



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

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Young people and the discovery of the vocation to marriage

Listening to young people and accompanying them in discovering the value of marriage

Friday, 9 October 2026

H.E. Msgr Stephen Fernandes

Your Holiness Pope Leo XIV, Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, dear Brothers in Christ,

I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on young people and their discovery of the vocation to marriage. I would like to begin with the conviction that *young people have not ceased to thirst for love. What has weakened for many is confidence that love can endure.*

This distinction is important. If we describe young people principally in terms of what they lack—faith, commitment, stability or readiness for marriage—we risk failing to hear what they are actually telling us through the way they live and seek relationships. Beneath many of their hesitations are profound aspirations: to be loved and accepted, to belong, to be treated with dignity, to find authenticity and to build a meaningful future.

The challenge before the Church, therefore, is not to begin by asking why young people are failing to accept marriage, but rather what are they seeking when they speak about love, freedom, dignity and their future, and how to accompany them in discovering whether their deepest desire for love can become a vocation, a free, faithful and enduring gift of oneself to another.

1. How Young People Experience Love Today

Young people experience relationships in a cultural environment very different from that of earlier generations. Digital communication has made it possible to connect more easily and quickly. At the same time, sustaining a personal relationship with someone can become very challenging. The culture of immediacy and continual choice can enter their experience of intimacy, while marriage requires patience, presence, forgiveness and perseverance.

Yet this should not be interpreted only negatively. Young people also bring to relationships a strong desire for authenticity. Many are unwilling to accept relationships marked by domination, manipulation or inequality. They increasingly expect mutual respect and the equal dignity of women and men. They rightly reject violence and every form of abuse within relationships.

This is not a difficulty to presenting the Christian vision of marriage. It can become a point of contact with the Gospel. Christian marriage is a covenant of mutual self-gift. The dignity of each person is safeguarded because husband and wife receive one another as persons and as gifts, rather than as possessions.

In India, this dimension has particular significance. Young people encounter not only changing cultural understandings of marriage, but also the concrete realities of caste, economic inequality, gender discrimination, migration, dowry expectations and, in some situations, violence against women. The Christian presentation of marriage cannot be separated from these lived realities. The Christian family must become a place where dignity, equality, reconciliation and non-violence are experienced concretely.

Listening to young people therefore asks us not merely to find new ways of speaking about marriage, but also to examine whether the marriages and families they encounter among us actually embody what we proclaim: fidelity, mutual respect, forgiveness, mercy and perseverance.

2. How Young People Envision Their Future

The second question concerns the future. Many young people today find it difficult to imagine a stable and meaningful personal, relational and family life. Economic insecurity, employment difficulties, housing costs, migration, social instability and ecological concerns can make the future appear uncertain.

For some, therefore, postponing marriage is not simply a rejection of marriage. It can reflect a crisis of confidence in the possibility of building a stable and enduring life with another person.

Here we encounter an important anthropological question: *what does freedom mean?*

In contemporary culture, freedom can easily be understood principally as having choices, the freedom to keep one's options open, to change direction and to avoid permanent commitments. Christian anthropology proposes something deeper: freedom reaches its maturity not merely in the ability to choose, but in the ability to give oneself.

A person becomes capable of covenant when freedom is understood not as escape from commitment but as the capacity to make a free and responsible gift of oneself.

This is why the vocation to marriage cannot be presented merely as an obligation or social institution. It must be presented as a possibility of human fulfilment: two persons freely choosing to belong to one another, to build a common life, to receive children as a gift, and to persevere together through the joys, responsibilities and difficulties that life brings.

There is also another dimension. Many young people today are deeply concerned about social justice, the environment and the common good. These concerns should not be regarded as separate from the vocation to marriage. They reveal a desire for a future worth inhabiting.

Listening to this aspiration should change the way we present Christian marriage and family: not simply as a private space of personal fulfilment, but as a communion of persons with responsibility towards society and creation. When young people participate actively in defending human dignity, serving the poor, caring for creation and working for the common good, they can experience that the future is something they can help to build. Such participation can strengthen their confidence that a better future is possible, and that marriage and family can have a meaningful place within that future.

The family itself can become a moral agent of social change. A couple who learns fidelity, responsibility, solidarity, care for creation and concern for the vulnerable is already contributing to the renewal of society.

3. Helping Young People Discover Marriage as a Vocation

Amoris laetitia reminds us that marriage is not simply a social arrangement but a vocation rooted in love. If this is our starting point, formation must begin much earlier than the immediate preparation for a wedding.

Young people should be guided as to what makes a marriage covenant possible. This means forming virtues: fidelity, responsibility, chastity, forgiveness, perseverance, generosity and openness to life. It means learning to communicate, resolve conflict, apologise and forgive. It means discovering that love is not sustained only by emotion, but by decisions repeatedly made for the good of the other.

Rather than presenting Christian morality primarily in terms of prohibitions and obligations, we need to speak of love as gift, freedom as self-giving, sexuality as the person's capacity to love and give oneself, fidelity as the foundation of trust and stability, and marriage as a covenant capable of giving meaning to life.

This is where moral theology and pastoral accompaniment meet. A moral norm identifies the good; healthy formation helps a person acquire the freedom and virtues necessary to choose that good.

And formation cannot be something done only *for* young people. It must increasingly be done *with* them. Young married couples can speak to their peers with a credibility that an institution sometimes cannot provide, while older couples can offer the wisdom of lived fidelity and become mentors and witnesses. Their testimony about forgiveness, sacrifice, prayer, parenting, conflict and reconciliation can make the beauty and realism of marriage concrete.

Young people who are discerning marriage should be protagonists in their formation. Even young people who are cohabiting can participate, where appropriate, in marriage preparation and discernment. Their stories, questions and experiences can become part of the Church's listening and accompaniment. It is the duty of the entire ecclesial community to develop a catechumenal pathway for marriage preparation and accompaniment.

4. Listening Changes How We Present Marriage

But before the Church can speak convincingly, she must first listen. Listening is an act of ecclesial discernment: we seek to understand young people's experiences, hopes and fears, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed within their lived reality.

Listening enables us to distinguish between a rejection of marriage and a fear that lifelong committed love may no longer be possible. This is particularly important in a world where young people may have experienced family breakdown, separation, violence, abandonment or relationships that have failed. Their hesitation may contain wounds as well as questions.

Our response must therefore hold together truth and mercy. We cannot abandon the truth about marriage, but neither can we proclaim it without entering into the concrete lives of those whom we accompany.

The Church's credibility will depend greatly on whether young people encounter among us the very qualities we ask of them: fidelity, reconciliation, mercy, mutual respect and perseverance.

5. Accompanying Cohabiting Couples Towards the Fullness of Marriage

This becomes especially important when accompanying couples who are cohabiting. Their situations are diverse, and we should resist both indifference and condemnation.

The first task is to know their story: Why have they chosen to live together? What do they hope for? What fears or obstacles stand before them? What is already good in their relationship? Where can we discern signs of generosity, fidelity, responsibility and grace?

But accompaniment must also involve genuine discernment. The question is not simply: *How can we move this couple towards a wedding?* It is also: *Are these two people truly called to marriage, and are they ready to enter into a lifelong marital covenant?*

Some cohabiting relationships may contain authentic love and important elements of commitment, while still lacking the conditions necessary for a mature marital covenant. Accompaniment may therefore lead a couple towards marriage; but it may also help them recognise that they are not yet ready to make such a commitment.

In either case, gradualness must never mean that the good becomes relative. Rather, it means respecting the person's journey while continuing to point towards the fullness of the vocation.

Here the Emmaus story offers a valuable paradigm. Jesus draws near, listens to the disciples, enters their experience, interprets their situation in the light of Scripture, and gradually leads them towards recognition and encounter. The Church is called to accompany young people in a similar way: drawing near, listening deeply, illuminating their experience with the Gospel and helping them discern the next faithful step.

6. One Gospel, Many Contexts

The vocation to Christian marriage is universal, but the circumstances in which young people discover it are profoundly diverse.

In some societies, individualism, cohabitation and declining confidence in institutions may be major challenges. In others, parental expectations, economic pressures, migration, dowry practices or social inequalities can shape the decision to marry. In situations of war, persecution, displacement or poverty, the possibility of establishing a stable family itself may be threatened.

The Gospel therefore remains one, but pastoral pathways cannot be identical everywhere. In India, for example, helping young people discover marriage requires us to speak simultaneously about the beauty of covenant and the dignity of women and men, the rejection of violence and domination, economic justice, care for creation and the responsibility of families towards the wider community.

This reminds us that the vocation to marriage is not only about the private happiness of two individuals. It is about building a communion of persons capable of generating life, serving society and contributing to the common good.

Conclusion

Perhaps the deepest question before us is not, “Why are young people rejecting marriage?” but rather, “What are young people telling us about their desire for love, their fears about the future, and their longing for a form of life that is both meaningful and trustworthy?”

They are asking whether commitment can still be a source of freedom, whether fidelity can still be a source of joy, whether family can still be a place of security and belonging, and whether love can really endure.

Our response must therefore be more than instruction. It must be witness, formation, discernment and accompaniment. We need to help young people discover that Christian marriage does not diminish freedom but brings freedom to fulfilment through self-gift; that fidelity is not a burden but the foundation of trust; that sexuality is not merely about desire but about the capacity to give oneself; and that the family is not closed in upon itself but can become a school of solidarity, justice, care for creation and service to the common good.

Above all, young people need to encounter marriages and families in which the Gospel is visibly lived. They need witnesses who can say, not simply, *“Marriage is beautiful,”* but, *“We have experienced its difficulties, we have known failure and forgiveness, sacrifice and joy, and we have discovered that love can endure.”*

The human heart has not ceased to thirst for love. What has weakened is often confidence that love can endure.

Perhaps this is where the Church's mission begins: not by lowering the beauty of the Christian vocation, but by making that beauty credible through the lives of those who have discovered, with grace, that a free and faithful love is still possible.