



WALKING WITH FAMILIES



POPE FRANCIS AND THE ART OF ACCOMPANIMENT

LIFE, MARRIAGE & FAMILY SUNDAY



CONTENTS

3

Introduction

4

Mission of the family

6

Walking with others: accompaniment

8

Reclaiming the domestic church

10

The domestic church in action: prayer and hospitality

13

Practical advice

18

Resources and contacts

As part of this booklet, we have produced a DVD series featuring an interview with Archbishop Mark Coleridge, a single woman, a widower and three couples. Each share their perspective of how accompaniment has taken shape in their life. Watch at: www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily



INTRODUCTION

We all come from a family. Whether we are married, single, widowed, divorced, consecrated or in the priestly ministry, we all have a role to play in strengthening and encouraging families and understanding the depth of its mission for the Church and for society.

In March 2016, Pope Francis released his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the *Joy of Love*. It followed a call from Pope Francis for bishops to reflect deeply on issues pertaining to marriage and the family with lay people in their dioceses.

This consultation process, along with two Synods of the Family (in 2014 and 2015), allowed Pope Francis and the Church to examine marriage and the situation of families in today's world and has raised a renewed awareness of the importance of marriage and the family.¹

The Holy Father presents this Exhortation as an aid to reflection, dialogue and pastoral practice, and a help and encouragement to families in their daily commitments and challenges.² The Exhortation invites us to value the gifts of marriage and the family and to be a sign of God's love from both within, and through the family.

Given the length and breadth of subject matter in the Exhortation, the Pope has suggested it be read slowly, with reflection given to the aspects most relevant to each person's circumstances.³ In light of that, this resource and its accompanying videos are designed to draw out just one of Pope Francis' central ideas—that of *accompaniment*.



*It is my hope that, in reading this text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for “families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity”.*⁴



MISSION OF THE FAMILY

The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected.⁵

The family is the basic cell of society. It is the natural human ecosystem in which we first learn how to receive and give love. It is from within the family that love is communicated and experienced—between husband and wife, parents and children, siblings, extended family, friends and the wider community.

The gift of the family also awakens us to who God is—Love. As Saint John Paul II stated, ‘Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love’.⁶

While Catholic institutions such as hospitals, schools and parishes, are prominent expressions of our faith and mission, it is from within the home—through the family—that the love, values and mission of the Church are first witnessed and experienced.



The family home is the place from which faith is nurtured and passed on. By their witness as well as their words, families can speak to others of Jesus. Family life can arouse a desire for God and reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Therefore Christian marriages and families enliven society by their witness in making God's love present.⁷

The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and the Church.⁸ The experience of love in families is an ongoing source of strength and inspiration.⁹ Families are called to open their hearts and the doors of their homes, to be a living sign of God's love and mercy, and to be a light in the darkness of the world.

No family is perfect; however, Pope Francis encourages us to always have an attitude of hope and gratitude. All of us, especially children, learn what love means by seeing the romance, self-sacrifice, joy, disappointment, fidelity and hardship of marriage and family life. God sees our heart.¹⁰ To him, a small step in the midst of great human limitations can be more pleasing than a life, which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties.¹¹

The strength of the family lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love.¹²



WALKING WITH OTHERS: ACCOMPANIMENT

*We are called to help sow seeds;
the rest is God's work.¹³*

Pope Francis has referred regularly to the concept of accompaniment. It means to walk with or alongside another. It is a call to be a friend and companion to another, an example and encouragement.

In living our faith personally and among others, we are called to listen to God, and also to others. Rather than judging or appearing to have all the answers, we are called to walk alongside others gently and faithfully. Pope Francis' actions eloquently demonstrate this in the many times he has gently embraced another, or attentively listened to the voices of those in need.

While explaining our faith and being 'prepared to give a defence for the hope we have'¹⁴ is important, we should be mindful that people listen to witnesses, and if they listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.¹⁵ We are called to invite and propose, rather than impose.¹⁶ It is by our faith and love, our



joy in being loved and forgiven by God, that we too become a channel of this love and mercy to those around us.

In speaking of accompaniment, Pope Francis also speaks of prioritising ‘time over space’. Changes that take place gradually over time, he believes, are more effective than trying to win arguments or change people in a single encounter.¹⁷ Love needs time to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one another and gaze into each other’s eyes, to appreciate one another. This is the key to building stronger relationships.¹⁸

This is true for the relationship not only between spouses, parents and children, but between any two people. We cannot control every moment or situation, particularly when it comes to a person’s relationship with God. It is more important to be a positive influence in a process of growth that takes place gradually, than to enforce a view. If we live what we profess, nurturing the love of God in our hearts, the natural and enduring relationships we have with family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues will become a fertile ground for evangelisation.

*In all families, the Good News needs to resound,
in good times and in bad,
as a source of light along the way.¹⁹*



RECLAIMING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

*Every home is a lamp stand.*²⁰

What happens within the homes of Christian families is indispensable to the mission and life of the Church and the wider community. Endorsing the Synod Fathers, Pope Francis emphasised, ‘Christian families are the principal agents of the family apostolate above all through their joy-filled witness’.²¹

Love begins at home, spreading from family to family, from house to house. Indeed, this is how the early Church began and grew—in the home. In the New Testament we see how the early Church centred on family homes. Christians met, prayed and served the community from within their homes. With no church buildings as we have today, Christianity flourished in a domestic setting.

In today’s world, more than ever the family is called to be a hub, or centre of outreach, love and faith, rather than relying exclusively on parishes or faith-related events outside the home. The home is a wonderful place for all to be welcomed into



the life and love of Jesus Christ—it is a place of encounter. A family’s home can become a domestic church by sharing a meal, or by simply lending a listening and loving ear.

Faith lived and nurtured from within the home is essential to the life of families and the Church. Reviving this sense of importance is critical to the healthy future of the Church. The home is a place to see and learn how to love, pray and serve. It is the place to grow in virtue and to learn the way of Christ and what it means in practice.

Social research clearly shows that those faiths that have established home-centred rituals of prayer, manage to have the highest proportions of their youth continue the practice of their faith into adulthood.²²

What parents do, even more than what they say, is still the strongest predictive factor of their children’s faith practice as adults. Similarly, grandparents have a particular role to play in demonstrating love and in actively passing on the faith to their grandchildren.²³ Many can testify that they owe their introduction into the Christian life to their grandparents. The words, affection or simply the presence of grandparents helps children to realise that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age old pilgrimage and that they should respect all that came before them.



As Pope Francis stated, ‘A family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline, whereas a family that remembers has a future’.²⁴ Families are called to reclaim this responsibility in realising the mission of the Gospel through the family home.



THE DOMESTIC CHURCH IN ACTION: PRAYER AND HOSPITALITY

GOD ACCOMPANYING US: PRAYER

Prayer can be understood as an exchange between friends, with a God who accompanies us and who is always by our side. And it starts by listening. By listening to Christ’s word and following his example, we can become faithful witnesses.

In the home, children need to see that prayer is important to their parents. Family prayer is a unique way of expressing and strengthening faith. Purposefully setting aside even a small amount of time together to say some simple words—whether it be offering thanks or praying for someone else—can do immense good for families.



Giving thanks at meals reminds all in the family of the blessings bestowed by God. Linked with this is the celebration of Sunday Mass as a family. It is as a family of families that the Christian community unites around the Eucharist—the sacrament of God’s love.

SOME HAVE ENTERTAINED ANGELS: HOSPITALITY

Being hospitable and reaching out to those in need of love, including family and neighbours who are isolated or not easy to get on with, is at the core of the mission of families. As highlighted by Pope Francis, ‘Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares’.²⁵

The family can generate life within itself, and also demonstrates openness to life when it cares for others. When a family reaches out, especially to the poor and neglected, it participates in the Church’s motherhood. Open and caring families find a place for those in need and build friendships and relationships with all of those around them. All are welcome. In their effort to live according to the Gospel, they are mindful of Jesus’ words: ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’.²⁶



THE HOME IS THE NEAREST HOSPITAL: MINISTRY

Early in his papacy, Pope Francis expressed the desire that the Church become like a field hospital—not waiting for the injured to come in, but going out to meet them.²⁷ In *Amoris Laetitia*, he describes the family as the nearest hospital.²⁸ It is a place of safety, nurture and care. The family home should be the place where we learn love, and be the place from which we go out into the world, in order to share God’s love and mercy.

It is also the place in which others who perhaps have trouble in their own family of origin—or who have no family—can come to find love, safety and care. In this way, families are called, ‘not to succumb to the temptation to be insular’, but to open their doors and to let their light shine.²⁹

And while there can be a temptation to wait until the family is “perfect”, seeing the messy reality of our family life can be a source of encouragement to others. When we retain hope and keep striving despite our imperfections, others may begin to believe that the ideals we strive for are worth pursuing. There is no ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems.³⁰

*The Christian ideal, especially in families,
is a love that never gives up.³¹*



PRACTICAL ADVICE

FOR EVERYONE

- ✦ Read *Amoris Laetitia* slowly. Savour it. It's a treasure.
- ✦ In every relationship, be generous with these words: please, thank you and I'm sorry.
- ✦ Share this booklet with anyone who might find it helpful.

FOR MARRIED COUPLES

- ✦ Develop a routine that gives a healthy sense of closeness and stability through shared daily rituals: a morning kiss, an evening blessing, waiting at the door to welcome each other home, taking trips together and sharing household chores, an evening prayer or reflection together.
- ✦ Pray for and with your spouse each day.
- ✦ Amidst the busyness of life, devote time each day to reconnecting and spending time together as a couple without interruption.



- ✦ Reach out to other couples in the parish or neighbourhood who may need support or encouragement. Your marriage will become a blessing, and in return will be blessed.
- ✦ Pope Francis particularly encourages older couples to offer support and encouragement to young and newly married couples.

FOR FAMILIES

- ✦ The home is a beautiful place to experience friendship, fraternity and the love of God. Be particularly attentive to those who may be alone or struggling. Invite them to be part of your family through meals, outings and celebrations.
- ✦ Celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, religious feasts and other special occasions. Perhaps create a specific celebration for your family. It's important that life in the family is celebrated joyfully.
- ✦ Eat meals together. It may be difficult, but try to share a family meal five times a week.
- ✦ Keep Sundays holy—set it aside not just for Mass and prayer but spend time together enjoying each other's company.
- ✦ Pray together as family each day, even if just for a short time. A family that prays together stays together.
- ✦ Be attentive to those who may be alone or struggling.



FOR ENGAGED COUPLES

- ✦ In preparing for marriage, take time to nourish the soul as well as the mind. Ensure that you are able to discern the deep reasons for your marriage thus ensuring a genuine and stable commitment. Discuss what each expects from the marriage, what you understand by love and commitment, what each of you wants from the other and what kind of life you'd like to build together. Pray for your future life together.
- ✦ Don't be afraid to call on other couples to ask questions, seek advice, or ask your parish for relevant resources.

FOR GRANDPARENTS

- ✦ Share your stories with your grandchildren, particularly those that are related to your love of God and faith. Provide them a sense of history, continuity and their place in the larger story of the family.
- ✦ Share your wisdom especially with young or newly married couples. Let the parish office know that you would be happy to walk alongside a younger couple if needed. When you see them at Mass, offer them encouragement and practical support.



FOR SINGLE PEOPLE

- ✦ Connect with a family who will be enriched by your life experience, and vice versa. Together you witness to the life of faith, love and unity of the entire Church.
- ✦ Look for ways to be of service to the wider community whether babysitting nieces or nephews, volunteering at a soup van or helping out at your local parish.

FOR PASTORS

- ✦ Encourage families to grow in faith by praying with them, offer frequent confession, spiritual direction and retreats. Encourage spouses to find time for individual, as well as shared prayer.
- ✦ When you next visit someone's home, gather all the members of the family to briefly pray with them, and for them. Bless the family members and the home.

FOR SEMINARIANS

- ✦ During studies, remain well grounded in the reality of family and parish life. Get actively involved and develop relationships that demonstrate God's concern and love for his people.



FOR PARISHES, COMMUNITIES AND MOVEMENTS

- ✦ Encourage couples and/or families living in the same neighbourhood to gather together in prayer.
- ✦ Run retreats or events for couples that provide an opportunity to rekindle and reconnect.
- ✦ Host talks by experts on issues relevant to married couples and families or a discussion group using one of the resources listed at the end of this booklet.
- ✦ Be attentive to those in your parish/community, particularly those going through difficult times and offer practical and pastoral support.
- ✦ Parish offices should be prepared to deal helpfully and sensitively with family needs and be able to make referrals.

For more practical ideas on putting accompaniment into action, see the Walking with Families—Pope Francis and the Art of Accompaniment video at: www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily



RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

ORGANISATIONS

- ✦ **Life, Marriage & Family Office**
www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily
- ✦ **Worldwide Marriage Encounter**
www.wwme.org.au
- ✦ **Emmanuel Community Australia (Love & Truth)**
www.emmanuelcommunityinaustralia.blogspot.com
- ✦ **Couples for Christ**
www.cfcaustralia.org
- ✦ **National Association of Catholic Families**
www.nacf.info

VIDEOS

- ✦ **Walking with Families—Pope Francis and the Art of Accompaniment**
www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily
- ✦ **Humanum Series**
www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily/Humanum
- ✦ **Beloved (Augustine Institute)**
www.augustineinstitute.org/beloved

PRINT RESOURCES

- ✦ **Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive**
www.bit.ly/2bB6q2e
- ✦ **The Joy of Forgiveness**
(Life, Marriage & Family Centre, Archdiocese of Sydney)
www.bit.ly/2bAUXVk
- ✦ **Amoris Laetitia Discussion Guide (Diocese of Broken Bay)**
www.bit.ly/2bQca9C

PUBLISHED BY:
Life, Marriage & Family Office
Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne
PO Box 146, East Melbourne, VIC 8002
t: (03) 9287 5587 • e: lmf@cam.org.au
w: www.cam.org.au/lifemarriagefamily

This resource has been produced for Life, Marriage & Family Sunday 2016.
© Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne 2016.
Design by Christine Lai, Design & Print Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

ENDNOTES

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 Pope Francis,
<i>Amoris Laetitia</i> [AL], 2 | 15 Paul VI,
<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i> , 41 | 23 Ibid, pp. 99-112 |
| 2 Ibid. AL, 4 | 16 Loc. cit. AL, 288 and
Homily of Benedict XVI,
Porto, 14 May 2010 https://
w2.vatican.va/content/ben-
edict-xvi/en/homilies/2010/
documents/hf_ben-xvi_
hom_20100514_porto.html | 24 Op cit. AL, 193 |
| 3 Ibid. AL, 7 | 17 Loc. cit. AL, 261 | 25 Ibid. AL, 287 and Heb 13:2 |
| 4 Ibid. AL, 7 | 18 Ibid. AL, 224 | 26 Matt 25:40 |
| 5 Ibid. AL, 44 | 19 Ibid. AL, 290 | 27 Pope Francis' interview
in America 13/9/13 http://
americamagazine.org/
pope-interview |
| 6 Ibid. AL, 11 | 20 Ibid. AL, 8 | 28 Ibid. AL, 321 |
| 7 Ibid. AL, 184 | 21 Ibid. AL, 200 | 29 Matt 5:16 |
| 8 Ibid. AL, 31 | 22 Bengtson V. et al
<i>Families and Faith</i>
Oxford University Press
2013 pp. 165-183 | 30 Loc. cit. AL, 57 |
| 9 Ibid. AL, 88 | | 31 Ibid. AL, 119 |
| 10 1 Sam 16:7 | | 32 Ibid. AL, 325 |
| 11 Op cit. AL, 305 | | |
| 12 Ibid. AL, 53 | | |
| 13 Ibid. AL, 200 | | |
| 14 1 Peter 3:15 | | |



PRAYER TO THE HOLY FAMILY³²

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 scandalised
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
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.

*Life Marriage
and Family Office*

CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE