

Walking with Families During the Year of *Amoris Laetitia*

*Goal #9: Incorporate into **youth ministry*** initiatives which reflect upon and discuss issues such as family, marriage, chastity, openness to life, the use of social media, poverty and respect for creation (cf. AL 40). We must succeed in sparking young people's enthusiasm, in enhancing their ability to commit themselves fully to great ideals and face the challenges that such ideals entail. Special attention should be paid this year to **children**, in order to make them aware of "Amoris Laetitia Family Year" and its suggested initiatives. (laityfamilylife.va)*

The Year of the Family offers an opportunity to examine the intersection of the role of parents (and the families of young people), as first educators of their sons and daughters, and the role of the parish, teachers, youth and young adult ministers, scout leaders, and anyone else who forms the character and informs the mind of a young person.

The family remains the first and most important place for forming the mind, heart, and soul of youth and young adults. Every child who is brought to the altar of God and the baptismal font by one's parents and godparents, is first formed around the table of the home and at the family hearth. Instruction and formation, the nurturing of mind, heart, soul, and body, all develop in the home and under the attentive gaze of the mother and father as a child moves developmentally into adolescence and young adulthood.

Moreover, it is a parental right and responsibility to ensure that every other form of instruction and formation that either educates a young person's mind or forms his or her character is well chosen by the parents and family members and supports the first foundations that are laid in the home. These include school instruction, parish faith formation, and extra-curricular opportunities that range from scouting to sport, music, dance, and art. The young person should be led to recognize, above all, the vast beauty of God's created world and the elements of truth, beauty, and goodness that surround us in his creation.

The Church's pastoral care towards youth and young adults through faith formation – especially sacramental preparation – and ministries that support catechetical instruction, spiritual growth, opportunities for service and justice, and character-

(*) When the Universal Church speaks of "young people" (in Spanish, "jóvenes," in French, "jeunes," or in Italian "giovani"), it is often referring to both adolescents in their teens and young adults in their 20s and 30s. The international age range of "young people" does not easily comport to the understanding we have in the United States, where we have clear legal and developmental distinctions between "youth" who are often in junior high or high school, and "young adults" who are over 18 and into their 20s and/or 30s. Going forward, it is best to read the term "young people" in this wider scope rather than only on one particular dimension.

building experiences such as scouting, sports, music, clubs, or sodalities, should all aim to support the family's principal role as the first educator and should sustain those efforts.

Another significant component to the Church's ministries with young people* is accompanying youth and young adults towards their vocation and mission in life. In his 2019 exhortation *Christus Vivit* (CV), Pope Francis encouraged Catholic leaders to consider how the Church's ministries with young people "and the pastoral care of families should be coordinated and integrated, with the aim of ensuring a continuous and suitable accompaniment of the vocational process" (CV, no. 242). The Church walks with young people as they discover how God is calling them to serve Him and society by the use of their gifts, their life, and their love.

Pastoral ministry leaders working with youth and young adults, therefore, are encouraged to develop ministries to young people that invite them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The relationship with the Lord is fundamental for discerning the call to serve him with their unique gifts as a beloved son or daughter of God.

Vocational discernment is a discernment about how to respond to the call of love, a call requiring a response that can be expressed in numerous ways but that always involves a gift of self: to another person in marriage, to God by way of consecrated life, or to the Church in the sacrament of Holy Orders. There are multiple avenues of service to one's neighbor, to God, and to the Church that are all expressions of the call to love and that respond deeply to the desire for love that everyone experiences.

Accompaniment along the way of discernment should start with the art of listening and progress into true dialogue and synodality. Dialogue does not exclude, but also encompasses sharing the faith throughout the accompaniment process. Moral instruction, based on an understanding of Catholic moral tradition, is usually a necessary part of accompaniment during one's youth and young adult years. An understanding of the gift of human sexuality and respect for its place in the plan of God requires an appreciation for chastity, an openness to life, working for justice, especially for those on the margins of society, and a profound respect for the dignity of every human person. The theology of the body can provide young people with a deep recognition of how our corporeal reality is intimately bound to our spiritual life.

*"Attentive and selfless listening is a sign of our respect for others."
(Christus Vivit, 292)*

The teachings of Jesus and his Church are an invitation to embrace the challenge of Christian living, whatever our vocation in life. Young people desire to take up the challenge that is the call to holiness and missionary service to others. Our ministries with youth and young adults should arouse noble aspirations towards all that is good, noble, and just as revealed by the Gospel.

Recognizing the distinctions between youth and young adults (within the broader category of “young people”), pastoral leaders must find developmentally appropriate ways of engaging adolescents, collegians, and young adults in their twenties or thirties, each in their own way. It is important that pastoral leaders be mindful of the realities that young persons encounter as they mature and grow from their youth into adulthood. Furthermore, it is critical to understand that this maturation varies from person to person, culture to culture, and family to family.

In practice, leaders in marriage and family ministries and leaders in the Church’s ministries with youth, collegians, and young adults can and should work together as often as possible, in joint projects, pastoral initiatives, and the accompaniment of the People of God of all ages. “In this outreach,” the Holy Father advises us, “we need to use above all the language of closeness, the language of generous, relational, and existential love” (CV, no. 211).

Each young person is on a journey, a pathway towards a vocational mission, and it is part of the Church’s maternal role to be present along that journey by walking with, instructing, and forming the minds, hearts, and souls of the young people entrusted to her care.