

## **DICASTERY FOR THE LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE**

### **Webinar**

#### ***“Where are we with Amoris Laetitia? Strategies for the pastoral application of Pope Francis’ exhortation”***

**9-12 June 2021**

#### **Introduction by His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Farrell**

Dear brother Bishops, Sisters and Brothers:

My best wishes to all of you who are gathered here for this *webinar*, which will take place over the next four days, and is set in the context of this special Year that the Holy Father has decided to dedicate to *Amoris Laetitia*, five years after its publication.

We, as a Dicastery, and you, as pastoral workers of various episcopal conferences, movements and associations of the family, have welcomed the invitation of the Holy Father to take another look, a more profound and pastoral look, at *Amoris Laetitia*, in order to develop new, dynamic and concrete ways to implement it pastorally.

In the first pages of the exhortation, Pope Francis gives us some fundamental direction, when he writes: “I do not recommend a rushed reading of the text. The greatest benefit, for families and for those engaged in the family apostolate, will come if each part is read patiently and carefully” (AL 7). The question before us today is to ask ourselves: to what degree the Pastoral approached outlined by two Synods has already been “patiently and carefully” implemented and what we can do to ensure that this work is taken up and carried forward on all levels, above all, on the level of local churches.

The pastoral application of *Amoris Laetitia* is particularly close to the Holy Father’s heart, as we contemplate a way to renew family pastoral ministry in the Church, a way to render it ever more concrete and closer to the real lives of families. The challenges that face many couples/families in our world today must be a reason

for concern for a "Missionary/Outgoing" Church, which always has the pastoral care of those domestic contexts in which life, faith and vocations take shape at the forefront of its mission.

On various occasions the Holy Father has asked for information regarding the Pastoral application of *Amoris Laetitia* in different parts of the world. In past *ad limina* visits with bishops, as well as in meetings that we have hosted *on line* in this time of pandemic, have afforded us many opportunities for profitable and constructive dialogue on family pastoral care, we have come to realize the importance of ‘taking stock’ of where we are. It is precisely the challenges, obstacles, favorable aspects and needs (which in this time of pandemic have become all the more evident) that have generated the title of this meeting: “Where are we with *Amoris Laetitia*?” ‘Taking stock’ together does not mean a mere statistical analysis or ecclesial survey; we must go much further, in search of common courses of action.

In October of 2017 the Holy Father visited the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life and spoke with us about the application of *Amoris Laetitia*, saying that “*Amoris Laetitia* must be read together, from the first to the last chapter, without ‘cherry-picking’ those sections which we consider easier to implement from those that are more challenging. Pope Francis continued, explaining: “If you ask me what is at the heart of the document - the part that inspires its whole spirit, I will tell you that it is the fourth chapter, but the whole document is valid, and we should not find ourselves ‘cherry-picking’.

The apostolic exhortation should, therefore, be read as an integral whole. It should be understood as a broad discourse on the family, but at the same time as a detailed account of many aspects of family life, into which the Holy Father has delved in a courageous and detailed way, inviting us to do the same in the way we carry out our pastoral work.

If we look back to the most important church documents of recent decades, we notice how long periods of time were needed to fully assimilate them. These long

periods of time were characterized by cyclical, repetitive dynamics. This dynamic can be broadly described as follows:

In the first phase, one sees a generalized interest for the text in question and even a certain “brouhaha” if the document introduces particularly relevant or previously unseen content. This phase is accompanied by a period of debate, in which numerous “intellectual positions and ideological interpretations” regarding the text are expressed. This phase leaves little room for the concrete application of the text. It is the moment in which the various theological and pastoral “sensibilities” and “schools of thought” come to light; those sentiments that characterize the ecclesial purview at each historical juncture. This early phase is basically made up of raw first reactions.

The next phase is one of a more peaceful examination of the document, during which there is a return to the single sections and specific themes of the document which are deemed to be of most interest. This phase of more profound study, with respect to the first moments in which everybody “says their piece”, normally involves a smaller number of persons, generally “specialists” of the material that is treated in the document.

Gradually, the text is found no longer to be the centre of media attention, falling into obscurity for some but becoming a fruitful source of inspiration for others. For those who find such inspiration, the document eventually begins to translate into concrete pastoral experience. These kinds of initiatives born of a document might be true pastoral “experiments” at the outset, but they are nonetheless important, because when they prove themselves to be effective, they are gradually shared and diffused, helping to introduce the document into the ordinary life of the Church. In this way, the document finally reaches “the many”, who can at this point draw the spiritual benefit that the document initially intended, even without being aware of the source from which these benefits originated, namely, the document in question.

This dynamic more or less describes the reception of *Amoris Laetitia*, of which the initial phase of debate and raw initial ‘first reactions’ were particularly lively due

to the controversies that arose in reaction to chapter eight. After this polemic stage, there were innumerable insights offered by academics and specialists, pastors and clergymen, who were able to conduct in-depth reflections with more restraint and objectivity than could have been expected of the initial phase.

Five years from its publication, we now find ourselves in the stage in which, according to the directions of Pope Francis, we can and must re-read the document as a whole and, cherishing all of its precious content and trying to translate it into concrete pastoral practices. In this manner, the document will filter down to the whole Church, such that many more families are able to benefit from its intended spiritual benefit. We understand, and I'm sure that you do also, that families who have had the opportunity to read even small sections of *Amoris Laetitia* have been struck by it in many positive ways; from the concreteness of its suggestions to the closeness to the tangible situations of family life that it expresses.

The webinar should be seen within the Synodal process as a sign of the Church coming together to ensure that the family is given a central place within the missionary outreach of every institution or Parish community within the Church. The Church is at the service of the family, to work with it, to hope in its great potential, in the certainty that “the Church is good for the family and the family is good for the Church” (AL 87).

The “programmatically lines” of the webinar should hopefully promote, on the one hand, the pastoral application of *Amoris Laetitia* and, on the other, a general renewal of family pastoral care. These “programmatically lines” are indicated by the titles of the sessions of our webinar: the preparation of couples for marriage, the formation of companions, the education of children, marital spirituality, family mission and fragility in the family environment. We are confident that putting the suggestions of *Amoris Laetitia* into practice in each of these domains will be of great benefit for many families that are present in our local churches.

Thank you for your participation and I wish you all the best for your work over the coming days.