitia*

*Goal #2: Promote meetings for reflection and discussion on the beauty and challenges of family life (cf. AL 32-ff. and 89-ff.) which should expand horizons both in terms of recognizing the value of the family on a societal level; as well as in creating well-established networks of pastors and families who, by their own sharing and witness, can accompany those who are struggling.*  
([Amoris Laetitia \(laityfamilylife.va\)](http://Amoris Laetitia (laityfamilylife.va)))

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As the place where we first learn to deeply encounter and love one another, the family can also be the place where the deepest losses, sacrifices, and even wounds are experienced. Some of these experiences are natural or otherwise unavoidable; others we may experience as the result of sin, to which the humanity of the family is not immune. In all cases, Christ remains close to us. This is true even when the pain in our family makes it difficult to be able to relate to God as Father, Christ as brother, or Mary as spiritual mother.

In addition to his spiritual and sacramental closeness, Christ remains present to families facing challenges through the members of his body, the Church. Through both friendship and service, the Christian community has a necessary role in comforting, assisting, and strengthening families in times of need. Throughout the life of a family, its members can embrace and be a living part of this community in different, meaningful ways.

The challenges that families face are myriad and range from the daily friction between personalities and opinions to the more grave – divorce, pornography, substance abuse, the disruption of relocation, job loss, medical crises, financial setbacks, separation by incarceration or deployment, death of a family member, domestic violence, and challenges related to immigration status, to name a few. Caring for and serving one another within a family (the domestic church) in these situations is not easy. It is a sharing in Christ’s passion and a sacrificial journey in holiness that can itself exemplify the purpose and strength of family and shine with the marvels of ever-growing

*“The truth is that “family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life...”*

*– (Amoris Laetitia, 106)*

love and fidelity. This can even be true in the most tragic of circumstances, where separation is necessary for safety.

Moreover, through both tangible and intangible support, multiple families – all of whom experience their own difficulties – can build up one another during challenging times and witness to the world the beauty of love among Christian families.

Parishes should faithfully welcome families of every condition, with parishioners not feeling averse to befriending families whose relationships are ruptured or who are otherwise perceived to be different because of their condition or circumstances.

Ministries to serve those families and individuals encountering challenges are essential, such as for the healing of spouses or children of divorce, the growth in the virtue of chastity in marriage, retreats for the grieving, the recruitment and support of foster or adoptive parents, and the provision of basic needs, especially for families with members who are incarcerated or who have disabilities.

Other families who have the desire to share the joy of love can help to make such ministries possible and thrive in their area. Some may worry that they are either too imperfect, or too busy. The Church invites them, however, to share their gifts and, in so doing, to increase in love.

At times, the challenges facing a family may be especially great and require additional competencies exceeding those of the parish home. For such instances, it is fitting for parishes and dioceses to stay informed of appropriate professional counseling, organized programming, and social service resources to which to refer those who are in their spiritual care.

Our families can be encouraged to take heart in knowing that it is okay to need and receive the help of others. This may not come easily, especially in our culture. To be sure, discretion regarding the privacy of the family is appropriate. At the same time, sharing experiences is necessary for a true encounter between families.

Finally, the health of families is also the health of communities. When families are not formed in mutual self-giving love or experience a significant trauma, diverse difficulties on a societal scale, impacting the socioeconomic wellbeing of others, eventually emerge. This collective pain, in turn, also speaks to the intended and beautiful centrality of the family in our community life. The Church proclaims the natural goodness of the family for all people and asks Her children to both grow in and witness to it with a radiant hope made possible in Christ, not just in good times but in great challenge. For through the vitality of the love in the family facing difficulty, the world may come to know and be blessed by the gift of hope.

*“Every family should look to the icon of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Its daily life had its share of burdens and even nightmares, as when they met with Herod’s implacable violence.”  
(Amoris Laetitia, 30)*