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Press Conference to present the “Amoris Laetitia Family” Year

At 11.30 this morning, in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the “*Amoris Laetitia* Family” Year.

The speakers were: His Eminence Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; Professor Gabriella Gambino, undersecretary of the same Dicastery; and the spouses Valentina and Leonardo Nepi, Italy.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of Cardinal Kevin J. Farrell

The continuing international pandemic situation is causing concern and distress to us all, but this should not paralyse us. On the contrary, at this particular time of bewilderment, we Christians are called to be witnesses of hope. Indeed, it is part of the Church's mission always to be a herald of the good news of the Gospel. It should be noted that the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* opens with these very words: “The Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed” (AL 1). It is more appropriate than ever, therefore, to dedicate an entire pastoral year to the Christian family, because presenting God's plan for the family to the world is a source of joy and hope; it is truly good news!

The Holy Father has decided to call this special year on the family, which will begin tomorrow, 19 March, on the solemnity of Saint Joseph and the fifth anniversary of the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*. Both anniversaries are significant.

First of all, it was providential that the Holy Father dedicated this year to Saint Joseph, husband and father, so loved that he was chosen by God to look after the Holy Family. Like him, every married couple must feel loved and chosen by God to generate, in flesh and spirit, the children of God the Father. The pandemic has had very painful consequences for millions of people. But it is precisely the family, though hard hit in so many ways, that

has once again shown its face as the “guardian of life”, as Saint Joseph was. The family remains forever the “guardian” of our most authentic and original relationships, those that are born in love and enable us to mature as people.

The fifth anniversary of the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, then, represents a stimulus for the entire Church to pick up once again this important document, fruit of a long synodal journey. The “*Amoris Laetitia* Family” Year is a valuable opportunity to allow the fruits of this journey to ripen, not only in the various ecclesial contexts, but also in families themselves. All the ecclesial documents pose a great challenge: I do not speak here of their composition, that may indeed be complex and laborious - I refer to the even greater challenge of their reception. The indications of the Church, after being published, must be known and received - with the mind and above all with the heart - and must then be translated into practice. This applies also to *Amoris Laetitia*. In this Year, we have the opportunity to present better, to all, the richness of the Exhortation, which contains words of courage, stimulus, reflection, and in broader terms, contains suggestions for pastoral and practical paths, which we should not allow to fall into the void.

Families need pastoral care and dedication. In ordinary pastoral ministry, indeed, for many issues we are still at an early stage: think of the accompaniment of couples and families in crisis, support for those who are alone and for poor and divided families. Many families must be helped to discover in the sufferings of life the place of the presence of Christ and his merciful love. This Year, therefore, is an opportunity to reach out to families, so they do not feel alone in the face of difficulties, to walk with them, to listen to them and to undertake pastoral initiatives that help them to cultivate their daily love.

We are well aware that Pope Francis exhorts us to pastoral renewal. And this applies also to family pastoral care.

A first aspect of this pastoral renewal that I would like to emphasise is the need for greater collaboration. Even in the field of family pastoral care the Church must learn to share the experiences that have shown themselves to be fruitful throughout the years and have succeeded in bringing the proclamation of the Gospel to the life of couples and families. Much has been done and is still being done for families; we are not starting out from scratch. All this work and all these experiences could be an example and an inspiration to others, but they are still little known and shared.

A second aspect of this pastoral renewal is a change of mentality. I am referring to the fact that we need to move from thinking of families as mere “objects” of pastoral care to thinking of them instead as “subjects” of pastoral care. Families are full of potential and gifts for the whole of society and for the Church, and therefore they must be recognised and actively involved as agents in the ordinary pastoral care of parishes and dioceses. An important aspect of this leading role played by families is their living example. Not infrequently, they are distinguished by the fact that they represent a lived faith, they are a “living catechesis”. Indeed, there are many families who live out their faith and their vocation to marriage and family in an exemplary way. And it is very edifying to see how they do not give up, how they face life's difficulties with profound joy, that joy which is found at the “heart” of the sacrament of marriage and which nourishes the entire existence of the couple and the people who live with them. Greater space must therefore be given to families. Their very lives are a message of hope for the whole world, and especially for young people, because, as many surveys around the world show, the desire to have a family of one's own is still one of the greatest dreams that young people wish to fulfil.

A third aspect of this pastoral renewal is the formation of formators. We are increasingly aware of the need to promote the formation of all those who will carry out pastoral work with families: from future pastors - from the time of the seminary - to the lay people and families who will dedicate themselves to this apostolate. Formators must be able to show families how the grace that flows from the sacrament of marriage can respond to the challenges of practical life, not in an abstract sense, but in the real circumstances experienced within the various cultures and geographical areas of the world.

This “*Amoris Laetitia* Family” Year will certainly need pastors who respond to the Pope's invitation with generosity and enthusiasm. Pastors who, as brothers and fathers, are willing to help families, but also to learn

from them. In fact, there is a special grace that flows from spouses and families: the grace of *spousality*. The grace, that is, of living love as the giving of oneself for others, making this attitude the "engine" that moves every action. It is the grace of finding one's own happiness, of making life a gift. Pastors, by being with families, come into deeper contact with this special grace of spousality and are enriched by it. And when the priestly ministry is lived in a truly spousal way it too becomes more joyful and spiritually fruitful. For pastors, then, we can say: there is much to "give" for families, but even more to "receive" from them.

So, let us begin this Year, trying to have in relation to families an attitude of fatherhood that we learn from Saint Joseph, a paternity made up of acceptance, strength, obedience and work. And let us seek at the same time to become a Church that is increasingly a "mother" to families, that is tender and caring towards their needs, capable of listening but also courageous and always steadfast in the Holy Spirit.

Intervention of Professor Gabriella Gambino

We have received a beautiful gift from the Holy Father. The "Amoris Laetitia Family" Year has truly made the Church rejoice. As a wife and mother, who like everyone else is experiencing the hardships of this time in marriage and the family, I must confess that it is exciting to be able to read emails and letters from all over the world from my workplace, expressing such gratitude and hope to the Church.

This year is an opportunity to give a push forward to family pastoral care, in an attempt to renew methods, strategies and perhaps even some aims of pastoral planning: no longer a pastoral care of failures, says the Holy Father in *Amoris Laetitia*, but a pastoral care that knows how to reinvigorate the beauty of the sacrament of marriage and of Christian families. It must make this beauty perceptible in the eyes of children and young people, so that they feel attracted to the gift of marriage. A pastoral care of the bond, Pope Francis calls it (*AL* 211): an enormous challenge at a time when fragility is so widespread. We can no longer take anything for granted. There is a great desire for the family, but so much fear in the face of the choice of marriage. The Church needs to be prepared, to delicately enter into the most onerous matters of families, knowing how to accompany them. Starting from the fundamentals of faith to lead children and young people to discover the beauty of a vocation: marriage.

In this sense, the anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* is not merely the commemoration of a written text, but a concrete opportunity to give renewed impetus to its pastoral application. In recent years much has been thought and written about the Apostolic Exhortation: books have been published and great doctrinal reflections have been made. Now it is time to act. *Amoris Laetitia* has much to tell us. It contains pastoral strategies and suggestions that we can read between its lines with intelligence and pastoral creativity. The Pope has repeatedly explained that if one reads *Amoris Laetitia* exclusively with the criterion of "it can be done or it cannot be done" one goes astray and does not grasp its true purpose. Unfortunately, in past years, reflection and debate have focused only on one part of the document. In this Year, therefore, we must read *Amoris Laetitia* as a "whole" and we must give greater value to all the spiritual and pastoral aspects contained in the document, which have perhaps been given little prominence and which are the ones that most interest the vast majority of families.

Just think of the attitudes to be learned and the virtues to be acquired in order to be able to live love well on a daily basis, of the precious indications on the emotional, affective and sexual components of love; think of generativity and the acceptance of life, think of the various relational dimensions experienced in the family - intergenerational, between siblings and with the elderly - think of the valuable indications on the education of children - moral, spiritual and sexual education - and the proposal to cultivate a specific conjugal and family spirituality. These are all issues that are of great interest to families, in which they wish to be accompanied and on which we have the opportunity to offer them the rich contents of the Exhortation, which should not only be read, but combined with the concrete life of every day.

Our Dicastery has also proposed twelve possible paths, so that each ecclesial reality is urged to take the initiative at least in some areas of family pastoral care. These are proposals that we have put together starting

from the concrete needs emerging from family pastoral work all over the world and from the perspective of *Amoris Laetitia*. The criterion: to make pastoral projects transversal, so that there are no longer separate sealed compartments. Accompanying children, young people, engaged couples and the elderly should be done in the light of an integral and unified vision of pastoral planning, which can be a source of great creativity. Bringing pastoral workers from different areas into dialogue, acting in a synodal spirit, is important to give continuity and gradualness to the path of growth in the faith of the laity.

If, for example, catechetical courses for children were given a vocational slant, so it would be possible to follow them after communion and confirmation with a remote formation to the spousal vocation, in many pastoral contexts we could avoid the risk of losing many very young people along the way, who after first communion no longer come to Church. Not because they are truly uninterested, but because nothing is offered to them or to their parents to accompany them in the spiritual growth of their children.

It is good that the Church is allowing herself this time of pastoral conversion. It is a sign of a Church that wishes to grow, to become adult, that is not content to use old and ineffective methods, because it knows how to act for love of the family. It is a sign of a Church that wants to grow, to become adult, that is not content with using old and ineffective methods, because it knows how to get involved for the sake of the family. There is a very incisive passage in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the programmatic document of the current pontificate, in which Pope Francis says: "the customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelisation of today's world, rather than for self-preservation" (EG 27). If we apply these words to families, we already have some clear indications of the pastoral conversion we need to implement. For example: are our customs, styles, schedules, language and ecclesial structures adapted to the concrete life of families? If we think of families who live in large cities and who have to combine their work commitments with their children's schooling and extracurricular activities, all of which entail constant movement from one part of the city to another - and often without much help from close relatives - we will realise that for many families it is almost impossible to participate in parish or diocesan events if these are not adapted to the real possibilities of the families.

We must recognise that many church structures, perhaps without being fully aware of it, are rather oriented towards the elderly or single people. This is therefore a great challenge for the Church. All pastoral agents, therefore, should take families more into account, go out to meet them, find new ways, new times and new spaces to establish a dialogue with them and take care of them.

As we have already had occasion to explain, our Dicastery will take a diligent part in disseminating some pastoral tools for families, parishes and dioceses, to help and support the sometimes very laborious work of local churches.

Periodically we will put resources and small pastoral tools on our website, which we will give notice of from time to time. It is a way of keeping the Church's attention on many areas of pastoral care alive throughout these months. There will be videos on the Apostolic Exhortation, which will be released monthly: in them, the Holy Father will participate, with some testimonial families from all over the world, who together with the Pope will tell how they live those aspects of family life that the Pope speaks about in *Amoris Laetitia*. They will be accompanied by simple pastoral aids, which can be used in many ecclesial contexts and even in families and, let us not forget, this year the first World Day of Grandparents and Seniors will be celebrated on 25 July.

But most of the resources will come from the dioceses, movements and family associations, which under our impetus and in a spirit of authentic communion are working hard to implement all the good things they are already doing, and to take new initiatives. Similarly, Catholic and Pontifical academic institutions are moving to promote reflections capable of having concrete effects, in dialogue with pastoral care. After all, they are developing Christian thought, which now urgently needs to be made available to the world. There are many issues to be addressed: the difficulties of families in today's complex societies are numerous and often interrelated. May every local church feel called to intervene where it sees the greatest family emergencies, listening to families, giving them space and walking alongside them.

Today we are experiencing a vocational emergency, not only in religious life, but also in marriage, because as we have said, choosing marriage is not like choosing a job: it is a vocation. This year, more than ever, we are all called to work to reinvigorate the institution of the family, not only in the Church, but also in society. It is a long road, and it will not end with the World Meeting of Families in 2022.

Intervention of the spouses Valentina and Leonardo Nepi

We are very pleased to be here today as a married couple who, in the Year dedicated to the "*Amoris Laetitia* Family", look forward to living their belonging to the Church with a renewed spirit, at a time characterised by the health emergency, but also by real prospects for intervention, thanks to the development of vaccines. It is with this prospect of hope that we welcome Pope Francis' invitation to live out the content of *Amoris Laetitia* in all its richness.

In our daily family life, by persistently proposing to us to use without fear the three phrases "please", "thank you" and "I'm sorry", the Holy Father reminds us that the relationship between family members, and between spouses in particular, is safeguarded by apparently simple words and gestures, which nevertheless spring from profound attitudes of openness, respect, patience, trust, sharing and forgiveness. These are the foundations of a relationship of family love to be nurtured every day, both in its joys and its difficulties.

Pope Francis' call for love and family harmony may be welcomed by those who live marriage as a sacrament, but it is also a universally valid appeal: this Year is above all a propitious time to cultivate good conjugal and family relationships. We also hope that the family may be more valued in society: promoting the social dimension of the family, its ability to educate children, to inspire places and communities with positive and generative values, cultivating dialogue between generations, can only have beneficial effects for society as a whole.

In the family we experience the need to share, to not feel alone, to learn that "one can do well", and in family love we find a response to these needs. For us as a couple, and as the parents of a five-year-old girl, it is important to be able to meet other families and share our experiences, to avoid isolation, which benefits no one.

At this time in particular, when distancing is imposed by the health emergency, we have tried to be creative with our relatives and friends, using the digital tools we have at our disposal and with which we are now familiar. Of course, the personal encounter is more intense and cannot be replaced entirely by a video call, but the remedy offered to us by these technologies is nevertheless important and we have put it to good use in our parish meetings, where we pray and share the reading of the Word together with other families. The atmosphere of community, built up over years of friendship in Christ, can also be felt during these online meetings, and there is no lack of exchanges of views on the week that has just gone by, on our relationship with our children, on what we expect in the days ahead, and on the life of our Church.

The strength of the family is therefore not limited to the intimacy of our homes, as it is a source of positive values for the whole community. We trust that this Year will also be a propitious time to become aware of our ecclesial mission, to which we dedicate ourselves as a family and not just on a personal level. Baptism and marriage make us living witnesses of God's Love, to whose call we have responded with joy and courage. The hope is therefore that we families can feel committed to contributing to evangelisation and allow ourselves to be generously involved in the Christian proclamation. We are the living witnesses of the beauty that the family can express.

It is essential that this proclamation should reach the youngest members of society in particular, those who are called to discern their vocation and to form the families of tomorrow. The seeds of this proclamation are already being sown at a young age, and it is important that family and youth ministry be closely linked. As a couple who met and were formed in the parish of Saione, Arezzo, we experienced the beauty of Christian life as teenagers, when other young people, a little older than us, committed themselves to offering us opportunities for fraternity and encounter. These were young animators, sometimes even engaged couples, many of whom later married.

We remember well the wedding day of all of them! We are grateful to them for the friendship they gave us, despite the age difference, which was overshadowed by the time we prayed together, engaged in charity work, and had fun together.

With many of them this community experience continues to this day, but when we were teenagers, it was important to see young engaged couples and married couples giving their time freely to us young people, inspired by a strong sense of Christian community. Following this example, we too then became involved in the animation of post-Confirmation activities, sharing the beauty and responsibility of animating a group of young teenagers led by the parish priest. We remember in particular the experience of WYD in Cologne in 2005, but also the summer weeks in the mountains, the retreats, the Saturday afternoon sharing meetings on topics of interest to young people, the animation of Holy Mass, the works of charity.

As an engaged couple, it was sometimes challenging to find a balance between different points of view on the activities to be proposed to the young people, and there was no lack of moments of tension as we sought to reach an agreement and present a united front to the group. We believe that it was a fundamental training ground for learning to confront each other in a respectful manner, bearing in mind that we were not trying to assert ourselves over each other, but that we were engaging in dialogue (sometimes lively!) for the good of the community. Even today, in the upbringing of our five-year-old daughter Ilaria, it can happen that our views differ on certain points, but we always try to overcome these differences through dialogue and by showing unity.

When we look back at these years of youth work in the parish, we cannot help but think that these have also been years of formation in marriage, in open dialogue, in managing shared responsibilities, in overcoming crises, in other words, in building an "us" based on mutual understanding and on God's support. We are therefore convinced that this Year is a fine opportunity to relaunch a transversal pastoral approach, capable of transmitting to young people the beauty of Christian family love.
