

Walking with Families During the Year of Amoris Laetitia

Goal #12: Organize meetings in parishes and communities involving groups for an in-depth study of Amoris Laetitia, in order to raise awareness of the concrete pastoral opportunities that occur in individual ecclesial communities (cf. AL 199-ff.).

The Year of Amoris Laetitia Family was promulgated in part to highlight the fifth anniversary of the release of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL). The Holy Father is asking parishes and dioceses to examine how they have put *Amoris Laetitia* into practice over the last five years. Areas of pastoral opportunities for married couples and families should be identified and addressed in light of the Church's teaching.

The Holy Father is aware that the challenges and areas of need in families will vary from community to community, which is precisely why he did not publish a pastoral plan for families (AL 199) and why he asks groups in parishes and communities to study *Amoris Laetitia* this year. It is on the local level that marriages and families can be best served in their particular circumstances. Additionally, communities already have various apostolates, programs, and ministries that address some areas of family need but not others. It is through reexamining *Amoris Laetitia* that those areas of need that are unmet can be properly supported.

Pope Francis's approach to reflecting on the pastoral challenges of families is beautiful, compassionate, and practical. He walks through the trials that can occur at every stage of family life, from marriage preparation to the death of loved ones. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has created a National Pastoral Framework for Marriage and Family Life Ministry, [*Called to the Joy of Love*](#), that proposes ways that these challenges brought forth by the Holy Father may be addressed in the United States. This document can assist parishes and dioceses in their discernment of the concrete pastoral opportunities that occur in their individual ecclesial communities.

Promoting an in-depth study of *Amoris Laetitia* may include:

- Identify and equip mentor married couples to lead couples who are in their first years of marriage through an in-depth study of *Amoris Laetitia* to foster ongoing formation as they begin their married lives together. (See AL 223)
- Host a series of conferences or talks highlighting the core teachings of AL both for married couples and pastoral leaders.

*“Different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church’s teaching and local problems and needs.”
(Amoris Laetitia, 199)*

- Utilize the Parish or Diocesan Pastoral Framework Inventory that is based on the teachings found in *Amoris Laetitia* to identify both areas where families are being served well and areas that need bolstering.
- Coordinate and collaborate with associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities in efforts to support married couples and families in developing a family spirituality. (See AL 223)
- Invite community ministries and apostolates at the service of families to make presentations on their work in parishes and on the diocesan level to raise awareness for their work and develop areas of collaboration.
- Seek the assistance of professionals, “teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers, juvenile and family advocates,” in the training of lay pastoral leaders, “drawing upon the contributions of psychology, sociology, marital therapy and counselling.” (AL 204)
- Highlight families, communities, and apostolates that have addressed areas of pastoral need for families in the local Catholic newspaper or on the diocesan website.

The Year of Amoris Laetitia Family provides an opportunity not only to highlight the importance of marriage and family to the life of the Church, but also to raise awareness of opportunities for pastoral care in local ecclesial communities. Hopefully, this awareness will continue even after the Year of Amoris Laetitia ends in June. Married couples and families are the lifeblood of the Church. Discovering and assisting the areas of need for families in our individual communities builds up the entire Church.