



Ten years after *Amoris laetitia*: *proclaiming the Gospel with families today*

Meeting of the Holy Father Leo XIV
with the Heads of Eastern Churches
and the Presidents of Episcopal Conferences

7-14 October 2026

Christian families as subjects of the Church's mission

Embracing conjugal and family love as an impetus for mission

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Introduction

On this fifth day of our meeting, I humbly invite you to look at the reality of Christian Families not as simply recipients of the Church's pastoral care but rather as active subjects of her mission. Let the theme of the day, after having listened to and worked, in the past four days, on the whole question of the development of the Church's pastoral care for families after *Amoris Laetitia*, help us further discern on how this Exhortation is inspiring us to look at a Church that carries out its mission with and through families that are to be understood as active agents of missionary activities. We therefore have to ask ourselves today, after ten years of *Amoris Laetitia*, what have we learned about the missionary agency of couples and families themselves?

A Short Historical Note

From the historical point of view, it is good to note that the Exhortation, firstly articulates insights from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council II (Vatican II), especially on the Ministry of the Lay People in the context of a Domestic Church. Through the sacrament of marriage, Christian spouses form a kind of *domestic church*, whose role is essential for teaching and transmitting the faith." Secondly, the Exhortation also builds on the post-Vatican II Papal teachings on marriage and family life. Needless to give many examples, we may cite the teaching of Pope Paul VI when he says: "Married couples themselves by their leadership they become apostles to other married couples" Similar teaching is also echoed by Pope John Paul II. in *Familiaris Consortio*, no 21.

Impact of the Exhortation for the Life and Mission of the Church

Without repeating what has already been presented to us, we know how much this Exhortation has sparked surge of renewal and strengthening in pastoral care for families, in all their diversity. Besides being family-centered in approach, many dioceses and parishes have found in it encouragement for the development and care given not only to marriage preparation, follow-up with couples as well as remarried people, but also engagements in other pastoral activities. Family has emerged as a crossroads for all areas of pastoral ministry. Indeed, the family is clearly seen as crossroads where generations meet, values are transmitted, faith is lived, and the future of both persons and society is shaped. No doubt, families and couples are becoming involved in various ministries. Moreover, it is encouraging to note that various pastoral approaches centered on welcoming, accompanying, and discerning the needs of people, baptized or not, married and remarried are being promoted through

movements, associations and various groups of the faithful. The pastoral accompaniment and discernment of individuals and aggregates of people, in the diversity of their state of life, have brought to light realities that until then may have gone unnoticed. It is actually here where we see that families and couples are moving from being mere recipients of pastoral care to becoming active participants and co-responsible subjects of the Church's mission. Perhaps we should ask ourselves here, how should the various ministries that are emerging and are involving families be recognized, further developed and the concrete steps to be taken.

The involvement of families as active subjects of pastoral action, is supported very much by the concrete experiences they have gained as faithful and committed Christians, which can be utilized not only in their struggle to support the growth of the Church's mission but also in shaping the formation of those who are called to accompany them. In some areas, steps have been taken, for example in engaging couples and families to support the economic development of the Church and her institutions. Very heartening is also the support given towards the formation of the pastoral agents, shaping them with their lived experience of marriage, parenthood and other social and family realities. The concrete questions and challenges that are faced by families and the society at large are shared to the pastors and like that the latter become formed by the former. Here comes a very interesting question. In these ten years of *Amoris Laetitia*, have couples and families in our areas been given a more active role in the formation of seminarians, deacons, and other pastoral workers? Let us also ask ourselves here if there is any novelty we have learned from their participation in this regard and what further steps could be taken. These are open questions that can help us forge our way to promoting the active ministry of families.

The African Experience of the Church as Family and the reality of Small Christian Communities for the Mission

As I come to the conclusion of my short intervention, permit me to share with you my experience of the promotion of the active ministry of families and couples supported by the African understanding of the Church as Family¹ and the development/establishment of the structures of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). The understanding of the Church as Family has indeed promoted a strong sense of belonging that has seen the family of God walking together and being ready to minister in a collaborative way. This is nothing else than a synodal way of being Church, that has been experienced in Eastern Africa since the introduction and establishment of the structures of SCCs in the 1970s, as ideal units of pastoral action intended to foster collaboration and co-responsibility of the faithful in the life and mission of the Church. It is a move that has seen Parishes being transformed into "family of families" where the faithful are not alien to one another and find it easy to interact, plan and contribute to the noble mission of evangelization. Within these structures, where various local lay ministries were developed like: ministry for community relationship; ministry for the sacraments; ministry for economic development; ministry for women development; ministry for family and community health; youth ministry and the ministry for the promotion of secular and religious vocations including the formation and support of future pastoral agents, families and married couples found themselves engaged in the life and mission of the Church through their participation into various pastoral activities.² This way of participatory ministry is extended through lay associations,

¹ John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 Sept 1995).

² Protase Rugambwa, Ministry and Collaboration in Small Christian Communities, "*Communities in Rulenge Diocese – Tanzania, a case Study*", Lateran University – Rome, 1998 (Doctoral desertation).pp.136-143.

movements and groups where these initiatives are pastorally planned and supported by both pastors and consecrated men and women.

Behind all these, as a basis especially in the African context, we need to promote the understanding of the Church as Family, as already proposed by John Paul II (*Ecclesia in Africa*, no.63). Guided by pastoral and missionary renewal, this has to be in light of a synodal way of being Church anchored on the spirit of communion and participation for the mission of all the People of God.