



SYNOD OF BISHOPS

III EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY IN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELIZATION

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS

VATICAN CITY

2014

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

Introduction

Preface

Part I

Communicating the Gospel of the Family in Today's World

Chapter I

God's Plan for Marriage and the Family

The Biblical Teaching on the Family (1-3)

The Family in the Documents of the Church (4-7)

Chapter II

The Knowledge and Acceptance of the Teachings on Marriage and the Family from Sacred Scripture and Church Documents (8)

The Knowledge of the Bible on the Family (9-10)

The Knowledge of the Documents of the Magisterium (11)

The Necessity of Properly Prepared Clergy and Ministers (12)

A Diversified Acceptance of Church Teaching (13-14)

Some Reasons for the Difficulty in Acceptance (15-16)

Fostering a Greater Knowledge of the Magisterium (17-19)

Chapter III

The Gospel of the Family and the Natural Law

The Relation of the Gospel of the Family to the Natural Law (20)

Present-Day Problems Related to the Natural Law (21-26)

Practical Objections to the Natural Law concerning the Union between a Man and a Woman (27-29)

A Call for a Renewal in Terms of Language (30)

Chapter IV

The Family and Vocation of the Person in Christ

The Family, the Person and Society (31-34)

In the Image of Trinitarian Life (35)

The Holy Family of Nazareth and Learning to Love (36-38)

The Differences, Reciprocity and Manner of Living as a Family (39-42)

The Family and the Integral Development of a Person (43-44)

Guidance in the Renewed Desire to Marry and Form a Family and the Related Crises (45-48)

Ongoing Formation (49)

Part II

The Pastoral Program for the Family in Light of New Challenges

Chapter I

The Pastoral Program for the Family: Various Proposals Underway

The Responsibility of Bishops and the Clergy and the Charismatic Gifts in the Pastoral Care of the Family (50)

Marriage Preparation (51-56)

Popular Piety and a Familial Spirituality (57)

Support for a Familial Spirituality (58)

Testimony on Behalf of the Beauty of the Family (59-60)

Chapter II

The Pastoral Challenges of the Family (61)

a) The Crisis of Faith and Family Life

Pastoral Action in the Crisis of Faith (62-63)

b) Critical Situations within the Family

Difficulty in Relationships / Communication (64)

The Break-Up and Breakdown of Families (65)

Violence and Abuse (66-67)

Dependence, the Media and the Social Network (68-69)

c) External Pressures on the Family

The Impact of Work on the Family (70-71)

Migration and the Family (72)

Poverty and the Struggle for Subsistence (73)

Consumerism and Individualism (74)

Counter-Witness in the Church (75)

d) Special Situations

The Weight of Societal Expectations on the Individual (76)

The Impact of Wars (77)

Disparity of Cult (78)

Other Critical Situations (79)

Chapter III

Difficult Pastoral Situations

a) Situations in Families (80)

Cohabitation (81-82)

De facto unions (83-85)

Persons Separated, Divorced and Divorced and Remarried (86)

Children and Those Who Are Alone (87)

Teen Mothers (88)

Situations of Canonical Irregularity (89-92)

Concerning the Reception of the Sacraments (93-95)

Other Requests (96)

Concerning Separated and Divorced Persons (97)

Streamlining the Processing of Marriage Cases (98-102)

Pastoral Care in Difficult Situations (103-104)

The Request for Marriage by Non-Practicing Catholics and Unbelievers (105-109)

b) Concerning Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

Civil Recognition (110-112)

An Evaluation of the Particular Churches (113-115)

Some Pastoral Guidelines (116-119)

The Transmission of the Faith to Children in Same Sex Unions (120)

Part III

An Openness to Life and Parental Responsibility in Upbringing

Chapter I

The Pastoral Challenges concerning an Openness to Life (121-122)

Knowledge and Acceptance of the Magisterium concerning a Mentality of an Openness to Life (123-125)

Some Causes of Difficulty in Acceptance (126-127)

Pastoral Recommendations (128)

Concerning Sacramental Practice (129)

Promoting a Mentality of an Openness to Life (130-131)

Chapter II

The Church and the Family in the Challenge of Upbringing

a) The Challenge of Upbringing in General

The Challenge of Upbringing and the Family Today (132)

The Transmission of the Faith and Christian Initiation (133-134)

Some Specific Difficulties (135-137)

b) Christian Education in Difficult Family Situations (138)

An Overview of the Situation of Upbringing (139-140)

Requests Addressed to the Church (141-145)

The Response of the Particular Churches (146-150)

The Time and Manner of the Christian Initiation of Children (151-152)

Some Specific Difficulties (153)

Some Pastoral Guidelines (154-157)

Conclusion (158-159)

Abbreviations

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

CDF Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

ITC International Theological Commission

CV Caritas in Veritate Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI (29 June 2009)

DCE Deus Caritas Est Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI (25 December 2005)

DV Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

EG Evangelii Gaudium Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis (24 November 2013)

FC Familiaris Consortio Apostolic Exhortation of Pope St. John Paul II (22 November 1981)

GS Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

HV Humanae Vitae Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI (25 July 1968)

LF Lumen Fidei Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis (29 June 2013)

LG Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

SC Sacramentum Caritatis Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI (22 February 2007)

Introduction

On 8 October 2013, Pope Francis convoked the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to treat the topic: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of*

Evangelization. The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops began its preparation by sending the *Preparatory Document*, which generated significant reflection among the People of God. The results of that consultation are presented in this *Instrumentum Laboris*. The Holy Father has determined that the work of Synod of Bishops is to take place in two stages, forming an single organic unity. In the III Extraordinary General Assembly in 2014, the synod fathers will thoroughly examine and analyze the information, testimonies and recommendations received from the particular Churches in order to respond to the new challenges of the family. The Ordinary General Assembly in 2015, representing a great part of the episcopate and continuing the work of the previous synod, will reflect further on the points discussed so as to formulate appropriate pastoral guidelines.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* is based on the responses to the questions in the *Preparatory Document* which was divided into 8 groups of questions on marriage and the family. After its publication in November, 2013, this document was distributed worldwide. A great number of detailed responses to the questions was submitted by the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the episcopal conferences, the departments of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. In addition, other responses — categorized as *observations* — were sent directly to the General Secretariat by a significant number of dioceses, parishes, movements, groups, ecclesial associations and families, not to mention academic institutions, specialists, both Catholic and non-Catholic, all interested in sharing their reflections.

The present text is divided into three parts and, for an orderly treatment at the synodal assembly, reflects the eight major subjects treated in the series of questions. The first part, devoted to the Gospel of the Family, treats the divine plan and the vocation of the person in Christ. Within this perspective, the section gives indications — positive as well as negative — of the faithful's knowledge and acceptance of pertinent teachings on the family from the Bible and the documents of the Church's Magisterium as well as the faithful's understanding of the natural law. The second part treats various challenges and actual situations related to the pastoral care of the family. The third part is devoted to the topic of an openness to life and the responsibility of parents in the upbringing of their children — characteristic of marriage between a man and a woman — with particular reference to difficult pastoral situations.

The present document, the fruit of a collegial effort by the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and the Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat to gather and examine the results of the consultation of the particular Churches, is placed in the hands of the members of the Synod Assembly as the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The document offers a broad, yet by no means exhaustive, perspective on the present-day situation of the family, on the challenges of the family and on the reflections related to the family today.

The topics which are not included in the document, those in response to question 9 in the *Preparatory Document (miscellaneous)*, will be treated in the Ordinary General Assembly of 2015.

Lorenzo Cardinal Baldisseri
General Secretary

Vatican City, 24 June 2014
Solemnity of the Birth of St. John the Baptist

Preface

The proclamation of the Gospel of the Family is an integral part of the mission of the Church, since the revelation of God sheds light on the relationship between a man and a woman, their love for each other and the fruitfulness of their relationship. In these times, a widespread cultural, social and spiritual crisis is posing a challenge in the Church's work of evangelizing the family, the vital nucleus of society and the ecclesial community. This proclamation of the Gospel of the Family takes place in continuity with the synodal assembly on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* and the *Year of Faith*, announced by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the topic: *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, aware that "Tradition, originating with the apostles, proceeds in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit" (*DV*, 8), is called to reflect on the path to follow to communicate to everyone the truth about conjugal love and the family and respond to its many challenges (cf. *EG*, 66). The family is an inexhaustible resource and font of life in the Church's pastoral activity. Therefore, the primary task of the Church is to proclaim the beauty of the vocation to love which holds great potential for society and the Church. To meet this urgency, the episcopate throughout the world is being called, *cum et sub Petro*, to listen humbly to the Holy Spirit and reflect on today's pastoral challenges.

The Church, fully aware that family life is not ultimately defined by difficulties and that people do not have problems only, willingly recognizes the efforts being made, primarily by young people, to bring about a new springtime for the family. This can be seen in the moving testimonies in many Church encounters where a renewed desire for marriage and family life is clearly manifested, above all in the newer generations. In light of this desire, the Church is called upon to offer support and guidance, wherever she be, in faithfulness to the Lord's mandate to proclaim the beauty of family love. The Holy Father encouraged everyone to look with hope to the future and recommended a manner of acting which preserves and fosters love within the family, namely, by saying "Can I? May I?", "Thank you" and "I'm sorry" and never allowing the sun to set on a quarrel or misunderstanding, without having the humility to ask forgiveness.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has emphasized that "the Lord never tires of forgiving: never! It is we who tire of asking his forgiveness." (*Angelus*, 17 March 2013). This accent on mercy has had a great impact even in matters relating to marriage and the family, in that, far removed from every kind of moralism, it confirms the Christian outlook on life and opens new possibilities for the future, no matter what the personal limitations or the sins committed. God's mercy is an opening to an ongoing conversion and a continuous rebirth.

Part I

Communicating the Gospel of the Family in Today's World

Chapter I

God's Plan for Marriage and the Family

The Biblical Teaching on the Family

1. The Book of Genesis shows that man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God; in receiving and accepting each other, they recognize that they are made for each other (cf. *Gen* 1:24-31; 2:4b-25). Through procreation, man and woman collaborate with God in accepting and

transmitting life: “By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way in the Creator's work.” (CCC, 372). Their responsibility also involves the stewardship of creation and the propagation of the human family. In biblical tradition, the beauty of human love as mirroring divine love is developed mainly in the Song of Songs and the prophets.

2. The Church's proclamation on the family finds its foundation in the life and preaching of Jesus, who lived and grew up in the family of Nazareth. He attended the wedding at Cana, which he honoured by performing the first of his “signs” (cf. *Jn* 2:1-11) and presented himself as the Bridegroom who unites himself to his Bride (cf. *Jn* 3:29). On the cross, he gave himself up with a love to the very end and, in his resurrected body, established new relationships among people. By revealing the fullness of divine mercy, Jesus allows man and woman to recover that “principle” according to which God unites them in one flesh (cf. *Mt* 19:4-6) and for which — by the grace of Christ — they are enabled to be faithful to each other and love each other forever. Therefore, the divine measure of conjugal love, to which spouses are called by grace, has its source in “the beauty of the saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead” (*EG*, 36), the very heart of the Gospel.

3. Jesus, in assuming human love, also perfected it (cf. *GS*, 49), giving man and woman a new manner of loving, which has its foundation in the irrevocable faithfulness of God. In light of this, the Letter to the Ephesians has identified in the married love between a man and a woman, “the great mystery” which makes present in this world the love between Christ and the Church (cf. *Eph* 5:31-32). A married couple possesses the charism (cf. *1 Cor* 7:7) of building up the Church with their spousal love and the task of the procreation and rearing of children. United in an indissoluble sacramental bond, the spouses live the beauty of love, fatherhood and motherhood and the dignity of participating, in this way, in God's creative work.

The Family in the Documents of the Church

4. Throughout the centuries, the Church has maintained her constant teaching on marriage and family. One of the highest expressions of this teaching was proposed by the Second Vatican Council, in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which devotes an entire chapter to promoting the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. *GS*, 47-52). This document defined marriage as a community of life and love (cf. *GS*, 48), placing love at the center of the family and manifesting, at the same time, the truth of this love in counter distinction to the various forms of reductionism present in contemporary culture. The “true love between husband and wife” (*GS*, 49) implies a mutual gift of self and includes and integrates the sexual and affective aspects, according to the divine plan (cf. *GS*, 48-49). Furthermore, *Gaudium et Spes*, 48 emphasizes the grounding of the spouses in Christ. Christ the Lord “comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony,” and remains with them. In the Incarnation, he assumes human love, purifies it and brings it to fulfillment. Through his Spirit, he enables the bride and groom to live their love and makes that love permeate every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the bride and groom are, so to speak, consecrated and, through his grace, they build up the Body of Christ and are a domestic Church (cf. *LG*, 11), so that the Church, in order to fully understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way.

5. In the wake of Vatican II, the papal Magisterium has further refined the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a particular manner, Pope Paul VI, in his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, displayed the intimate bond between conjugal love and the generation of life. Pope St. John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love, his Letter to Families (*Gratissimam sane*) and, especially, his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. In these documents, the Pope

called the family the “way of the Church,” gave an overview on the vocation of man and woman to love and proposed the basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. In specifically treating “conjugal love” (cf. *FC*, 13), he described how the spouses, through their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness.

6. Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, again took up the topic of the truth of the love between man and woman, which is fully understood only in light of the love of Christ Crucified (cf. *DCE*, 2). The Pope emphasized that “marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love” (*DCE*, 11). Moreover, in his Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he emphasizes the importance of love as the principle of life in society (cf. *CV*, 44), the place where a person learns to experience the common good.

7. Pope Francis, in his Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, treating the connection between the family and faith, writes: “Encountering Christ, letting themselves (young people) be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness” (*LF*, 53).

Chapter II

The Knowledge and Acceptance of the Teachings on Marriage and the Family from Sacred Scripture and Church Documents

8. The life of the Church in these times is characterized by a widespread rediscovery of the Word of God, which has had an impact in various ways in dioceses, parishes and ecclesial communities. Many responses and observations conclude, however, that the knowledge, communication and reception of the Church's teaching on the family takes place in a variety of ways, depending on family life, the fabric of the Church and socio-cultural factors. In places with a vibrant Christian tradition and a well-organized pastoral programme, people are responsive to the Christian doctrine on marriage and the family. In other places, many Christians, for various reasons, are found to be unaware of the very existence of this teaching.

The Knowledge of the Bible on the Family

9. Generally speaking, it can be said that biblical teaching, particularly that in the Gospels and Pauline Letters, is more extensively known today. Nevertheless, all bishops' conferences agreed that much work remains to be done if this teaching is to become the bedrock of spirituality and the Christian life, even in reference to the family. Many responses also note the faithful's great desire to know Sacred Scripture better.

10. In this regard, the formation of the clergy stands out as particularly decisive, especially in the quality of homilies, on which the Holy Father, Pope Francis has insisted recently (cf. *EG*, 135-144). Indeed, the homily is a privileged means of presenting Sacred Scripture to the faithful and explaining its relevance in the Church and everyday life. As a result of preaching in a befitting manner, the People of God are able to appreciate the beauty of God's Word which is a source of appeal and comfort for the family. In addition to the homily, another important means is the promotion, within dioceses and parishes, of programmes which help the faithful take up the Bible in a proper way. What is recommended is not so much multiplying pastoral initiatives as inserting the Bible in every aspect of existing ministerial efforts on behalf of the family. Every instance where the Church is called to offer

pastoral care to the faithful in a family setting can provide an opportunity for the Gospel of the Family to be announced, experienced and appreciated.

The Knowledge of the Documents of the Magisterium

11. The People of God's knowledge of conciliar and post-conciliar documents on the Magisterium of the family seems to be rather wanting, though a certain knowledge of them is clearly evident in those working in the field of theology. The documents, however, do not seem to have taken a foothold in the faithful's mentality. Some responses clearly state that the faithful have no knowledge of these documents, while others mention that they are viewed, especially by lay people with no prior preparation, as rather "exclusive" or "limited to a few" and require some effort to take them up and study them. Oftentimes, people without due preparation find difficulty reading these documents. Nevertheless, the responses see a need to show the essential character of the truth affirmed in these documents.

The Necessity of Properly Prepared Clergy and Ministers

12. Some observations attribute the responsibility for this lack of knowledge to the clergy, who, in the judgment of some of the faithful, are not sufficiently familiar with the documentation on marriage and the family, nor do they seem to have the resources for development in these areas. Some observations inferred that the clergy sometimes feel so unsuited and ill-prepared to treat issues regarding sexuality, fertility and procreation that they often choose to remain silent. Some responses also voice a certain dissatisfaction with some members of the clergy who appear indifferent to some moral teachings. Their divergence from Church doctrine leads to confusion among the People of God. Consequently, some responses ask that the clergy be better prepared and exercise a sense of responsibility in explaining the Word of God and presenting the documents of the Church on marriage and the family.

A Diversified Acceptance of Church Teaching

13. A good number of episcopal conferences mention that, when the teaching of the Church is clearly communicated in its authentic, human and Christian beauty, it is enthusiastically received for the most part by the faithful. When an overall view of marriage and the family is sufficiently set forth according to tenets of the Christian faith, its truth, goodness and beauty is clearly visible. Church teaching is more widely accepted, when the faithful are engaged in a real journey of faith and are not just casually curious in what might be the Church's thinking in the matter of sexual morality. On the other hand, many respondents confirmed that, even when the Church's teaching about marriage and the family is known, many Christians have difficulty accepting it in its entirety. Generally speaking, where certain elements of Christian doctrine, although relevant, receive treatment, in varying degrees, other elements are overlooked, e.g., birth control, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, cohabitation, fidelity, premarital sex, *in vitro* fertilization, etc. However, many responses recount how Church teaching on the dignity of human life and respect for human life might be more widely and readily accepted, at least in principle.

14. The observations rightly indicate the need for a greater integration of a familial spirituality and moral teaching, which would lead to a better understanding, even of the Church's Magisterium, in the field of moral issues related to the family. Some responses note the importance of identifying elements from local cultures which can be of assistance in understanding Gospel values. Such is the case in many Asian cultures often centered on the family. In these areas, some bishops' conferences argue that it is not difficult to integrate Church teaching on the family with the social and moral values

present in these cultures. At the same time, attention needs to be given to the importance of intercultural exchange in proclaiming the Gospel of the Family. Ultimately, the responses and observations call for the need of establishing real, practical formation programmes through which the truths of the faith on the family might be presented, primarily to appreciate their profound human and existential value.

Some Reasons for the Difficulty in Acceptance

15. Some episcopal conferences argue that the reason for much resistance to the Church's teaching on moral issues related to the family is a want of an authentic Christian experience, namely, an encounter with Christ on a personal and communal level, for which no doctrinal presentation, no matter how accurate, can substitute. In this regard, some responses point to the insufficiency of pastoral activity which is concerned only with dispensing the sacraments without a truly engaging Christian experience. Moreover, a vast majority of responses highlight the growing conflict between the values on marriage and the family as proposed by the Church and the globally diversified social and cultural situations. The responses are also in agreement on the underlying reasons for the difficulty in accepting Church teaching, namely, the pervasive and invasive new technologies; the influence of the mass media; the hedonistic culture; relativism; materialism; individualism; the growing secularism; the prevalence of ideas that lead to an excessive, selfish liberalization of morals; the fragility of interpersonal relationships; a culture which rejects making permanent choices, because it is conditioned by uncertainty and transiency, a veritable "liquid society" and one with a "throw away" mentality and one seeking "immediate gratification"; and, finally, values reinforced by the so-called "culture of waste" and a "culture of the moment," as frequently noted by Pope Francis.

16. Responses from many countries recall the obstacles created by the long domination of atheistic ideologies, which have caused a general attitude of distrust in religious teaching. Other responses relate the difficulties which the Church encounters in tribal cultures and ancestral traditions where marriage is characterized very differently from the Christian view, for example, those supporting polygamy or others opposing the idea of marriage as indissoluble and monogamous. Christians living in these cultural surroundings certainly need to receive the strong support of the Church and Christian communities.

Fostering a Greater Knowledge of the Magisterium

17. Many responses voiced a need to find new ways to communicate the Church's teachings on marriage and family, which depends greatly on the vitality of the particular Church, its traditions and the effective resources at its disposal. Above all, some recognize the need of forming pastoral workers to communicate the Christian message in a culturally appropriate manner. However, almost all the responses stated that a Commission for the Pastoral Care of the Family and a Directory on the Pastoral Ministry to the Family exists at the national level. Generally speaking, the episcopal conferences offer the Church's teaching through documentation, symposia and many other initiatives. On the diocesan level, work is done by various bodies and commissions. Clearly, responses from some particular Churches reveal the burdensome situation of a lack of economic and human resources in organizing an ongoing catechesis on the family.

18. Many responses relate the critical importance of establishing relations with academic centers which are adequately and properly prepared — doctrinally, spiritually and pastorally — in family matters. Some respondents speak of the fruitfulness at the international level between centres on university campuses and dioceses — even in outlying areas of the Church — in promoting qualified formative sessions on marriage and family. An often-cited example in the responses is the

collaboration with the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Rome which has several locations around the globe. In this regard, various episcopal conferences recall the importance of developing the insights of Pope St. John Paul II in his “theology of the body” series, in which he proposes a fruitful approach to the topics of family through existential and anthropological concerns and an openness to the new demands emerging in our time.

19. Finally, the observations insist that catechesis on marriage and family, in these times, cannot be limited exclusively to the preparation of couples for marriage. Instead, a dynamic catechetical programme is needed — experiential in character — which, through personal testimony, shows the beauty of the family as transmitted by the Gospel and the documents of the Magisterium of the Church. Long before they present themselves for marriage, young people need assistance in coming to know what the Church teaches and why she teaches it. Many responses emphasize the role of parents in the catechesis on the family. As far as the Gospel of the Family is concerned, they have an irreplaceable role to play in the Christian formation of their children. This task calls for a thorough understanding of their vocation in passing on the Church’s teaching. Their witness in married life is already a living catechesis in not only the Church but society as well.

Chapter III

The Gospel of the Family and the Natural Law

The Relation of the Gospel of the Family to the Natural Law

20. Speaking of the acceptance of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family necessarily involves the subject of the natural law, which is often quoted in the Church’s magisterial documents and poses difficulties today. The large-scale perplexity surrounding the concept of the natural law tends to affect some elements of Christian teaching on the subject of marriage and the family. In fact, what underlies the relationship between the Gospel of the Family and the natural law is not so much the defense of an abstract philosophical concept as the necessary relation which the Gospel establishes with the human person in the variety of circumstances created by history and culture. “The natural law responds thus to the need to found human rights on reason and makes possible an intercultural and interreligious dialogue” (*ITC, Alla ricerca di un’etica universale: nuovo sguardo sulla legge naturale*, 35).

Present-Day Problems Related to the Natural Law

21. In light of what the Church has maintained over the centuries, an examination of the relation of the Gospel of the Family to the experience common to every person can now consider the many problems highlighted in the responses concerning the question of the natural law. In a vast majority of responses and observations, the concept of natural law today turns out to be, in different cultural contexts, highly problematic, if not completely incomprehensible. The expression is understood in a variety of ways, or simply not understood at all. Many bishops’ conferences, in many different places, say that, although the spousal aspect of the relationship between man and woman might be generally accepted as an experiential reality, this idea is not interpreted according to a universally given law. Very few responses and observations demonstrated an adequate, popular understanding of the natural law.

22. The responses and observations also show that the adjective “natural” often is understood by people as meaning “spontaneous” or “what comes naturally.” Today, people tend to place a high value on personal feelings and emotions, aspects which appear “genuine” and “fundamental” and, therefore, to be followed “simply according to one’s nature.” The underlying anthropological

concepts, on the one hand, look to an autonomy in human freedom which is not necessarily tied to an objective order in the nature of things, and, on the other hand, every human being's aspiration to happiness, which is simply understood as the realization of personal desires. Consequently, the natural law is perceived as an outdated legacy. Today, in not only the West but increasingly every part of the world, scientific research poses a serious challenge to the concept of nature. Evolution, biology and neuroscience, when confronted with the traditional idea of the natural law, conclude that it is not "scientific."

23. Generally speaking, the notion of "human rights" is also seen as highly subjective and a call for a person to self-determination, a process which is no longer grounded in the idea of the natural law. In this regard, many respondents relate that the legal systems in many countries are having to make laws on situations which are contrary to the traditional dictates of the natural law (for example, *in vitro* fertilization, homosexual unions, the manipulation of human embryos, abortion, etc.). Situated in this context is the increased diffusion of the ideology called *gender theory*, according to which the *gender* of each individual turns out to be simply the product of social conditioning and needs and, thereby, ceasing, in this way, to have any correspondence to a person's biological sexuality.

24. Furthermore, much attention is given in the responses to the fact that what becomes established in civil law — based on an increasingly dominant legal positivism — might mistakenly become in people's mind accepted as morally right. What is "natural" tends to be determined by the individual and society only, who have become the sole judges in ethical choices. The relativization of the concept of "nature" is also reflected in the concept of stability and the "duration" of the relationship of marriage unions. Today, love is considered "forever" only to the point that a relationship lasts.

25. If some responses refer to a lack of proper understanding of the natural law, several episcopal conferences in Africa, Oceania and East Asia, mention that, in some regions, polygamy is to be considered "natural," as well as a husband's divorcing his wife because she is unable to bear children — and, in some cases, unable to bear sons. In other words, from an emerging point of view, drawn from a widely diffused culture, the natural law is no longer to be considered as applicable to everyone, since people mistakenly come to the conclusion that a unique system of reference does not exist.

26. The responses point to a general belief that the distinction between the sexes has a natural foundation within human existence itself. Therefore, by force of tradition, culture and intuition, there exists the desire that the union between a man and a woman endure. The natural law is then a universally accepted "fact" by the faithful, without the need to be theoretically justified. The demise of the concept of the natural law tends to eliminate the interconnection of love, sexuality and fertility, which is understood to be the essence of marriage. Consequently, many aspects of the Church's sexual morality are not understood today. This is also a result of a certain criticism of the natural law, even by a number of theologians.

Practical Objections to the Natural Law concerning the Union between a Man and a Woman

27. Given the lack of reference to the natural law by many academic institutions today, major complaints result from the extensive practice of divorce, cohabitation, contraception, procedures of artificial procreation and same-sex unions. Other complaints against the natural law come from the poorest areas and those least influenced by western thought — especially some African states — which cite the phenomena of machismo, polygamy, marriages between teens and preteens, and divorce in cases of sterility or a lack of a male heir, as well as incest and other aberrant practices.

28. Nearly all the responses as well as observations relate an increasing number of cases of “blended” families, especially because of the presence of children from different *partners*. Western society is now witnessing many cases in which children, in addition to their being with separated and divorced parents who might or might not be remarried, find themselves with grandparents in the same situation. Moreover, in Europe and North America in particular (but also among some countries in South Asia), the instances of couples or single persons, who lack a mentality of an openness to life, are increasing; *single* parenthood is also on the rise. A dramatic increase can also be seen on these same continents in the age at which people decide to wed. Many times, especially in northern Europe and North America, children are considered a hindrance to the well-being of the individual and the couple.

29. Some responses, particularly in parts of Asia, point to a willingness, on the civic level, to recognize so-called “multi-personal” unions between individuals of different sexual orientations and sexual identities, based simply on personal needs and on individual and subjective necessities. In short, this tendency accentuates the absolute right to personal freedom without any compromise: people are “formed” on the basis of their individual desires only. What is increasingly judged to be “natural” is more of a reference-to-self only, when it comes to their desires and aspirations. This situation is heavily influenced by the mass media and by the lifestyles of some people in sports and entertainment. These aspects are exerting influence even in countries with traditional family cultures which seem, until now, to have exercised great resistance in the matter (Africa, Middle East and South-Central Asia).

A Call for a Renewal in Terms of Language

30. The language traditionally used in explaining the term “natural law” should be improved so that the values of the Gospel can be communicated to people today in a more intelligible manner. In particular, the vast majority of responses and an even greater part of the observations request that more emphasis be placed on the role of the Word of God as a privileged instrument in the conception of married life and the family, and recommend greater reference to the Bible, its language and narratives. In this regard, respondents propose bringing the issue to public discussion and developing the idea of biblical inspiration and the “order in creation,” which could permit a re-reading of the concept of the natural law in a more meaningful manner in today’s world (cf. the idea of the law written in the human heart in *Rm* 1:19-21; 2:14-15). Moreover, this proposal insists on using language which is accessible to all, such as the language of symbols utilized during the liturgy. The recommendation was also made to engage young people directly in these matters.

Chapter IV

The Family and Vocation of the Person in Christ

The Family, the Person and Society

31. The family is acknowledged in the People of God to be an invaluable asset, the natural setting in which life grows and develops and a school of humanity, love and hope for society. The family continues to be the privileged place in which Christ reveals the mystery and vocation of the person. In addition to commonly affirming these basic facts, the great majority of respondents agree that the family has the potential of being this privileged place, despite their indicating, and often explicitly recounting, the worrisome difference between the forms of the family in today’s world and Church’s teaching in this regard. Real-life situations, stories and multiple trials demonstrate that the family is experiencing very difficult times, requiring the Church’s compassion and understanding in offering guidance to families “as they are” and, from this point of departure, proclaim the Gospel of the Family

in response to their specific needs.

32. The responses acknowledge that, as in centuries past, the family has played a significant role in society as the first place where the person is formed in society and for society. Since the family is the natural place for personal development, it is the foundation of society and the State. In summary, the family is defined as the “primordial human society.” From the very first years of a person’s existence, the family is the place for the transmission and learning of values, such as brotherhood, loyalty, love for the truth and work, and respect and solidarity between generations, not to mention the art of communication and a sense of joy in living. The family is the privileged place to live out and promote the dignity and rights of man and woman. The family, founded on marriage, is the place for the integral formation of a country’s future citizens.

33. One of the great challenges of the family today consists in attempts at its privatization, running the risk of forgetting that the family is “the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another” (*EG*, 66). What needs to be clearly delineated is the idea of the family as a resource in society, that is to say, a source of the essential virtues for a life in community. In a family, a person learns a sense of the common good and experiences the goodness of living together. Without the family, a person is unable to emerge from his individualism, since it is the only place to learn the power of love to sustain life, and “without a love which is trustworthy, nothing could truly keep men and women united. Human unity would be conceivable only on the basis of utility, on a calculus of conflicting interests or on fear, but not on the goodness of living together, not on the joy which the mere presence of others can give” (*LE*, 51).

34. The synod will have to reflect on how to promote in today’s world a ministry which encourages the participation of the family in society. Families are not only the subject of protection by the State, but must regain their role as active agents in society. In this regard, the following challenges emerge: the relationship between the family and the workplace; the relationship between the family and education; the relationship between the family and health; the family’s ability to bring generations together so as not to neglect the young and the elderly; the situation of the rights of the family institution and its specific relationships; and the promotion of just laws, such as those that ensure the defense of human life from its conception and those which promote the social goodness of an authentic marriage between a man and a woman.

In the Image of Trinitarian Life

35. A number of responses focuses on the image of the Trinity reflected in the family. The experience of the mutual love between the spouses is an assistance in understanding the life of the Trinity as love. Through a communion lived in the family, children can glimpse an image of the Trinity. Recently, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in his catechesis on the sacraments, recalled that “when a man and woman celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony God as it were ‘is mirrored’ in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us. Indeed, God is communion too: the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity. And this is precisely the mystery of Matrimony: God makes of the two spouses one single life” (*General Audience, 2 April 2014*).

The Holy Family of Nazareth and Learning to Love

36. A recurring subject in almost all the responses is the importance of the Holy Family of Nazareth as the model and example for the Christian family. The mystery of the Word of God’s becoming incarnate within a family reveals how it is the privileged place for God’s revelation to humanity. In

fact, the family is acknowledged to be the ordinary and everyday place to encounter Christ. The Christian people look to the Holy Family of Nazareth as a model in relationships and love, as a point of reference for every family and as a comfort in time of trial. The Church invokes the Holy Family of Nazareth, entrusting all families, in their moments of joy, hope and sorrow, to the care of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

37. The responses highlight the importance of love in the family, referring to it as “an efficacious sign of the existence of God's Love” and calling the family itself “the sanctuary of life and love.” The initial experience of love and human relationships takes place within the family. Every child needs to live in the warmth and protective care of loving parents in a home where peace abides. Children must be able to see that Jesus is always with them and that they are never alone. Because of an obvious weakening in family ties, particularly in some parts of the world, children experience loneliness. Even when children need correction, it should be done so as to ensure that they grow in a familial atmosphere of love and that parents might realize their vocation to be God's collaborators in the development of the human family.

38. Considerable emphasis is placed on the formative value of love in the family for not only children but all its members. As such, the family is a “school of love,” a “school of communion,” and a “gymnasium for relationships,” that is, the privileged place to learn to build meaningful relationships which help a person develop a capacity for giving one's self. Some of the responses suggest that a relation might exist between the knowledge of the mystery and vocation of the human person and the acknowledgment and acceptance of each's unique gifts and abilities within the family. In this sense, the family can be considered as the “basic school of humanity,” and thus regarded as irreplaceable.

The Differences, Reciprocity and Manner of Living as a Family

39. The role of parents as primary educators in the faith is considered vital and essential. Emphasis is often placed on their witness of fidelity, particularly on the beauty of their individuality and at times, simply on the importance of their distinctive roles as father and mother. At other times, the responses stress the positive character of the spouses' freedom, equality and reciprocity. Still other responses, especially from Europe, stress the equal importance of both parents in the upbringing of their children and domestic responsibilities.

40. Again referring to differences, some responses mention the richness of the inter-generational relationships experienced in the family, where decisive events take place, e.g., birth and death, successes and misfortunes, achievements and disappointments, etc. Through these and other occurrences, the family becomes the place where children grow, through the various stages of their life, to respect life and form their personality.

41. The responses insist on the importance of parents' sharing and explicitly professing their faith, beginning with their manner of life as a couple, in their relationship between themselves and that with their children, and also, in sharing their knowledge and awareness of Christ, who — the responses continually stress — must be at the center of the family. In a pluralistic society, parents can offer their children, in this manner, a basic orientation for their lives, which can sustain them even in the years after childhood. For this reason, the responses voice a need for families to create time and opportunities for family-togetherness and open, honest communication in a continual dialogue with one another.

42. All respondents stress the importance of prayer in the family as the domestic Church (cf. [LG](#), 11), where a true and proper “familial culture of prayer” is nourished. In fact, a genuine knowledge of

Jesus Christ is fostered through personal prayer and, particularly, family prayer, according to the specific forms of prayer and ritual practices in the home, which are considered an effective way to teach the faith to children. Great emphasis is also placed on reading Scripture in common and other forms of prayer, such as the blessing before and after meals and the family recitation of the rosary. In this regard, however, the domestic Church of the family can never be a substitute for the parish community nor underestimate the importance of the participation as a family in the parish's sacramental life, the Sunday Eucharist and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Most responses also speak of the need of living the Sacrament of Reconciliation and practicing Marian devotions.

The Family and the Integral Development

43. The responses also emphasize the fundamental character of the family in the process of a person's integral development. The family is essential in the maturation of those cognitive and affective processes which are crucial to personal development. In addition to being a vital environment in personal formation, the family is also the place to experience the awareness of being not only a Child of God but also called to a vocation of love. Still other places contribute to personal growth, such as living in community, the workplace, civic and ecclesial life. Nevertheless, the fundamental elements acquired in a human family allow access to other levels of living in and building society.

44. The family faces many daily difficulties and trials, as many responses indicate. Being a Christian family does not automatically guarantee the absence of trials, even excessively burdensome ones. But through such trials the family itself can be strengthened, and, with the support of pastoral care, led to recognize its fundamental vocation in God's plan. The family is already a reality, "given" and secured by Christ, and, on the whole, to be "built up" each day with patience, understanding and love.

Guidance in the Renewed Desire to Marry and Form a Family and the Related Crises

45. The responses point out the significant fact that even in the face of very difficult situations, many people, especially the young, see a value in a stable, enduring relationship and express a real desire to marry and form a family. This creates the possibility for a married couple to realize a love that is faithful and indissoluble and one that offers a peaceful atmosphere conducive to human and spiritual growth. This "desire to marry and form a family" is a true sign of the times which should be seen as an opportunity for pastoral ministry.

46. The Church needs to provide care for families living in critical and stressful situations, ensuring that the family be attended in its entirety. The quality of the relationships within the family must be of utmost concern for the Church. Initial support originates in a parish, which is the "family of families". It is the principal centre of a renewed pastoral care which receives and guides people and is animated by sentiments of mercy and tenderness. In this regard, parish organizations have a significant role in sustaining the family.

47. Some particularly urgent cases, where family relationships are threatened through domestic violence, require supportive action that leads to healing wounds and uprooting their causes. In families where abuse, violence and neglect prevail, neither growth nor a perception of one's inherent value is possible.

48. Finally, the responses mention the significance of the close collaboration of families / homes and the parish in the mission of evangelization, as well as the need for the active involvement of the family in parish life through support and solidarity on behalf of other families. In this regard, invaluable assistance comes from the community made up of families. Membership in movements and

associations can also be a particularly significant source of support.

Ongoing Formation

49. The responses very often stress the need for a family ministry which provides systematic and ongoing formation on the value of marriage as a vocation and the rediscovery of parenting (fatherhood and motherhood) as a gift. The Church's activity on behalf of the couple should not be limited to preparation for marriage, which — it should be noted — requires reevaluation. Evidently, a more consistent and structured formation ought to be biblical, theological and spiritual as well as human and existential. Catechesis requires a true exchange between generations, actively involving parents in the process of the Christian initiation of their children. In this regard, some responses gave particular attention to liturgical feasts, such as Christmas and particularly the Feast of the Holy Family, as invaluable occasions to show the importance of the family and take into consideration the human context in which Jesus grew up and where he learned to speak, love, pray and work. Some responses recommend preserving the special character of Sunday as the Lord's Day — even civilly where possible — and encouraging families to meet on this day, not only individually as a family but collectively with other families.

Part II

The Pastoral Program for the Family in Light of New Challenges

Chapter I

The Pastoral Program for the Family: Various Proposals Underway

The Responsibility of Bishops and the Clergy and the Charismatic Gifts in the Pastoral Care of the Family

50. At work in the pastoral programme for the family is a beneficial mutual exchange between the responsibility of the bishops and other members of the clergy and the various charisms and ministries of the ecclesial community. This synergy results in many positive experiences. The engagement of so many brothers and sisters in the pastoral care of the family can lead to new effective forms of service for the Church community, which, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, is emboldened to “go out” of itself in mission. The richness in this field is revealed by considering various subjects and reviewing some initiatives and approaches found in the responses.

Marriage Preparation

51. The responses from the different continents display a great similarity when treating the subject of marriage preparation. Many refer to activities well underway, such as programmes in parishes, seminars and retreats for couples. In addition to priests, these are often led by married couples with extensive experience in family matters. These programmes have the following aims: strengthening the couple's relationship and their mutual awareness that they are entering marriage by their own free choice; raising a consciousness of the human, civil and Christian implications of their commitment; re-catechizing the couple on the Sacraments of Christian Initiation with particular emphasis on the relation of these Sacraments to the Sacrament of Matrimony; and encouraging the couple to participate in the life of the parish community and society.

52. Some responses mention that, in many cases, couples give little attention to pre-marriage programmes. For this reason, many different approaches are being adopted in catechesis, namely,

offering instruction on the subject to the following: young people, even before their engagement; the parents of engaged couples; couples already married; people who are separated; and those requesting Baptism for their children. Programmes are also being sponsored to heighten people's awareness of the pastoral documents of bishops and the Church's Magisterium. Some countries refer to true and proper schools of preparation for married life, especially intended for the education and advancement of women. The contrary is true in strongly secularized areas, where, in certain cultures, couples are distancing themselves more and more from Church teaching. Particularly long courses are not always welcome. Normally, pre-marriage courses inform engaged couples about the natural methods in the regulation of birth, as witnessed by "couples with experience using these methods."

53. Some episcopal conferences express concern that couples, having already set a date for their wedding, often approach the Church too late, and, at times, require special attention in dealing with their situation, e.g., the case of disparity of cult (marriage between a baptized and non-baptized person) or a poor Christian formation. Other conferences mention how preparation programmes for the Sacrament of Matrimony have improved in recent decades, with greater attempts being made to transform a simple "course" into a more detailed "programme," involving both the clergy and married couples. In recent years the content of these programmes has substantially changed from being merely a preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage to becoming an actual initial proclamation of the faith.

54. Many laudable initiatives in marriage preparation are taking place in various parts of the world, including: "new communities" which promote retreats; personal encounters; groups for prayer, reflection and discussion; pilgrimages; festivals; and national and international congresses on the family. At times, however, these initiatives are seen more as an obligation than a freely undertaken opportunity for growth. Undoubtedly, another important moment in marriage preparation is the meeting with the pastor or his delegate, a necessity for all engaged couples. The responses mention that often this meeting is not sufficiently used as an opportunity to engage the couple in a more detailed discussion on marriage but, instead, is a mere formality.

55. Several respondents report that attempts are being made to add new topics to marriage courses that are being offered, such as communication skills, the sexual aspects of conjugal life and conflict resolution. In some places characterized by a somewhat sexist cultural tradition, there exists a certain lack of respect towards women, which hinders the necessary mutual exchange in conjugal life between a man and woman who are equal in dignity. In other places, dominated in the past by atheistic regimes and often lacking in even a rudimentary knowledge of the faith, new forms in the preparation of engaged couples are being introduced, e.g., weekend retreats, small group activities with testimonies from married couples, events celebrating the family in dioceses, stations of the cross and retreats for entire families.

56. Some responses indicate that in some multi-religious and multi-confessional territories, certain factors need to be taken into consideration, e.g., the considerable number of mixed marriages (a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) and marriages of mixed religions, both of which require a suitable preparation by the clergy in attending to the couples involved. The dioceses in Eastern Europe are exploring a dialogue with the Orthodox Churches in inter-marriage preparation. Interesting information exists on diocesan events celebrating the family with the bishop present and testimonies given by couples who are well experienced in the faith. Such days can create an opportunity for families to interact with each other and to dialogue with older couples, thus adding to the value of initiatives based on the Bible and moments of prayer for engaged couples. Older and more experienced couples act as "godparents" to younger couples who are preparing for marriage.

Popular Piety and a Familial Spirituality

57. The responses suggest a need to safeguard and promote the various forms of popular piety on the different continents in support of the family. Despite a break-down in family life, certain religious practices which bring families together still remain vibrant, e.g., Marian devotion, folk festivals and the celebration of local saints. In addition to the rosary, some people also pray the *Angelus*. Others see a value to the practice of the *peregrinatio Mariae* ("Mary's Pilgrimage"), in which an icon or statue of the Virgin Mary passes from one home to another and from one family to another. Still others speak of the advantage of the "Gospel Pilgrimage," which consists of a family's displaying an icon and a Bible in their home with a commitment to regularly read the Bible and pray together for a certain period of time. Those families that foster such pious practices, like the "Pilgrimage of Families," are found to have particularly strong bonds of friendship and communion. In this regard, many also insist on the importance of praying the liturgy of the hours in common, the reading of the Psalms and other texts from Sacred Scripture. Still others recommend spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving and requests for forgiveness. Some countries encourage celebrating different religious events in life, such as anniversaries of baptism, marriage and death. One response refers to family prayer, frequently practiced during travel, work and school, which, in some countries, utilizes radio and television. Furthermore, some note how families can benefit from nearby monasteries which can complement the vocation of marriage with that of the consecrated life. The same can be said for the fruitful relationship between couples and priests, in their respective roles.

Support for a Familial Spirituality

58. Many bishops' conferences recount how particular Churches render support to a familial spirituality in their pastoral activity. In our time, spiritual movements make a special contribution to promoting an authentic, effective pastoral programme for the family. Christian communities are characterized by a variety of ecclesial situations and approaches aimed at specific individuals. Clearly, local Churches should be able to find that this richness is a real resource for not only promoting various initiatives on behalf of couples intending marriage but devising ways to provide suitable pastoral care for families today. Some respondents recount that many dioceses foster specific endeavours and formation for couples who can then provide support to other couples and sustain a series of initiatives to promote a true familial spirituality. Some argue that sometimes local communities, movements, groups and religious associations can be exclusive and too restrictive in the life of a parish. This situation illustrates the importance of their being fully engaged with the whole Church in an authentic sense of mission so as to avoid the danger of excessively looking inward. Families belonging to these communities exercise a vibrant apostolate and, judging from the past, are instrumental in the evangelization of many families. Their members offer a credible witness with their lives of fidelity in marriage, mutual respect, unity and openness to life.

Testimony on Behalf of the Beauty of the Family

59. All the responses agree that a key point in fostering an authentic, incisive pastoral programme for the family seems ultimately to rest on a couple's witness of life, a witness which is consistent with not only Christian teaching on the family but also the beauty and joy which permits the Gospel message to be embraced in marriage and lived as a family. Pastoral ministry for the family also needs to follow the *via pulchritudinis* ("the way of beauty"), namely, by a witness which attracts others simply because the family lives the Gospel and is constantly in union with God. This entails "showing that to believe in and follow him [Christ] is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties" (*EG*, 167).

60. Although some episcopal conferences mention that, in many parts of the world, a successful

outcome to marriage and family life can no longer be presumed, they equally observe that young people have a high esteem for couples who, even after many years of marriage, continue their life together in love and fidelity. As an acknowledgment, many dioceses celebrate, with the bishop present, wedding anniversaries and thanksgiving commemorations for married couples who have spent many years together. In this regard, special recognition needs to be given to those who faithfully remain with their spouses, despite problems and difficulties.

Chapter II

The Pastoral Challenges of the Family

61. This section deals with the responses and observations on the pastoral challenges of the family. It treats three fundamental questions: the crisis of faith and its relation to the family; the internal and external challenges affecting the family; and some difficult situations connected to a culture of individualism and a lack of trust in enduring relationships.

a) The Crisis of Faith and Family Life

Pastoral Action in the Crisis of Faith

62. Some responses show how, in cases where the faith of family members is either weak or non-existent, both the parish and the Church in general are not seen as supportive. This probably comes from a mistaken idea of the Church and her activity due to socio-cultural circumstances, especially where the institution of the family itself is in crisis. In these cases, the ideal of living as a family is viewed as unattainable and frustrating instead of as a possible means for learning how to respond to one's vocation and mission. Often, when the lay faithful sense the great distance between the ideal of family living and the impossibility of achieving that goal, the couple's crisis in marriage and the family gradually becomes a crisis in faith. Therefore, the question arises on how to act pastorally in these situations, namely, how to make sure that the Church, in her variety of pastoral activities, can demonstrate that she has the ability of caring for couples in difficulty and families.

63. Many respondents point out that a crisis in faith can either lead to failure or be taken as an opportunity for growth and an occasion to discover the deeper meaning of the marriage covenant. In this way, the loss of a sense of meaning, or even the breakdown within a family, can be the means of strengthening the marriage bond. Families, willing to offer support to a couple in this difficult situation, can help them overcome this crisis. In particular, the parish must draw near married couples and the family as the "family of families."

b) Critical Situations within the Family

Difficulty in Relationships and Communication

64. Most responses indicate that one of the many critical issues facing the family is a difficulty in relationships and communication. Whether it be tensions and conflicts in a marriage due to a lack of mutual trust and intimacy or the domination of one marriage partner over the other or the inter-generational conflict between parents and children, all hinder the building of family relationships and can even make them entirely impossible. The dramatic aspect of these situations is that they lead to the gradual disappearance of the possibility of dialogue as well as the time and opportunity to work on relationships. For want of sharing and communication, each one is forced to face difficulties in isolation without an experience of being loved and, in turn, loving others. In some places in society, persons often don't experience love, especially the love of a father, thereby making it particularly

difficult to experience God's love and him as Father. The lack of a father-figure in many families causes major imbalances in households and uncertainty in gender identification in children. People who do not witness, live and accept love on a daily basis find it particularly difficult to discover the person of Christ as the Son of God and the love of God the Father.

The Break-Up and Breakdown of Families

65. In various ways, the responses refer to many instances of the break-up and breakdown of families, the first and foremost being a couple's divorce and separation which is sometimes caused by poverty. Other critical situations include many relationships which do not coincide with the idea of a traditional nuclear family, i.e., mother, father and children: single parenthood (a mother only or a teen mother), *de facto* unions and homosexual unions and parenting (specifically mentioned in Europe and North America). In some cultures, polygamy is insistently seen as one of the factors causing the breakdown of families, along with a mentality of parents which is not open to life. Many bishops' conferences are greatly concerned about the widespread practice of abortion. In many ways, today's society seems to promote a culture of death regarding the unborn and to manifest a culture of indifference in approaching life in general. Some governments do not contribute adequately to protecting the family by enacting laws which encourage individualism, thereby influencing the people's mentality and leading to superficiality on issues of critical importance. Many responses also stress that a contraceptive mentality has a negative impact on family relationships.

Violence and Abuse

66. The responses unanimously make reference to psychological, physical and sexual violence and abuse in families which has a particularly damaging effect on women and children, a phenomenon which, unfortunately, is neither occasional nor isolated, particularly in certain parts of the world. In this regard, the responses also mention the appalling phenomenon of the killing of women, often caused by deep emotional trouble in relationships. Arising from a false culture based on possessions, this is particularly disturbing and calls for action by everyone in society and by the Church in her ministry to the family. Sexual promiscuity and incest in the family are explicitly cited in certain parts of the world (Africa, Asia and Oceania), as well as pedophilia and child abuse. The responses also refer to authoritarianism by parents, expressed in the lack of care and attention given to their children, a situation often leading to their children's abandonment, and, on the parents's part, a want of a sense of responsible parenthood which causes them to refuse to not only care for their children but also educate them, thereby leaving them totally to their own devices.

67. Several episcopates worldwide raise the tragic question of the trafficking and exploitation of children. In this regard, particular attention needs to be given to the scourge of "sexual tourism" and the use of minors in prostitution, especially in developing countries, thereby creating disorder within the family. All of this illustrates the extensiveness of domestic violence and the abandonment and breakdown of families and how its many forms have a significant psychological impact on the individual and, consequently, on the life of faith, negatively affecting a person's vision, perception and experience of God and his love.

Dependence, the Media and the Social Network

68. When citing the various critical situations affecting the family, the responses constantly allude to not only addictions to alcohol and drugs but also pornography, at times used and shared within families, not to mention addictions to gambling and video games, the Internet and social networks. As for the media, the respondents repeatedly stressed, in one instance, their negative impact on the

family, particularly when they convey and offer opposing models to the image of the family, which transmit mistaken and misleading values. On the other hand, the responses refer to problems in relationships which the media, together with the social networks and the Internet, are creating within the family. In fact, television, smart phones and computers can be a real impediment to dialogue among family members, leading to a breakdown and alienation in relationships within a family, where communication depends more and more on technology. In the end, the means of communication and access to the Internet replace real family relationships with virtual ones. This situation runs the risk of leading to not only the disunity and breakdown of the family but also the possibility that the virtual world will replace the real one (particularly a danger in Europe, North America and Asia). The responses consistently mention how even a family's leisure time is hijacked by these instruments.

69. Furthermore, the responses allude to the growing phenomenon in the Internet age of an *information overload*, namely, the exponential increase of information on line, often not corresponding to an increase in quality, in addition to the inability always to check the reliability of the information available on the Internet. Technological progress is a global challenge which can cause rapid changes in family life regarding values, relationships and the internal equilibrium. This situation becomes critical, therefore, when a family lacks an adequate knowledge of the proper use of the media and new technologies.

c) External Pressures on the Family

The Impact of Work on the Family

70. All responses, treating the impact of work on the well-being of the family, make reference to the difficulty of coordinating the communal aspects of family living with the excessive demands of work, which require of the family a greater flexibility. The pace of work is fast and sometimes even exhausting, and work hours, often excessive, can sometimes include Sundays, all of which hinders the possibility of a family's spending time together. An increasingly hectic life leaves little opportunity for moments of peace and family togetherness. Some parts of the world are showing signs of the price being paid by the family as a result of economic growth and development, not to mention the much broader effects produced by the economic crisis and the instability of the labor market. Increasing job insecurity, together with the growth of unemployment and the consequent need to travel greater distances to work, have taken their toll on family life, resulting in, among other things, a weakening of family relationships and the gradual isolation of persons, causing even greater anxiety.

71. In dialoguing with the State and the related public entities, the Church is called to offer real support for decent jobs, just wages and a fiscal policy favouring the family as well as programmes of assistance to families and children. In this regard, laws protecting the family in relation to work are frequently wanting, particularly those affecting working mothers. Moreover, civil support and involvement on behalf of the family provides the Church with an opportunity for working together. Networking in this area with organizations which pursue similar goals is equally wise and productive.

Migration and the Family

72. In treating the relation of work to the family, the responses also emphasize the impact of migration on the family. To support the family financially, fathers, and an increasing number of mothers, are being forced to abandon their families for work. The absence of a parent has serious consequences on both the well-being of the family and the upbringing of children. At the same time, the absent parent's sending money to the family can cause a kind of dependence in other family members. This situation requires promoting appropriate policies that make it easier for families to be reunited.

Poverty and the Struggle for Subsistence

73. The responses and observations widely and insistently refer to the economic hardships endured by families as well as the lack of material resources, poverty and the struggle for subsistence. This widespread phenomenon is not limited to developing countries only, but is also mentioned in responses and observations from Europe and North America. In such cases of extreme and increasing poverty, the family has to struggle for subsistence, a struggle to which the family has to devote most of its energy. Some observations call for the Church to raise a strong prophetic voice concerning poverty which puts a strain on family life. A Church which is “poor and for the poor” must not fail to make her voice heard in this area.

Consumerism and Individualism

74. In treating the cultural pressures on the family, the responses consistently mention consumerism, which is gradually focusing more on “what I have” rather than “who I am”. This consumer mentality, cited especially by respondents from Europe, is the driving force in the idea of “having a child at any cost” and the consequent methods of artificial fertilization. Careerism and a competitive spirit are also pointed out as crucially affecting family life. Relegating life, faith and ethics to the private sphere is also noted, particularly in the West, to have a decisive effect. In other words, an individual’s conscience and free choice determines the ultimate value of whether something is good or bad. A culture based on the senses and immediate gratification is also having an influence. In this regard, the words of Pope Francis on a tendency today to “waste” and “live for the moment only” come to mind, both of which, having a major impact on the fragile endurance of emotional relationships, are often the cause of deep discomfort and instability in family life.

Counter-Witness in the Church

75. Responses from almost every part of the world frequently refer to the sexual scandals within the Church (*pedophilia*, in particular) and, in general, to a negative experience with the clergy and other persons. Sex scandals significantly weaken the Church’s moral credibility, above all in North America and northern Europe. In addition, a conspicuously lavish lifestyle by some of the clergy shows an inconsistency between their teaching and their conduct. Some lay faithful live and practice their faith in a “showy manner,” failing to display the truth and humility required by the Gospel spirit. The responses lament that persons who are separated, divorced or single parents sometimes feel unwelcome in some parish communities, that some clergy are uncompromising and insensitive in their behavior; and, generally speaking, that the Church, in many ways, is perceived as exclusive, and not sufficiently present and supportive. In this sense, an open and positive pastoral approach is needed, one which can restore confidence in the institution through a credible witness by all her members.

d) Special Situations

The Weight of Societal Expectations on the Individual

76. Added to the critical situations within and outside the family mentioned above, others are prevalent in different parts of the world, e.g., in Asia — though not exclusively — familial and social expectations have a strong impact on the individual from the very beginning of childhood. Achievement at school and obtaining scholastic degrees (*credentialism*) are considered by the family as prime objectives. In addition to this burdening of children with high expectations, the responses from some areas allude to the negative impact on the family by students’ attending high-achievement, tutorial courses, which take place after school hours and well into the night (*cram schools*). Such

cases affect family life and the life of faith as well as the free time for children to play, not to mention, to rest and sleep. Expectations can sometimes be so powerful that they lead to ostracism, and even suicide. Finally, the responses note the great difficulty of the Church and society — arising from specific cultural and social situations — to confront these types of problems and discuss them openly.

The Impact of Wars

77. The responses, particularly those from Africa and the Middle East, speak of the impact of war on the family, causing violent deaths and the destruction of homes and forcing people to abandon everything to seek refuge in other countries. In some places, wars lead to the breakdown of society, forcing persons, and at times entire families living in poverty, to abandon their Christian faith community.

Disparity of Cult

78. In some geographical areas, like Asia and North Africa, given the low percentage of Catholics, a great number of couples in families is made up of one who is Catholic and the other who comes from another religion. Some responses, while recognizing that these couples bring great richness to the Church, highlight the inherent difficulties of these unions in the Christian upbringing of children, particularly where civil law has an influence in determining the religious affiliation of the couple's children. Sometimes, different religions in the family are seen as an opportunity or a challenge for growth in the Christian faith.

Other Critical Situations

79. Other difficulties affecting the family, in addition to physical illnesses, including AIDS, are: mental illness, depression and the death of a child or spouse, all of which call for a pastoral approach which takes into account the unique family situation. Times such as these, marked by illness and bereavement, are a particularly opportune occasion to rediscover the sustaining and consoling nature of the faith. In some parts of the world with declining birth rates, still other critical situations include the spread of sects, esoteric practices, occultism, magic and witchcraft. The responses clearly indicate that no area and no situation can be considered *a priori* unable to be reached by the Gospel. Therefore, the power and urgency of proclaiming the Gospel of mercy is crucial for a Christian community in the course of providing for and receiving persons in these difficulties, especially when a family is particularly in need.

Chapter III

Difficult Pastoral Situations

a) Situations in Families

80. Under the heading of so-called marriage difficulties, the responses consistently recount stories of great suffering as well as testimonies of true love. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open, [...] where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (*GE*, 47). Real pastoral attention is urgently needed to care for these people and bring them healing so that they might continue their journey with the entire ecclesial community. The mercy of God does not provide a temporary cover-up of personal misdeeds, but rather radically opens lives to reconciliation which brings new trust and serenity through true inward renewal. The pastoral care of families, far from limiting itself to a legal point of view, has a mission to recall the great vocation of love to which each person is called and to help a person live up to the dignity of that calling.

Cohabitation

81. From every part of the world, the responses note an increasing number of couples who live together *ad experimentum* (“on an experimental basis”) in unions which have not been religiously or civilly recognized nor officially registered in any way. The terms “experiment” or “trial period” are really not appropriate, since, especially in Europe and America, they often refer to a permanent form of life. Sometimes marriage takes place after the birth of their first child and the wedding and baptism are celebrated together. Statistics show a high incidence of these unions, though with some qualification between rural areas, where cohabitation is rarer and urban areas, e.g., in Europe, Asia and Latin America, where the practice is more widespread. Generally speaking, cohabitation is more commonly seen in Europe and North America, increasingly witnessed in Latin America and almost non-existent in Arab countries and Asia minor. In some regions of Latin America, cohabitation is more of a tradition in rural areas, integrated into the indigenous culture (*servinacuy*: “trial marriage”). In Africa marriage is practiced in stages and associated with verifying the fertility of the woman, which implies a sort of bond between the two families in question. In Europe, a variety of situations exist, which, in some cases, are influenced by a Marxist ideology, and, in others, are increasingly claimed to be simply a moral choice.

82. Among the circumstances which lead couples to choose cohabitation, the responses mention: inadequate policies of support for the family; financial need; youth unemployment; and a lack of housing. These and other factors tend to make couples delay marriage. In this regard, the fear of making a commitment and the idea of having children are also elements to be taken into consideration, especially in Europe and Latin America. Many think that cohabitation can serve to “test” the eventual success of a wedding, before its actual celebration. Others indicate that improper marriage formation is a reason couples choose cohabitation. For still others, cohabitation allows a couple to live together free from any definitive decisions or responsibilities on an institutional level. In this regard, some pastoral approaches might include offering, from a young age, instruction on appreciating the beauty of marriage and better forming pastoral workers on the topics of marriage and the family. Not to be overlooked is the witness-value of the many young people preparing for marriage and presently living their engagement period in a spirit of chastity.

De facto unions

83. Living together *ad experimentum* often takes the form of *de facto* unions, which are not civilly or religiously recognized. The responses note that, in some countries, civil recognition of these unions, though not equivalent to marriage, is governed by specific legislation which has been enacted in their regard. Despite the availability of this option, an increasing number of couples do not request any form of registration. The responses recount that in western countries, society no longer views this situation as a problem. In others (e.g., Arab countries), however, marriage without any civil or religious recognition remains very rare. Some reasons given for this situation, especially in western countries, is: a lack of assistance from the State, for which the family no longer has any particular value; the idea that love is a private matter with no public role; and the absence of policies on behalf of the family, resulting in marriage being viewed as a financial loss. Immigrants, especially when they enter a country illegally, are a particular problem, because they fear being identified as such, if they seek public recognition for their marriage.

84. The responses mention a concept of freedom, mainly associated with life in the West but equally found in other countries, which considers the bond of marriage as a relinquishment of personal freedom. Such an idea influences poorly formed young people to make them think that love cannot endure for a lifetime. The media largely promotes this attitude among young people. Often,

cohabitation and *de facto* unions are a symptom of the fact that young people tend to prolong their adolescence and consider marriage too challenging and, therefore, fear embarking on an adventure considered too great for them (cf. Pope Francis, *Address to Engaged Couples*, 14 February 2014).

85. In this regard, any possible response to this situation through pastoral care must assist young people overcome an overly romantic idea that love is only an intense feeling towards each other and teach them that it is, instead, a personal response to another person as part of a joint project of life, which reveals a great mystery and great promise. Such a pastoral approach must include education in human love and emotions which begins already in childhood, is reinforced in young couples in the early stages of their engagement and puts the community and liturgical aspects in relief. Pastoral action needs to teach young people how to open themselves to the mystery of the Creator, manifested in their love, because they are fully conscious of the implications of their consent. Likewise, it must help them see the need to restore the ties between the family and society so as to counteract the idea that love is something lived apart from the community. Finally, pastoral care ought to convey to young people the certainty that they are not alone in building their own family, because the Church is at their side as the “family of families.” The overall structuring of the “company” to be entrusted with manifesting the Church’s love is a crucial element in providing special care for engaged couples. Therefore these persons are to be encouraged to become true partners among themselves and with others.

Persons Separated, Divorced and Divorced and Remarried

86. The responses indicate that in Europe and across America, a very high number of persons are separated, divorced or divorced and remarried; the number is much lower in Africa and Asia. Given that this phenomenon is on the rise, many parents are concerned about the future of their children. In addition, the responses note that the increasing number of people simply living together makes the problem of divorce less important. Fewer of these people are divorcing, because fewer tend to marry. In some places the situation is different; divorce does not exist because civil marriage does not exist, e.g., in Arab countries and some Asian countries.

Children and Those Who Are Alone

87. The responses and observations also raise the issue of the children of separated or divorced persons, who notably lack the attention of society. They bear the burden of conflict within marriage and require the Church’s care. The Church also needs to provide care to the parents of divorced persons. They also suffer the consequences of a breakdown of a marriage and often have to compensate for the disadvantages created by the children’s situation. Separated or divorced persons who remain faithful to their marriage vows call for the Church’s attention in their situation, which is often lived in loneliness and poverty. Such persons are also among the “new poor.”

Teen Mothers

88. The responses give particular attention to mothers who have no husbands and who, alone, must care for their children, a situation which is often the result of much suffering and, very often, abandonment. Above all, they are to be esteemed for the love and courage with which they welcomed the life conceived in their womb and now provide for the upbringing and education of their children. They deserve from society a special support which takes into account the many sacrifices they are facing. The Christian community is also called to provide a care which permits these mothers to see the Church as truly a family of God’s children.

Situations of Canonical Irregularity

89. Generally speaking, the responses from various places in the world devote attention to divorced and remarried persons or those, at least, who have formed a different union. Those living in such canonically irregular situations display various attitudes ranging from their being entirely unaware of their irregular situation to their consciously enduring the difficulties created by their irregular situation. For the most part, divorced persons in new unions display similar attitudes in the various parts of the world, with the most prevalent in Europe and America and the fewest in Africa. In this regard, some responses attribute this situation to a lack of formation or religious practice. In North America, people often think that the Church is no longer a reliable moral guide, primarily in issues related to the family, which they see as a private matter to be decided independently.

90. A rather great number of people give no thought to their irregular situation. In these cases, no one requests access to Holy Communion nor the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. These persons often become aware of their irregular situation when they request the Sacraments of Christian Initiation for their children or if they are asked to be a godfather or godmother at the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism or Confirmation. At times, adults, who have a personal and conscious experience of the faith in the programme of catechesis or the catechumenate, become aware of the irregularity of their marital relationship. From a pastoral point of view, these situations are good opportunities to begin the process of regularization, especially in cases of cohabitation. The responses from Africa speak of a different situation, not so much focusing on divorced persons who form a new union as those engaged in practicing polygamy. In cases of a person's conversion to the faith, difficulties arise in leaving a second or third wife who bore children and now wants to participate in the life of the Church.

91. Before treating the suffering associated with those who are unable to receive the sacraments due to their irregular union, the responses refer to a more basic suffering which the Church must take in hand, namely, the suffering of a breakdown in marriage and the difficulty of regularizing the situation. Someone experiencing this crisis expresses a desire to seek the Church's assistance. Various episcopal conferences in Europe, Africa and America mention that distress in the situation often seems to depend on the degree of formation. Many times, people in these irregular situations do not grasp the intrinsic relationship between marriage and the Sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Penance. Consequently, they find it very difficult to understand why the Church does not allow those who are in an irregular situation to receive Holy Communion. The catechetical instruction on marriage does not sufficiently explain the connection. Some responses (America, Europe, Asia) relate how at times people wrongly think that divorced people as such, without entering a new union, are automatically excluded from receiving Holy Communion. Such people, however, are not prohibited from receiving the sacraments.

92. Some Church members who are cognizant that they are in an irregular situation clearly suffer from the fact that they are unable to receive the sacraments. Many feel frustrated and marginalized. Some wonder why other sins can be forgiven and not theirs. Others cannot see how religious and priests can receive a dispensation from their vows and priestly obligations so they can marry, while divorced and remarried persons are unable to receive Holy Communion. These questions highlight the necessity of providing suitable formation and information in the matter. In other cases, persons do not understand how their irregular situation can be a reason for their not being able to receive the sacraments. Instead, they believe that the Church is at fault in not permitting their irregular marriage situation. This way of thinking can lead to viewing withholding the sacraments as a punishment. Furthermore, another factor of concern is the lack of understanding of the discipline of the Church

when access to the sacraments is denied in these cases, as if it were a punishment. A good number of episcopal conferences recommend assisting people in canonically irregular marriages not to consider themselves as “separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life” (*FC*, 84). Moreover, responses and observations from some episcopal conferences emphasize that the Church needs to equip herself with pastoral means which provide the possibility of her more widely exercising mercy, clemency and indulgence towards new unions.

Concerning the Reception of the Sacraments

93. In the matter of access to the sacraments, the responses describe various reactions among the faithful who are divorced and remarried. In Europe (and also in some countries in Latin America and Asia) the prevailing tendency among some of the clergy is to resolve the issue by simply complying with the request for access to the sacraments. Other members of the clergy, particularly in Europe and Latin America, respond to the matter in a variety of ways. At times, the faithful distance themselves from the Church or go to other Christian denominations. In some countries of Europe and some countries on the other continents, this solution is not sufficient for many people; they wish to be publically readmitted to the Church. The problem is not so much not being able to receive Communion but that the Church publically does not permit them to receive Communion. As a result, these believers then simply refuse to consider themselves in an irregular situation.

94. Some Church members in canonically irregular situations express a desire to be received and guided by the Church, especially when they attempt to understand the rationale of the Church’s teaching. These people recognize the possibility of living in their situation, while relying on God’s mercy through the Church. Still others, as indicated in the responses from some Euro-Atlantic episcopal conferences, accept the duty to live in continence (cf. *FC*, 84).

95. A good number of responses speak of the very many cases, especially in Europe, America and some countries in Africa, where persons clearly ask to receive the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. This happens primarily when their children receive the sacraments. At times, they express a desire to receive Communion to feel “legitimized” by the Church and to eliminate the sense of exclusion or marginalization. In this regard, some recommend considering the practice of some Orthodox Churches, which, in their opinion, opens the way for a second or third marriage of a penitential character. In light of this suggestion, countries having a major number of Orthodox Christians noted that, from their experience, this practice does not reduce the number of divorces. Others request clarification as to whether this solution is based on doctrine or is merely a matter of discipline.

Other Requests

96. Very many responses, especially in Europe and North America request streamlining the procedure for marriage annulments. In this regard, they see a need to investigate the question of the relationship between faith and the Sacrament of Matrimony, as suggested by Pope Benedict XVI, on several occasions. In some cases, Catholics in countries with a major number of Orthodox Christians remarry in the Orthodox Church following their customary ritual and then ask to receive Communion in the Catholic Church. Finally, other responses request clear indications on the procedure to follow in cases of a mixed marriage, in which the Orthodox spouse has already been married and has received permission for a second marriage in the Orthodox Church.

Concerning Separated and Divorced Persons

97. Various responses and observations want to see more attention given to separated and divorced persons who have not remarried but have remained faithful to their nuptial vows. Oftentimes, these people seem to have the added suffering of not being given proper care by the Church and thus overlooked. Such persons also have difficulties and a need for pastoral attention. Moreover, the responses emphasize the importance of a pastor's due care in seeing whether a marriage annulment is possible so as not to introduce cases without proper discernment. In this process, many responses ask for a concerted effort towards reconciliation to see if the separated parties can be reunited. Some responses refer to the great Christian witness made by separated persons who, courageously accepting their situation of suffering and solitude, remain faithful to their marriage vows.

Streamlining the Processing of Marriage Cases

98. A great many responses request streamlining the canonical processing of marriage cases. The reasons underlying this request vary. Some argue that reducing the steps in the process would not be effective, while others, in favor of a reduction, want to see a clearer explanation of the nature of the process of annulling a marriage, so that the faithful will better understand it.

99. Some responses urge caution and point out the following risks in streamlining, simplifying or reducing the process: injustices and errors could result; the impression might be given that the indissolubility of the Sacrament is not respected; the change might lead to abuses and create in young people's minds the idea that marriage is not a life-long commitment; and the action might bolster the mistaken idea that an annulment is simply "Catholic divorce." Instead, they propose preparing an adequate number of qualified people to deal with marriage cases. Responses from Latin America, Africa and Asia, advance the idea of increasing the number of tribunals — non-existent in many regions — of giving more authority to local bodies and of providing better formation for the clergy. Other responses wish to add another qualification in the possibility of streamlining the processing: some of the faithful, accepting the validity of their marriage and recognizing its failure, might feel that to request such an annulment would be dishonest. Nevertheless, many believers consider their first marriage valid because they have no idea of the factors which might make it invalid. Sometimes, those who have been divorced, encounter difficulty in returning to the past, which could reopen painful wounds, personally and for one's spouse.

100. On the subject of simplifying the canonical process, many responses make the following requests: a simpler and faster canonical process; the granting of more authority to the local bishop; a greater number of laity as judges; and the reduction of financial fees attached to the process. In particular, some question whether two confirming sentences are necessary, at least when no appeal is made, and, in some case, to leave the obligation to make an appeal to the discretion of the defender of the bond. Others also propose decentralizing the third instance. Responses from the world over call for a more pastoral approach in ecclesiastical courts which gives greater attention to the spiritual needs of the persons involved.

101. Both responses and observations recognize the extensiveness of the pastoral problem of a breakdown in marriages and raise the question whether it is possible to deal with this matter through a judicial process only. Some advance the idea of working through administrative channels. In certain cases, some suggest ascertaining a person's conscience in assessing the invalidity of the marriage bond. The question is whether other pastoral means are available to the clergy involved in the process of verifying the validity of the marriage. Generally speaking, the responses call for a better formation of pastoral workers in this field so that the faithful may be duly assisted.

102. In the annulment process, a more appropriate formation of the faithful would be helpful, in some

cases, to eliminate difficulties, e.g. the mistaken idea of parents who fear that an annulment of marriage would make their children illegitimate, as mentioned in some episcopal conferences of Africa. Many responses insist on the fact that streamlining the canonical process might be useful, only if the pastoral care of the family takes into consideration the entire family. A number of bishops' conferences from Asia cite the case of marriages with non-Christians who do not want to cooperate in the canonical process.

Pastoral Care in Difficult Situations

103. Pastoral charity impels the Church to assist people who have suffered the breakdown of their marriage and are living with their situation relying on the grace of Christ. A more painful wound results when these people remarry and enter a state of life which does not allow them to receive Holy Communion. Clearly, in these cases, the Church must not assume an attitude of a judge who condemns (cf. Pope Francis, [*Homily, 28 February 2014*](#)), but that of a mother who always receives her children and nurses their wounds so they may heal (cf. *GE*, 139-141). With great mercy, the Church is called to find forms of "accompaniment" which can support her children on the path of reconciliation. With patience and understanding, she must explain to these people that their not being able to celebrate the sacraments does not mean that they are excluded from the Christian life and a relationship with God.

104. In referring to these complex situations, many responses highlight the lack of a specific pastoral ministry for these people in some dioceses. Many bishops' conferences mention the importance of offering these members of the faithful a means to participate actively in the life of the Church through prayer groups, liturgical functions and charitable activities. They also refer to some pastoral initiatives, such as giving an individual blessing to those who cannot receive the Holy Eucharist or encouraging their children's participation in parish life. In this regard, the role of movements on conjugal spirituality by religious orders and parish commissions for the family cannot be undervalued. A particularly meaningful recommendation is to include a prayer for people in difficult situations in the Prayer of the Faithful at parish and diocesan liturgies.

The Request for Marriage by Non-Practicing Catholics and Unbelievers

105. On the subject of difficult situations, the Church also considers the pastoral action to be taken with the baptized who, although they might be non-practicing and non-believers, request their marriage be celebrated in Church. Almost all responses indicate that this is more common in cases where two non-practicing Catholics decide on a marriage in Church than two non-believers who request marriage. The latter case, although not impossible, is considered a very remote possibility. A more common case, however, is an engaged couple's requesting a canonical celebration of marriage, where only one of the parties is Catholic and often non-practicing. The primary reason for non-practicing Catholics to return to their parishes for the celebration of a marriage — in the opinion of all the responses which address this issue — concerns the "aesthetical aspects" of the celebration (atmosphere, attractiveness, photo opportunities, etc.) and, equally, a conditioning from the religious tradition of the families of the couple to be married, transmitted to them in some fashion. Oftentimes, the festivities and the traditionally external aspects prevail over the liturgy and the essence of what is being celebrated. The responses agree that these occasions are a propitious opportunity for evangelization and recommend that the parish priest and pastoral workers for the family welcome the couple very warmly and show their readiness to be of assistance.

106. According to a large number of responses and a greater number of observations from various parts of the world, preparation for a religious ceremony of marriage should not be limited to

catechesis only but also serve as an opportunity to get better acquainted and engage in conversation, something pastors could encourage more. On the other hand, various responses from both East and West mention that some of the clergy experience a certain frustration at often witnessing a failure in their pastoral endeavours, when only a very small number of couples continue some kind of relationship with the parish after the celebration of marriage.

107. Many respondents lament a general insufficiency of existing marriage formation programmes to lead engaged couples to a true idea of the faith. In most cases, meetings are planned and attended solely for the purpose of receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony. Precisely because so many non-practicing Catholics, at the conclusion of the formative programme before their wedding, return to their former way of life, the responses, especially from Latin America, see the need to improve, encourage and develop the evangelization and pastoral care of their children and young people in general. Responses also note that, when a couple of non-practicing believers returns to a parish for the celebration of the marriage, pre-nuptial instruction does not sufficiently help a couple undertake a real journey of faith.

108. The majority of responses see an absolute need for a follow-up programme for couples after marriage with meetings aimed at offering them assistance. Some responses, especially those from the bishops' conference of western and southern Europe, strongly emphasize, particularly when couples display a certain lack of maturity, to consider the choice of a marriage ceremony without the celebration of the Eucharist. In cases where a couple does not seem to understand or does not agree with the basic teachings of the Church on the benefits of marriage and its related responsibilities, the bishops' conferences of northern Europe and North America say that the more appropriate course of action would be to postpone the celebration of marriage, fully cognizant beforehand that this proposal could lead to misunderstanding and resentment. Inherent in such a solution, however, would be the danger of a rigorism which is not very merciful.

109. Some episcopates from southern and eastern Asia would require as a prerequisite to marriage participation in the pastoral life of the parish. In this case, however, an overwhelming majority of responses found that such participation ceased immediately after the celebration of the Sacrament. Generally speaking, pastoral care, preparation and planning of formation sessions prior to marriage are having a limited and uneven success everywhere. In almost every case, everything depends, for good or for ill, on the initiatives of each priest. One episcopal conference from Europe outlines how to conduct meetings in preparation for marriage, based on a sequence of verbs: proposing, not imposing; guiding, not pushing; inviting, not driving away, thought-provoking, never disappointing.

b) Concerning Unions of Persons of the Same Sex

Civil Recognition

110. On unions of persons of the same sex, the responses of the bishops' conferences refer to Church teaching. "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. [...] Nonetheless, according to the teaching of the Church, men and women with homosexual tendencies 'must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided'" (CDF, *Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*, 4). The responses indicate that the recognition in civil law of unions between persons of the same sex largely depends on the socio-cultural, religious and political context. In this regard, the episcopal conferences describe three instances: the first exists when repressive and punitive measures are taken in reaction to the phenomenon of homosexuality in all its

aspects, especially when the public manifestation of homosexuality is prohibited by civil law. Some responses indicate that, in this context, the Church provides different forms of spiritual care for single, homosexual people who seek the Church's assistance.

111. A second context is one where the phenomenon of homosexuality is fluid. Homosexual behavior is not punished, but simply tolerated until it becomes visible or public. In this context, legislation on civil unions between persons of the same sex does not usually exist. In political circles, especially in the West, however, the increasing tendency is to adopt laws providing for registered partnerships or so-called "marriage" between persons of the same sex. People argue non-discrimination to give support to this idea, an approach which is perceived by believers and a good part of the public, in central and eastern Europe, as an imposition by a political and foreign culture.

112. The responses describe a third context, one where States have introduced legislation recognizing civil unions or so-called "marriages" between homosexual persons. In some countries, the situation reflects a real redefining of marriage, where the couple is viewed only in legal terms, with such references as "equal rights" and "non-discrimination" without any thought to a constructive dialogue in the matter based on the deeper anthropological issues involved and the centrality of the integral well-being of the human person, especially the integral well-being of the children in these unions. When legal equality is given to heterosexual and homosexual marriage, the State often allows the adoption of children (biological children of either partner or children born through artificial fertilization). Such is the case, particularly in English-speaking countries and central Europe.

An Evaluation of the Particular Churches

113. Every bishops' conference voiced opposition to "redefining" marriage between a man and a woman through the introduction of legislation permitting a union between two people of the same sex. The episcopal conferences amply demonstrate that they are trying to find a balance between the Church's teaching on the family and a respectful, non-judgmental attitude towards people living in such unions. On the whole, the extreme reactions to these unions, whether compromising or uncompromising, do not seem to have facilitated the development of an effective pastoral programme which is consistent with the Magisterium and compassionate towards the persons concerned.

114. A factor which clearly has an impact on the Church's pastoral care and one which complicates the search for a balanced attitude in this situation is the promotion of a gender ideology. In some places, this ideology tends to exert its influence even at the elementary level, spreading a mentality which, intending to eliminate homophobia, proposes, in fact, to undermine sexual identity.

115. Episcopal conferences supply a variety of information on unions between persons of the same sex. In countries where legislation exists on civil unions, many of the faithful express themselves in favour of a respectful and non-judgmental attitude towards these people and a ministry which seeks to accept them. This does not mean, however, that the faithful give equal status to heterosexual marriage and civil unions between persons of the same sex. Some responses and observations voice a concern that the Church's acceptance of people in such unions could be construed as recognition of their union.

Some Pastoral Guidelines

116. When considering the possibility of a ministry to these people, a distinction must be made between those who have made a personal, and often painful, choice and live that choice discreetly so as not to give scandal to others, and those whose behaviour promotes and actively — often

aggressively — calls attention to it. Many conferences emphasize that, due to the fact that these unions are a relatively recent phenomenon, no pastoral programs exist in their regard. Others admit a certain unease at the challenge of accepting these people with a merciful spirit and, at the same time, holding to the moral teaching of the Church, all the while attempting to provide appropriate pastoral care which takes every aspect of the person into consideration. Some responses recommend not using phrases such as “gay,” “lesbian” or “homosexual” to define a person’s identity.

117. Many responses and observations call for theological study in dialogue with the human sciences to develop a multi-faceted look at the phenomenon of homosexuality. Others recommend collaborating with specific entities, e.g., the Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences and the Pontifical Academy for Life, in thoroughly examining the anthropological and theological aspects of human sexuality and the sexual difference between man and woman in order to address the issue of *gender* ideology.

118. The great challenge will be to develop a ministry which can maintain the proper balance between accepting persons in a spirit of compassion and gradually guiding them to authentic human and Christian maturity. In this regard, some conferences refer to certain organizations as successful models for such a ministry.

119. Sex education in families and educational institutions is an increasingly urgent challenge, especially in countries where the State tends to propose in schools a one-sided view and a *gender* ideology. Formation programmes ought to be established in schools or parish communities which offer young people an adequate idea of Christian and emotional maturity to allow them to face even the phenomenon of homosexuality. At the same time, the observations show that there is still no consensus in the Church on the specific way of receiving persons in these unions. The first step would be a slow process of gathering information and distinguishing criteria of discernment for not only ministers and pastoral workers but also groups and ecclesial movements.

The Transmission of the Faith to Children in Same Sex Unions

120. The responses are clearly opposed to legislation which would allow the adoption of children by persons in a same-sex union, because they see a risk to the integral good of the child, who has the right to have a mother and father, as pointed out recently by Pope Francis (cf. [*Address to Members of the International Catholic Child Bureau \(BICE\)*](#), 11 April 2014). However, when people living in such unions request a child’s baptism, almost all the responses emphasize that the child must be received with the same care, tenderness and concern which is given to other children. Many responses indicate that it would be helpful to receive more concrete pastoral directives in these situations. Clearly, the Church has the duty to ascertain the actual elements involved in transmitting the faith to the child. Should a reasonable doubt exist in the capability of persons in a same sex union to instruct the child in the Christian faith, proper support is to be secured in the same manner as for any other couple seeking the baptism of their children. In this regard, other people in their family and social surroundings could also provide assistance. In these cases, the pastor is carefully to oversee the preparation for the possible baptism of the child, with particular attention given to the choice of the godfather and godmother.

Part III

An Openness to Life and Parental Responsibility in Upbringing

Chapter I

The Pastoral Challenges Concerning an Openness to Life

121. In recent decades, basic objections have arisen regarding the subject of a couple's openness to life, which concerns the innermost qualities and aspects of life. In this regard, substantial differences exist between the Christian idea of life and sexuality and that of a highly secularized society. Pope Paul VI, in publishing the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, was well aware of the difficulties his statements could cause over time. He wrote, for example, in the document: "It is to be anticipated that perhaps not everyone will easily accept this particular teaching. An intensive, clamorous outcry is being raised against the voice of the Church which is made more intense by the today's means of communication. But it comes as no surprise to the Church that she, no less than her divine Founder, is destined to be a 'sign of contradiction' (Lk 2:34). She does not, because of this, evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical" (*HV*, 18).

122. The Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* certainly had a prophetic character in reiterating the unbreakable link between conjugal love and the transmission of life. The Church is called to proclaim the fruitfulness of love in light of that faith which "helps us grasp in all its depth and richness the begetting of children, as a sign of the love of the Creator who entrusts us with the mystery of a new person" (*LE*, 52). Many of the difficulties highlighted in the responses and observations reveal the agonizing situation of people today when faced with the subjects of love, the generation of life, the reciprocity between man and woman and fatherhood and motherhood.

Knowledge and Acceptance of the Magisterium concerning an Openness to Life

123. When treating a couple's openness to life and their knowledge of the Church's teaching, with particular reference to *Humanae Vitae*, the responses clearly admit that, in the vast majority of cases, the positive aspects are unknown. Those who claim to know the Church's teaching belong, for the most part, to associations and Church groups actively involved in parishes or programmes of spirituality for the family. A vast majority of responses emphasize how the moral evaluation of the different methods of birth control is commonly perceived today as an intrusion in the intimate life of the couple and an encroachment on the autonomy of conscience. Clearly, believers hold different positions and have diverse attitudes on this subject, depending on the different parts of the world where they live and their local surroundings, including those who find themselves immersed in highly secularized and technically advanced cultures and those who live a simpler life in rural areas. Many responses recommend that for many Catholics the concept of "responsible parenthood" encompasses the shared responsibility in conscience to choose the most appropriate method of birth control, according to a set of criteria ranging from effectiveness to physical tolerance and passing to a real ability to be practiced.

124. Reference is made above all in the observations to the struggle to understand the distinction among the natural methods of regulating fertility and contraception. Much of the time, the difference is generally translated by the media in terms of "natural" and "unnatural" contraceptive methods. Consequently, it is understandable why people mistakenly think that such a distinction is a pretext and why the "natural" methods of birth control are considered simply ineffective and impractical. Natural methods for fertility regulation are not natural "techniques" applied to solve a problem. Instead, they show a respect for "human ecology" and the dignity of the sexual relationship between husband and wife. They are part of a vision of conjugal life which is open to life. On this rests the difference in contraceptive methods and the experience which shows the effectiveness of their use.

125. The responses and observations reveal a deep understanding of the difference between "abortive" and "non-abortive" contraceptive methods, which is often used as a criterion in judging the

moral integrity of the different methods. Moreover, some responses and above all different observations point out the difficulties associated with the prevention of HIV / AIDS, which is a grave problem in some parts of the world, where the disease is widespread. In this regard, many feel the Church's position needs to be explained better, especially considering certain distortions in the media. Compliance with an outlook which takes the person and relationships into consideration seems to require that the question should not be limited exclusively to the technical aspects, but rather provide assistance in the dramatic situations which characterize the lives of a countless number of people. In this way, the Church becomes a promoter of a way of living which is truly human, in the often arduous, real-life situations of a couple who deserve proper care and genuine respect.

Some Causes of Difficulty in Acceptance

126. All responses tend to emphasize that the difficulty in accepting the Church's teaching on the fruitful love between a man and a woman is related to the large gap between the Church's teaching and civil education, especially in places in the world where secularization is very strong. The responses from episcopal conferences mainly place the emphasis on a basic difference in anthropology. The responses indicate great difficulties in the inability to express adequately the relationship between Christian anthropology and the meaning of the natural regulation of fertility. Reducing the problem to a case study is not helpful in promoting a broad understanding of Christian anthropology. Oftentimes, the Church's teaching is summarily dismissed as backward by the prevailing mentality, without taking into account its reasoning and conception of the human being and human life.

127. Some responses see a relation between the commonly-held contraception mentality and a pervasive *gender* ideology which tends to change some basic aspects of anthropology, including the meaning of the body and the difference between the sexes which is replaced with the idea of gender orientation to the point of subverting sexual identity. In this regard, many responses see a need to go beyond simply condemning this ever-pervasive ideology and to respond with persuasive argumentation against this position, now widely spreading in many western societies. In this way, the Church's position on the subject of fatherhood and motherhood will be a strong voice in the anthropological change which some very influential persons are promoting. The response, therefore, cannot be only on the issue of contraception or natural methods, but should be placed at the level of the decisive human experience of love, discovering the intrinsic value of the difference that marks human life and its fruitfulness.

Pastoral Recommendations

128. From the pastoral point of view, the responses, in very many cases, see the need to make better known what was stated in *Humanae Vitae* and to propose a coherent anthropological vision in revitalized language, not only in pre-marriage preparation but also in instructional courses on love in general. Some responses suggest that the presentation of the methods of the natural regulation of fertility be done in collaboration with well-qualified people from both the field of medicine and the parish. For this purpose, the responses insist on collaboration with academic institutions engaged in study and research on these methods and in the promotion of a more ecologically-minded approach to human living. Similarly, the responses suggest including the subject in the seminary formation of future priests, given that priests are sometimes unprepared to deal with these issues and sometimes provide inexact and misleading information.

Concerning Sacramental Practice

129. Sacramental practice, in particular the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and participation in the Holy Eucharist are included in the pastoral treatment of the subject of openness to life. In this regard, almost all the responses mention that, in areas strongly influenced by secularization, couples generally do not consider the use of contraceptive methods to be a sin. As a result, they tend not to consider it a matter for confession or a problem in approaching the Eucharist. On the other hand, the responses stress that the faithful are well aware that abortion is a very serious sin and always a matter for confession. Some responses mention that nowadays a Christian couple's "examination of conscience" concentrates more on their relationship (infidelity, lack of love) and less on the aspects of openness to life, thereby confirming the often-seen weakness in understanding the relation between the gift of oneself to another in faithfulness and the procreation of life. The responses also demonstrate the diversity in pastoral practice among the clergy in reference to this subject, including those who show understanding and support and others who are either very rigid or entirely permissive. The situation indicates the necessity to reconsider these aspects of pastoral care in the formation of clerics.

Promoting a Mentality of an Openness to Life

130. In some parts of the world, a contraceptive mentality and the diffusion of an individualistic anthropological model are causing a sharp decline in population whose social and human consequences are not being adequately taken into account. Policies leading to a decline in the birth rate are having an effect on the quality of marital relationships and relationships between generations. Therefore, in her pastoral programmes, the Church needs to reflect on how to encourage a mentality which is more open to life.

131. Many responses and observations point to the connection between an openness to life and social issues and work. Encouraging married couples to have children intrinsically depends on circumstances which allows them, with a sense of freedom, responsibility and serenity, to choose to procreate and bring up children. In this regard, childcare, flexible working hours, parental leave and an easiness at integrating raising a family into a work situation appear to be essential. Christians, therefore, share a responsibility in promoting legislation and structures which foster a positive approach towards birth. From a purely pastoral point of view, the responses highlight the usefulness of providing family counselors in dioceses and associations dedicated to caring for the family, who can thereby bear witness to the beauty and the value of a couple's openness to life. The responses recommend that the synod can be of assistance in rediscovering the deep anthropological meaning of the moral character of conjugal life, which beyond every type of moralism, appears as a true desire to live the beauty demanded by the Christian love between a man and a woman and given value by considering the greatest act of love which comes from laying down one's life for a friend (cf. *Jn* 15:13). Many responses recommend rediscovering the meaning of conjugal chastity as part of the authentic character of a love-experience.

Chapter II

The Church and the Family facing the Challenge of Upbringing

a) The Challenge of Upbringing in General

The Challenge of Upbringing and the Family Today

132. The challenges a family faces in upbringing children are manifold, often making parents feel unprepared for the task. Recent Church Magisterium has stressed the importance of raising children and the special grace given to parents in their marriage to assist them in accomplishing this responsibility. The responses and observations emphasize that the upbringing of children must be

totally integrated, prompting the great question of truth which can serve as a guide in the journey of life (cf. Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Plenary Meeting of the Congregation for Catholic Education [for Seminaries and Educational Institutions]*, 21 January 2008), and insist that education finds its origin in love from the very instant a child is welcomed by his parents (cf. Benedict XVI, *Presentation to the Diocese of Rome of the "Letter on the Urgent Task of Education"*, 23 February 2008). The upbringing of children, consisting in a total and complete introduction to all aspects of life, particularly living in society, is the primary responsibility of parents, which the State must respect, protect and promote (*GE*, 3; *FC*, 37). Pope Francis stressed the importance of the transmission of the faith: "Parents are called, as Saint Augustine once said, not only to bring children into the world but also to bring them to God, so that through baptism they can be reborn as children of God and receive the gift of faith" (*LF*, 43).

The Transmission of the Faith and Christian Initiation

133. In her pastoral activity, the Church is called to assist families in the upbringing of children, beginning with Christian initiation. Catechesis and formation in the parish are an indispensable means of assisting the family in educating, particularly during preparation for Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. Alongside the family and the parish, the responses emphasize the effectiveness of the testimony rendered by spiritual movements on behalf of the family and lay groups. Within these ecclesial entities, a "ministry of the couple" increasingly seems to be developing, where those responsible for formation in families contribute to the growth of the domestic Church through personal encounters and meetings of families and, above all, through prayer.

134. Christian education in the family is first achieved when children see their parents witness to the faith. Some of the responses point out that the method of transmitting the faith does not change with time but is dictated by circumstances, namely, the actions in a couple's sanctification; personal prayer and times for prayer in families; listening to the Word of God; and the witness of charity. Following this way of life ensures the transmission of the faith, even if children are subjected to forces to the contrary.

Some Specific Difficulties

135. In many countries, the challenge of a Christian upbringing and the transmission of faith is often characterized by a significant change in relations between generations, which affects the communication of values within the family. In the past, these relations were the basis of a life of faith which was shared and communicated as a heritage from one generation to the other. Every bishops' conference response and many observations reveal profound changes affecting the educational task of the family, despite the obvious differentiation of traditional elements still present in society, where the family lives or developments, and the effects of secularization. Bishops in western Europe recall the powerful generational conflict which seemed to have taken place in the sixties and seventies of the last century. Today, perhaps conditioned by those experiences, parents appear overly cautious in applying any pressure on their children in religious practice. Precisely in this regard, they seek to avoid any type of conflict instead of dealing with it. In addition, when the subject of religion is raised, these same parents often feel insecure and, instead of passing on the faith, they often remain silent and relegate their task, even if considered important, to religious institutions. This seems to demonstrate a weakness among adults, especially young parents, in transmitting the gift of faith with a spirit of joy and conviction.

136. The responses point out how Catholic schools, at all levels, can play an important part in transmitting the faith to young people and be of great assistance to parents in fulfilling their role in

upbringing their children. The responses, therefore, recommend that Catholic schools be fostered and supported by the entire ecclesial community. Such is the case especially where the State is overly intrusive in the educational process, seeking to usurp the family's responsibility. In this regard, Catholic schools express the idea of freedom in education and reassert the primacy of the family as the true subject in the educational process, to which others involved in education must contribute. The task of education requires a greater collaboration among families, schools and Christian communities.

137. Bishops from the Middle East mention that the task of the family in the transmission of the faith and Catholic upbringing is even more important in places where Christians are a minority. Responses from the countries of eastern Europe recount a painful experience. Older generations, having lived under a socialist regime, received the basics of the Christian faith before the advent of socialism, while the younger generation has been raised in a post-Communist climate highly influenced by secularization, which has had a negative effect on the transmission of the faith. Even though this is true, younger generations are especially affected by the example and witness of their parents. In general, families participating in ecclesial movements are the most active in seeking to transmit the faith to newer generations. Some responses indicate a certain paradox in faith-education, namely, in various ecclesial entities parents are not the ones who transmit the faith to their children, but vice versa, children, embracing the faith, communicate the faith to their parents, who have long abandoned religious practice.

b) Christian Education in Difficult Family Situations

138. Recognizing that the transmission of the faith and Christian upbringing are inseparable from an authentic witness of life, provides a basis for understanding how difficult situations within the family complicate the educational process. In this sense, those families with children who may be particularly affected by the so-called "irregular" situation of their parents deserve greater pastoral attention in Christian education. In this regard, words and expressions need to be used which create a sense of belonging and not exclusion, ones that can better convey the warmth, love and the support of the Church, so as not to generate, especially in the children and young people involved, the idea of rejection or discrimination against their parents, fully aware that "irregular" is a word applied to situations, not persons.

An Overview of the Situation of Upbringing

139. An overview of the present situation is quite complex and changeable. In some regions where the Catholic faith continues to be professed by a high percentage of people, the number of children born and raised in "regular" families is in sharp decline. In other regions the particular Churches must face different challenges of upbringing, because cohabitation outside of marriage, homosexuality or civil unions are not permitted. The Church, nevertheless, must attend, in varying degrees, to these difficult or irregular situations now almost everywhere. This phenomenon is on the rise, even in places having a significant number of "regular" situations of families with two parents who were married in Church.

140. The responses refer to three elements on the subject of irregular situations and their impact on the upbringing of children. Firstly, unions between persons of the same sex, clearly limited for the moment to more "liberal and progressive" countries, does not require specific action in pastoral care, other than some pastoral guidelines already mentioned at the end of Part II. Secondly, consideration needs to be given to the actual existence and growth of single parent households, often comprised of single mothers with small children, who live in poverty. This phenomenon poses a pastoral challenge, particularly for the Churches of Latin America and Asia where, not infrequently, these mothers are

forced to entrust the upbringing of their children to other members of their family. Thirdly, of great importance in the southern hemisphere is the phenomenon of “street children,” who are left by troubled parents to fend for themselves, and children, orphaned by the violent death of their parents, who are sometimes entrusted to their grandparents.

Requests Addressed to the Church

141. Generally speaking, the responses mention that parents in irregular situations come to the Church with a variety of attitudes, depending on their feelings and motivations. Some approach the Church with a great deal of respect and trust, while others, instead, display a negative attitude, because of the shame felt by the choices they made, and hesitate to approach the Church for fear of being rejected or marginalized. Others believe that the ecclesial community will understand and accept them graciously, despite their failures and difficulties, while others, instead, see the Church as an institution overly intrusive in people’s lives. Still others are convinced that the Church is a kind of guardian who must guarantee education and support but not make too many demands.

142. Parents in these irregular situations in life most commonly have recourse to the particular Churches to request the administration of the sacraments to their children, especially Baptism and First Communion, with a clear difficulty, however, of not giving due importance and genuine value to religious education and participation in parish life. Many know that catechesis is a prerequisite for receiving the sacraments; but even more, they feel that the occasion is an obligation, a formality or a compromise to be accepted, if the child is to receive what is requested. The responses point out that parents frequently display a reluctance and disinterest in preparation programmes proposed by the Christian community, often resulting in their avoiding, if they can, participating in the events planned for both them and their children. They use time and work as an excuse, when, in reality, it is a matter of a lack of caring and coming up with an easier or faster solution. Sometimes, they even react negatively to the requests of the catechists. In other cases, their indifference is clearly evident in their continued passivity to any initiative and their lack of involvement in the religious education of their child.

143. An analysis of this information indicates that many of these parents, and likewise a good portion of Catholic parents in “regular” marriage situations, ask the Sacraments of Initiation for their children out of habit and simply to follow social custom. For many, the sacrament is a festive occasion which they request more out of conformity to family traditions than out of conviction. Nevertheless, other parents exist who sincerely desire to transmit the faith to their children, and, for this purpose, rely on the formation programmes which the parish offers in preparation for the administration of the sacraments. Sometimes, they themselves request assistance in remedying delicate situations. They also show a willingness to embark on a genuine spiritual journey and wish to participate actively in the life of the Church through their involvement in the child’s catechetical and sacramental programmes. In rare cases, parents genuinely rediscover their faith, sometimes even arriving at the point of requesting marriage after years of living together.

144. The responses also mentioned other requests which parents in irregular situations make of the Church. In certain cultures, parents might ask for the sacraments for their children because of superstition or to avoid their remaining unbaptized and without a religion. In other circumstances, they have recourse to their local priests simply to receive financial and educational support. Generally speaking, the number of requests for Confirmation for children is decreasing, especially in highly secularized countries. People increasingly have the idea of allowing their child the freedom and responsibility to decide when to begin a programme of initiation into the Christian life. Difficulties arise when divorced parents are in disagreement on the Christian initiation of their child. In these cases, the

Church is called to play an important mediating role through understanding and dialogue.

145. On the question of the teaching of the Catholic religion, the responses and observations distinguish two situations. On the one hand, a request can be made to take advantage of the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools, beyond the catechesis supplied in a parish. In general, many parents, even those in irregular situations, choose this option. Particularly in Europe, many of these requests come from persons who are non-Catholic or non-baptized. Over the past few years, in some parts of Europe, the number of those who endorse teaching the Catholic religion in public schools has increased. On the other hand, some basic scholastic programmes (e.g. in Australia), offer the possibility of a good education in the faith and religious instruction. In these cases, many parents in irregular situations, at the baptism of their child, easily make use of the opportunity to attend the Christian formation programmes offered by these same schools in preparation for the reception of the sacraments without having to take part in the catechetical programme in the parish. Still another reality on all continents is the existence and activity of Catholic schools and Catholic colleges, in which the children of parents in irregular situations can enroll without any distinction being made. In fact, these parents appear willingly to have recourse to them, mainly because they know that they will receive support and collaboration in their work of educating their children. In Africa, Catholic schools are important places for the Christian education of children. The question of teaching the Catholic religion in a programme of faith-education is barely treated in the responses. Attempts for a greater collaboration among parish catechesis, scholastic activity and religious instruction seem to deserve attention and encouragement, especially where the teaching of the Catholic religion is only treated academically.

The Response of the Particular Churches

146. The particular Churches are called upon to assist families, and with them, persons in irregular situations. When parents, usually after an absence from the Church for some time, request from the ecclesial community the sacramental preparation of their children, the most recommended approach in all the responses is to readily accept them without making any distinctions. Receiving them with a basic attitude of respect, a friendly disposition and a willingness to listen to their human and spiritual needs creates a proper and beneficial atmosphere for communicating the Gospel message. The important and effective ecclesial experiences aimed at assisting parents along the way include: catechesis in the family and community; the ecclesial movements in support of the pastoral care of married couples; Sunday Masses; family visits; prayer groups; popular missions; the activities of basic Christian communities; groups of bible study; the pastoral activities of ecclesial movements; and Christian education offered to the parents of children and teens who attend numerous colleges and centers of Catholic education, especially in Latin America. Many times the children are the ones who evangelize their parents.

147. Despite what has been said, quite a few responses indicate that the Church's pastoral care does not always adequately address the specific problems existent in family life. To meet this need, pastoral action requires renewed efforts, creativity and joy to be more effective and proactive in creating an intrinsic relationship among the formation of children, the faith-formation of parents and community life. In response, new initiatives are being enacted, including opportunities for formation in prayer and retreats, intended for parents and often taking place simultaneously with their children's catechesis in preparation for the sacraments; "schools for parents"; catechetical programs on sexual morality and moral issues related to the family; and providing the opportunity for many couples to be married during the same ceremony (*mass marriage*) to resolve financial difficulties, which, at times, delay and discourage a couple's seeking marriage, as cited by the bishops of Nigeria and South Africa. Some

argue, however, that these initiatives are not fully developed.

148. Responses to the questions indicate that if, on the one hand, support for parents depends on their willingness to become involved and be guided, their pastoral care arises mainly from a sense of responsibility and concern by the local priest and his ability to engage as much as possible the entire parish community. In parishes in Germany, for example, a group of catechists oversees children as well as parents throughout the catechetical process. Implementing a customized approach to pastoral care seems more difficult in big cities. In each case, the challenge is finding possible ways of attentively approaching these sisters and brothers in order to follow them, listen to them, help them express the questions which are a concern to them and propose an itinerary leading to a reawakening of a desire to deepen their relationship with the Lord Jesus through genuine communal ties. This would motivate already-existing initiatives, such as the one promoted by some episcopal conferences in South America which supplies and offers formation-aid to assist parents in the education of their children.

149. Particular Churches are well aware that children or young people are not to blame for the choices and living situation of their parents. Consequently, children are welcome everywhere, without distinction with respect to others and with the same love and attention. The Christian formation offered to them is no different from the initiatives in catechesis and pastoral activities intended for the other children in the community, namely: catechesis; schools of prayer; introduction to the liturgy; associations, especially the Missionary Childhood Association in Latin America; biblical acting schools and church choirs; parochial schools and camps; and youth groups. Special programmes to assist children in healing their wounds and working through their problems appear lacking. Consequently, the responses hope for the promotion of programmes on their behalf and support groups, especially in the difficult period of the separation and divorce of their parents, when they must be able to continue to hope in family relationships, despite the fact that their parents separate. In a diocese in northern Europe, where the number of children of divorced parents is very high, some pastors, to deal with these family problems and the strain on the children who on weekends cannot always attend the catechesis classes, are scheduling catechesis on alternate weekends, so that children can always participate without feeling different.

150. In addition to parishes, associations and movements, valuable assistance is provided these parents and their children by the apostolic activity of religious institutes of women, above all in situations of extreme poverty, religious intolerance or the exploitation of women. The work of the Propagation of the Faith contributes to the education and Christian formation of children, including those with parents in irregular situations, through ordinary and extraordinary aid.

The Time and Manner of the Christian Initiation of Children

151. Preparation for the sacraments and sacramental practice is determined by canonical norms, episcopal conferences and diocesan directives. No alternate process of preparation is envisioned for children in families with irregular situations. Consequently, in principle, the traditional course of action is to prepare for the Sacrament of Baptism through meetings with parents. This is followed by an orderly and progressive catechesis, according to age, for the preparation, in about three or four years, for the other sacraments of Christian initiation, always if the parents request that their children receive them. In some dioceses, Confirmation is followed by a formation which includes various pastoral experiences, such as, a solemn profession of faith and specific initiatives for youth groups. Generally speaking, after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, young people frequent the Church only occasionally, possibly because of an inadequate catechesis, or abandon sacramental practice entirely for lack of personal motivation. Such a situation shows an insufficiently grounded faith and a

want for a personalized approach in catechesis. The differences between the various particular Churches and Eastern Catholic Churches in this matter may be related to the order in which the sacraments are administered, the age at which they can be received or the organization of catechetical programmes, as well as pastoral decisions which ought to encourage and open new approaches in pastoral accompaniment.

152. Some see a duty to celebrate the sacraments without previously establishing a set age but, instead, take into account the spiritual maturity of the recipient, despite the fact that this frequently creates difficulty between the parents. In other cases, children of families with irregular situations receive Baptism after three or four years of catechesis, at an age when their peers are admitted to First Communion, as mentioned by some episcopal conferences in Africa. When parents request the baptism of their children, but are in a situation of cohabitation, some churches, before administering the sacrament, choose to provide personal guidance to parents through instructional meetings which will eventually lead to their approaching the sacraments and, ultimately, the celebration of their marriage. In a few years, the children are then baptized. This is the practice in some African and Arab countries. In other countries, a pastoral practice of being overly rigid regarding the moral integrity of parents can carry the risk of unjustly denying the sacraments to their children and making an unjust distinction between different morally unacceptable situations (for example, punishing the children for the invalidity of the marriage of the parents, but not consider the situation of those who live a life of crime and exploitation). Only a few responses refer to the catechumenate for children.

Some Specific Difficulties

153. The difficulties associated with sacramental practice draw attention to sensitive issues and problems in pastoral activity in some particular Churches. For example, concerning the Sacrament of Baptism, some complain about an attitude of tolerance with which, at times, the sacrament is administered to children whose parents are in irregular situations, without any formative preparation. On the same subject, sometimes the programme for Christian Initiation is outrightly denied, because one of the parents is in an irregular situation. Some responses make reference to the deep uneasiness of parents at their not being able to approach the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist, while their children are invited to participate in the sacraments. This uneasiness more or less depends on a parent's outlook in not being able to receive Holy Communion, which is not to be viewed in negative terms only, but as an initial step in a possible process of healing.

Some Pastoral Guidelines

154. The responses mention that pastoral activity needs to express more of a sensitivity based on a respect for persons living in these irregular situations and capable of offering effective support to them in the upbringing of their children. The pastoral guidance of parents living in these situations should be ongoing and more attentive to their needs. The high number of those who return to the faith at the moment of their children's preparation for the sacraments calls for action on the local level in seeking appropriate ways to allow them to rediscover and strengthen their faith. This would also require adequate training and pastoral action. Of particularly importance is a renewed understanding of the value and role of the godfather or godmother in the journey of faith in the lives of children and young people. The suggestions on this subject range from reconsidering the criteria in choosing a godfather or godmother, which becomes more difficult because of the growing number of people in irregular situations, to making catechesis for parents, godfathers and godmothers more incisive and motivating, considering the high percentage of those who are unaware of the meaning of the sacrament. Specific pastoral attention and care ought to be given to persons in mixed marriages and marriages of mixed religion, who often face major difficulties in the religious education of their children.

155. Some episcopal conferences wonder whether it is possible, in every Christian community, to enlist married couples to act as suitable godmothers and godfathers for parents in irregular situations so as to guide and support the growth of these persons in an authentic manner. In places where catechists have an important and delicate role, some recommend forming them with renewed dedication and choosing them with greater discernment, since, at times, catechists in irregular marriages can cause division and difficulties. Some responses call for the Church to give greater consideration to the quality of the programme of formation for catechists and better to form catechists so they can give credible witness with their lives. Others point to the great need to evangelize people while preparing them for the sacraments and working harder to initiate people into the faith and life of the Church. This requires guaranteeing proper pastoral care for parents, starting from the baptism of their child to their child's First Communion. Some responses proposed organizing, at the deanery or vicariate levels, meetings for persons with family problems, who have the added task of educating their children in the faith.

156. Catholic schools have a great responsibility with regards to children and young people of couples in irregular situations, who, today, are present in large numbers. Consequently, the academic community needs increasingly to serve as a family by creating a welcoming environment and showing the face of God. Some responses voice the desire that parishes and Catholic schools effectively collaborate in the programme of preparation for the sacraments to reinforce a sense of belonging to the community. Others look to the possibility of encouraging, everywhere in the Church, instructional and formation programmes for children, teenagers and young people on the subjects of loving relationships, emotional maturity and sexuality. Proposing new models of holiness in married life could promote personal development within the family and the intertwining relationships of protection, education and love.

157. Those in difficult situations, e.g. refugees or migrants, also require the Churches attention, above all in psychological and material support and assistance in education, in the prevention of abuse or in safeguarding minors from exploitation. In the case of "itinerant peoples," who generally ask for the Sacrament of Baptism for their children, the particular Churches ought to become more involved in spiritually accompanying the family, so that it can complete every stage and aspect of Christian initiation.

Conclusion

158. The extensive material submitted to the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops is presented in this *Instrumentum Laboris* to promote the dialogue and development which is expected to take place during the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Clearly, the richness of what is contained in the responses and observations goes beyond what has been reported in these pages, which are intended to provide an initial reference point in synod discussion. To come to some idea of how to respond to the new demands in the People of God, the following three main areas are under discussion in the Church: how the Gospel of the Family can be preached in the present-day; how the Church's pastoral care programme for the family might better respond to the new challenges today; how to assist parents in developing a mentality of openness to life and in upbringing their children.

159. After examining the responses and observations and gathering from them not only the hopes and joys but also the griefs and anxieties, this work concludes by returning to the sources of faith, hope and charity, namely, the Blessed Trinity which is the mystery of absolute love, revealed in Christ and made accessible by the Holy Spirit. The love of God shines in a particular way in the Holy Family of

Nazareth, the sure point of reference and comfort for every family. The Holy Family, the beacon of true love, is to be contemplated in every family situation so as to draw light, strength and consolation. Therefore, the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is prayerfully entrusted to the Holy Family of Nazareth in the words of Pope Francis:

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendour of true love,
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic Churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again
experience violence, rejection and division:
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may the approaching Synod of Bishops
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer!

Amen.

© Copyright 2014

© The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.

This text can be reproduced by bishops' conferences, or at their authorization, provided that the contents are not altered in any way and two copies of the same are sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 00120 Vatican City State.

