

FORUM AMORIS LAETITIA (9-12 June 2021)

Pastoral project:

AKADEMIE FÜR EHE UND FAMILIE

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Do you care about your own marriage and family? Do you want to invest in your partnership? Do you want to actively shape the church and society as a couple and take on responsibility? Then become a marriage and family coach!

This is how the German Academy for Marriage and Family promotes itself on its website. Interested couples are invited to attend a two-year training course. The Family Academy was founded in Austria in 1992. From there it spread to 10 European countries (as well as Brazil). From the year 2000, training courses were held also in Germany. In the meantime, a total of almost 1,000 couples in these countries have been qualified for voluntary service in pastoral care for marriage and the family. All courses are run by the Schoenstatt Movement.

Such an academy at a time when marriage and family as a way of life are being questioned in Central Europe and increasingly globally. **Social change** has produced alternative forms of life. In an expanded sense, family remains accepted. Marriage as an institution is becoming increasingly vague.

"In the midst of this trend, we want to specifically strengthen Christian marriage and family. In the academy we have experienced and learned to be open to people's concerns. At the same time, rooted in faith, we want to give faith a happy face - or two faces."

We call such trained couples marriage and family trainers. They act as **multipliers** in parishes, associations, spiritual movements, in their professions, in schools, in society. The couples themselves choose their field of activity.

The attractiveness of marriage and family is radiated by married couples. They are the best witnesses for this form of life. Couples who talk about their own marriage and family are credible



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and competent dialogue partners. They know about people's longing for a life-giving relationship. That is why we take **authentic experiences** as our starting point, as Pope Francis does in many ways in *Amoris laetitia*.

The **basis of the Academy's work** is the Christian and Catholic understanding of marriage and family. What the married couples experience in everyday life is put in relation to what they are given in the sacrament of marriage. It is important to note that information alone does not lead to development. The work within the couple is decisive.

Successful life practice and findings from the **social sciences** on the field of marriage and families are reflected upon and interlinked. Interdisciplinary leadership teams guarantee a broad spectrum within the courses.

Essential impulses come from the spirituality of the **Schoenstatt Family Movement**, which was founded by Fr Joseph Kentenich in the Dachau concentration camp in 1942.

The **goals of the academy training** are that the individual couple look at and optimise their own marriage and family.

However, they should also be able to perceive the circumstances of other families and accompany their developments and progress.

Marriage and family **coaches should distinguish** themselves through a conscious and committed appearance as a team.

They should have a sound knowledge of relevant topics of marriage and family.

methodical know-how on rhetoric, presentation and moderation should help them to get their message across.

What is our motivation for such academy work?

In one sentence: As married couples, we want to contribute to **evangelisation**. We are very aware that the Church essentially grows together from the homes of families.

In its Constitution on the Church, the Second Vatican Council rediscovered marriage and the family as the **domestic Church** (*ecclesia domestica*). (LG 11)



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Pope John Paul II calls marriage and the family "a real subject of evangelisation" and describes the family as the "primary place of transmission of the faith". He says: "The family is the heart of the Church." And: "The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family." (FC 75)

Pope Francis explains in *Amoris Laetitia* 67:

"In this way, the spouses are consecrated and by means of a special grace build up the Body of Christ and form a domestic church."

Thus, in the sacrament of marriage, spouses are not only given the gift of God's closeness. They also have a **mission, a task in the Church and for the Church**. This is why the bride and groom are asked at the wedding ceremony:

"Are you both ready to take co-responsibility as Christian spouses in the church and in the world?"

In this sense, the new **Directory for Catechesis from 2020** calls married couples and families the subject of pastoral care:

"Families are therefore called to contribute to the building up of the Christian community and to bear witness to the Gospel in society, in addition to their essential ministry of bringing up children." (231)

The Directory calls for **training centres** for those who provide catechetical services in the Church (154-156). This is precisely where the Academy for Marriage and Family sees itself located. It trains couples who are active in the broad field of pastoral care for marriage and the family.

Because the participants are doing a service in and for the Church, there is a **sending out ceremony** at the end of the two-year training. The local bishop in whose diocese the course took place presents each couple with a certificate. He blesses the couples individually and commissions them:

"I send you, with God's help, to work especially for marriage and family in church and society."



Amoris Laetitia Family
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Slide 1

In addition to the introductory video of the Academy for marriage and family we would like to present some perspectives to you that we consider important.

Slide 2

We would like to begin with two experiences that remain relevant in the ongoing Corona pandemic.

Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic, when church services were no longer possible, the calls for the family serving as a domestic church became louder. During this extraordinary time, families rediscovered themselves as the first center of the faith. Besides online church services, many parishes supported families in creating their own worship services at home.

A Bishop from Peru reported that no ash crosses were able to be dispensed this year on Ash Wednesday. Many dioceses provided handouts offering guidance on how families could bless and apply the ashes in their own homes.

These are all enormous challenges for couples and families. In Germany we've experienced difficult situations, for example during the preparation for First Communion. Few parents are able and willing to pray with their children. Few children have been taught the Lord's prayer at home. Only a few are familiar with Christian rituals.

Slide 3

If it's true that faith essentially grows out of the homes of families, then we need a new initiative, an advent of training for couples and families.

We see this as our challenge in the Academy for Marriage and Family. We see the Academy as a way through which couples can learn abilities and skills. Educating does not only mean imparting knowledge about the faith, rather more importantly, couples and families should grow in their Christian spirituality in a broader sense.

Slide 4

The future of pastoral care stands on two pillars: pastoral care in the parishes through priests and paid as well as volunteer staff – and through the families. If families cannot be recruited for this service, they certainly won't introduce their children to the church community.

The current lack of priests demands that families take on a new or clearer role as carriers and subject of pastoral care. Most importantly, however, it is couples that inspire couples and



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families that inspire families to embrace the faith. This is where the multiplier effect comes in. One could also say: formatting catecheting couples.

Slide 5

The structure of one training course is divided into 2 parts:

- The first year is principally about strengthening and supporting the individual couples. The theme is living as a married couple and family. It's important to note that information alone will not lead to any significant growth. The work as a couple is decisive.
- In the second year the couples will be taught to support other couples and family groups, for example at conferences or retreats. The theme: supporting marriages and families.
- In total it's 12 meetings in two years - five weekends per year and one week of study.
- After the first year the couple completes a collaborative written paper and after the second year a practical examination. A final colloquium completes the training course.
- Service as a marriage and family coach begins at the sending out ceremony along with the conferring of the certificate by the local Bishop.
- After the training course graduates can participate in continuing education at conferences and through networks.

Slide 6

Here you can see a list of current topics:

- Balance of closeness and distance
- The unbeatable marriage team
- God's footprints in our marriages and families
- Family of origin – treasures and burdens
- The art of the conversation
- Life in the digital world
- Trust and conflict
- Intimacy and sexuality
- Becoming parents – staying a couple
- Church at home – domestic church
- Family, career and leisure
- Through the liturgical year as a couple
- Parenting and pedagogy of trust



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- Identity and calling as a couple

All of these topics need to be addressed considering the following two questions:

- How does the couple relate to each other as well as to other couples and families regarding empathy, appreciation and authenticity?
- What does this have to do with the sacrament of marriage?

Slide 7

In the second year we add:

- Communication training
- Rhetoric and presentation skills
- Coaching skills
- Facilitation/Mediation

Slide 8

Over the span of the training course, each couple will find their own marriage theme. It's a favorite theme that has taken on particular significance as a result of the individual couple's marriage history. It's a theme that makes the individual couple joyous and vibrant and that represents a source of strength. It is – seen through the eyes of faith - the vision that God has blessed the couple with that has given them their distinct identity.

Here you can see the coat of arms that one couple in the training course drew to illustrate their vision of identity as a couple. First let's have a look at the larger picture: the couple feels led by the Holy Spirit. Between the trees of life they continue along the path towards the church that is represented by a small chapel. For them, the Eucharist is an important source of strength.

Slide 9

The training course places an emphasis on holistic learning. Symbols and rituals play an important role. Here are two examples from the Schönstatt movement.

Since the families view themselves as the domestic church, they set up a so- called home shrine, a prayer corner that reminds them that God is omnipresent in their lives.



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Another element is a pitcher which families set up at home. As at the Wedding of Cana, parents and children pour the water of their life, in other words happiness and thanksgivings, problems and suffering into the pitcher. May God transform these to Good, as Jesus did at the Wedding of Cana.

Slide 10

What are the prerequisites for the course?

- A decisive prerequisite is a fundamental respect and appreciation that the couple has for one another. They are prepared to invest in their marriage.
- They are not currently facing a marriage crisis and want to develop new perspectives and behaviour patterns in their marriage.
- They were married in the Christian Church and actively live their faith.
- They are prepared to work on a collaborative project to strengthen marriages and families.

Slide 11

What are the benefits for the church and the society from the Marriage and Family Trainers in Evangelisation?

After the sending out ceremony, the couples are ready, with the blessing of the church, to offer their services. There are countless possibilities. Here some examples:

- House circles / Family circles
- Marriage preparation seminars
- Marriage and family catechesis
- Family weekends
- Workshops in schools
- ...

But the most important benefit is, the Graduates are the message themselves – as a couple, whatever they do, wherever they are. They give faith a happy face – or two faces!

Contact:

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BIOGRAPHY



We are married since 2003. We live in South Germany with our wonderful two girls, **Sophia** (13 years) and **Gloria** (11 years).

Beate studied theology and adult education. Now she organizes formations for families at the educational centre in the monastery of Roggenburg - Order of the Canons Regular of Prémontré.

Christian is a mechanical engineer in a German automotive manufactory and he is also a Professor

at the university of applied science in Ulm.

We both try – since our youth – to live our life in the spirituality of the Schönstatt movement.

2006 we started the training course to become Marriage and Family Trainers in the Academy for Marriage and Families. After our sending out ceremony we switched to the management team of the academy and execute many courses.

We are proud to represent the precious work of the Academy for Marriage and Families.

