

Amoris Laetitia

AMDG

My husband David and I attended the Jesuit Pastoral Conference in Swanwick in June, together with Andrew Snape, Frances Ahearne and Father Peter SJ. It was great to get to know **them** better and to meet people from various Jesuit parishes around the country.

The theme of the conference was the 3 documents Pope Francis has published in recent years and we split them up, so that Andrew and Father Peter went to the one on the Joy of the Gospel, Frances went to the one on Care for our common home and, as we were the married couple in the delegation, David and I went to the one on the Joy of Love – on love in the family.

I felt quite smug because I had already read the document – which is a book – but I still learned a lot and realise I still have a lot more to learn.

I would like to bring the book to your attention : Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love – on love in the family. Pope Francis begins with a Summary of the Document which I *will use to give you a flavour of what's in it:*

Pope Francis

1. begins with an opening chapter inspired by the Scriptures. He says this is in order “to set a proper tone”. (Chapter 1)
2. he then examines the **actual** situation of families. He says this is “in order to keep firmly grounded in reality”. (Chapter 2)
3. he goes on to recall some essential aspects of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family (Chapter 3), thus paving the way for two central chapters dedicated to love. (Chapter 4 – on 1 Corinthians 13 (the passage which begins “Love is patient and kind”... and Chapter 5 – on children and parenting)
4. he then highlights some pastoral approaches that can guide us in building sound and fruitful homes in accordance with God’s plan, with a full chapter devoted to the raising of children (Chapter 6).
5. Finally, the Pope offers an invitation to **mercy** and the pastoral discernment of those situations that fall short of what the Lord demands of us (Chapter 7). He concludes with a brief discussion of family spirituality (Chapter 8)”.

Things that stand out in the document for me personally:

The document is much more than the media hype and is about much more than one or two issues. There is something in it for all of us.

It was 4 years in the making and drew upon information gathered from around the world from various Bishops’ conferences and 2 Synods, as well as Pope Francis’ own vision. It was a continuation of work begun by his predecessors and he refers to them in it.

It struck me as realistic – the Pope knows what **really** goes on in families in the 21st Century

He talks about developing consciences, not replacing them - with lists of rules (although of course rules still matter): preaching the ideal but exercising compassion in individual situations.

He talks about tenderness and about how the Church is often like a field hospital.

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He emphasises that cultural norms and differences are important.

He says, don't just focus on helping those where marriage has failed (although it is important they are not judged harshly and are welcomed) – focus too on supporting married couples and families.

We **all** have families and in this document he doesn't just focus on the nuclear family. He talks about how much single people can offer. He talks about how much those in less than ideal relationships can offer too.

Families do not start fully formed – there is a gradual development. Don't focus on the ideal: accompany people where they are, across the generations.

Response:

The document challenges us to respond in terms of supporting couples and parents in our Parish; strengthening inclusive family networks. This theme will be developed over the coming weeks and months within our Parish. Ideas will be most welcome.

Some ideas generated at the conference were:

1. to give at least a summary of this Book to couples who come for 3 sessions of marriage preparation before their wedding;
2. developing Teams of Our Lady; small groups of husbands and wives who meeting to share and pray together
3. having more family orientated activities/Parish events – e.g. picnics, walks etc. ideally together with families from St. John's Church.

If you have more ideas please feel free to mention them to me after Mass, when I will have brief summaries for anyone interested. I have also ordered copies of the complete Document if anyone would like one.

LDS