

## Walking with Families During the Year of Amoris Laetitia

*Goal #3: Organize meetings for parents on the education of children and the current challenges that they face (cf. AL, 172-ff. and 259-290), in response to the advice of Pope Francis, who is encouraging parents to try to understand “where children are in their journey” (cf. AL, 261). ([laityfamilylife.va](http://laityfamilylife.va))*

Where are our children? (See AL, 260).

A young married couple’s three-year-old first-born son runs off in a crowded mall. They call and then yell for him. Frantic. They cannot find him. Where did he go? Did someone take him? This is every parent’s nightmare.

After about five minutes, which seem like an eternity, they find their son, hiding behind a short wall. After hugging him with relief, they ask why he ran off. “I wanted to play hide and seek.” Oh! They realize they have a lot of work to do. Traumatic experiences like this ramp up the innate instinct to guard and protect, sometimes to a fault. It would be an overreaction to never let the son out of sight, especially when he gets older, goes to school, starts driving, and gets a job. Given today’s many challenges and dangers, though, the temptation is strong.

This little episode pales in comparison to what it takes to prepare children for the barrage of secularism, violence, drug abuse, pornography, sexual identity issues, and ideological messaging that we all experience in our culture. It would be a mistake to think parents fulfill their duty by simply knowing where their children are at any given moment and that they are safe. This would not be a healthy education or formation in true freedom and responsibility. Pope Francis insists that “Vigilance is always necessary, and neglect is never beneficial.” (AL, 260) Parents are to prepare (to educate) their children to navigate challenges of every kind. Controlling every situation or a child’s every move is not possible but imparting time-honored values and tested principles is possible.

Besides being concerned about where or with whom a son or daughter is spending their time or what they are watching on TV or the internet, a parent must ask, as Pope Francis urges, “where they are existentially, where they stand in terms of their convictions, goals, desires and dreams... ‘Do we seek to understand “where” our children really are in their journey? Where is their soul, do we really know? And above all, do we want to know?’” (AL, 261).

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– (Amoris laetitia, 261)*

When children grow, mature, and even leave home, parents should be mindful and ask where they are in their relationship with God. What is their faith like? Do they pray? Do they go to Mass and Confession? Do they seek to live a life of virtue? If not, what are they experiencing

that is keeping them from a life of faith? It is much easier to just stick to small talk and avoid the more difficult questions. This is especially true if a child has drifted or even willfully abandoned the Catholic faith. Certainly, parents don't want to "interrogate" or "lecture" their children, but they may need to connect or re-connect with them, and this takes patience, determination, and – above all – love.

*"The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom."  
– (Amoris laetitia, 274)*

Dioceses, parishes, and Catholic schools can provide useful programs, workshops, and resources to assist parents in their sacred duty to form their children, beginning at an early age. Such opportunities allow parents to renew their own formation so they can better hand on the faith to their children. In the sections of *Amoris laetitia* noted above, topics include understanding the love and valuable roles of a mother and a father, a child's right to receive that love, the importance of marriage, balanced parenting, the ethical formation of children, particularly in human sexuality, and more. Family life is the primary educational setting, especially in hope, for our journeys' end in Heaven.