

## Background information on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation "Amoris Laetitia" ("The Joy of Love")

- Pope Francis' post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the family will be released on Friday, April 8, at a news conference starting at 11:30 a.m. in Rome (5:30 a.m. EDT).
- It will be available on the Vatican website, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va), starting at noon Rome time (6:00 a.m. EDT). Dated March 19, the text will be made available in Italian, French, English, German, Spanish and Portuguese.
- The Apostolic Exhortation is titled **Amoris Laetitia** (Latin for "The Joy of Love"), on the love of the family.
- An **Apostolic Exhortation** is a type of communication from the Pope. It encourages Catholics to undertake a particular activity, **but does not define Church doctrine**. It is considered lower in formal authority than a Papal Encyclical, but higher than other ecclesiastical letters, Apostolic Letters and other types of papal writings.
- Pope Francis has issued one other Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Latin for "The Joy of the Gospel") in November, 2013.
- Apostolic exhortations are most often issued in response to an assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in which case they are known as **post-synodal Apostolic Exhortations**. *Amoris Laetitia* is issued following the Synods on the Family held in 2014 and 2015, formally known as the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops and the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.
- While Bishop Libasci himself did not attend, the Diocese of Manchester participated in the synods held in 2014 and 2015 by responding to questionnaires from Vatican officials. Those responses, along with those from other dioceses throughout the world, were incorporated into the discussion documents used at each synod.

## Questions and Answers

- What does Pope Francis expect will happen because of this Apostolic Exhortation?
  - *Amoris Laetitia* is not merely a theoretical text with no connection to people's very real problems. Pope Francis intends that Catholics will reflect on the document and that it will help them better understand the Church's teaching regarding families. While it is essential reading for bishops, priests, and anyone involved in ministry to families, it is not intended to be for "experts only". **Pope Francis hopes that all Catholics will see the effort that the Church is making to be close to them, regardless of what their situation might be or how far from the Church they may feel.**
- Does this exhortation change Church teaching?
  - **No, an Apostolic Exhortation is not intended to change Church doctrine.** Instead, after listening to Catholics from around the world and holding two synods, Pope Francis is taking the concerns and questions that he heard and explaining Church teaching to address those concerns and questions.
- Much of the controversy around the 2014 and 2015 synods was about Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried receiving Holy Communion. Does *Amoris Laetitia* pronounce definitively on this issue?

- No, it does not. It became clear during the two synods that arguments which result in winners and losers were not productive. What was productive was a deep, respectful and compassionate examination of family life, marriage, and the People of God as they strive to live out their vocation in troubled and complex times. **Chapter Eight, “Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness,” offers a profound look at how general rules do not apply straightforwardly to every particular situation, and how there is need to take the complexity of each situation into account.** The Pope acknowledges that everyone should feel challenged by Chapter Eight. It certainly calls pastors and those working in family apostolates to listen sensitively to anyone who feels wounded, and to help them experience God’s unconditional love.
- There are many Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried, struggling to try to do the right thing and bring up their children in the Church. What does *Amoris Laetitia* offer them?
  - ***Amoris Laetitia* offers them the guarantee that the Church and her ministers care about them and their situation.** Pope Francis wants them to feel and to know that they are part of the Church. They are not excommunicated (see AL 243). Even if they cannot yet fully participate in the Church’s sacramental life, they are encouraged to take active part in the life of the community. A key concept of *Amoris Laetitia* is integration. Pastors need to do everything possible to help people in these situations to be included in the life of the community. Anyone in a so-called “irregular” situation should get special attention. “Helping heal the wounds of parents and supporting them spiritually is also beneficial for children, who need the familiar face of the Church to see them through this traumatic experience” (see AL 246).
- For a synod that at one point seemed to offer broad new acceptance for gays in the Church, *Amoris Laetitia* seems to present precious little. What happened?
  - **Church teaching remains clear: marriage is between a man and a woman, and homosexual unions cannot be placed on the same level as Christian marriage (AL 250).** That said, it is important that we all learn to imitate God’s unconditional love, for everyone. “The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception” (AL 250). While its focus is on marriage and family, AL also speaks to countless people who aren’t married. These include single parents, widows and widowers, celibate men and women – all of whom have family links. Everyone is a son or daughter; everyone has a family history; everyone has bonds of love with family members; and everyone has friends in difficult and painful situations.
- What’s the greatest challenge of *Amoris Laetitia*?
  - *Amoris Laetitia* lays out proposals for the Church and her pastors to change its focus regarding the family: to accompany, to integrate, to remain close to anyone who has suffered the effects of wounded love. **Above all, it challenges us to be understanding in the face of complex and painful situations.** Pope Francis would have us approach the weak with compassion, and not judgement, to “enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of tenderness” (AL 308).