

**SYNOD OF BISHOPS - - XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY  
IN THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

***LINEAMENTA***

***AND***

**QUESTIONS AIMED AT A RESPONSE TO  
AND  
AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF THE *RELATIO SYNODI***



**Diocese of Santa Rosa**  
**Consultation Document**  
**January 2015**

# Office of the Bishop

Phone: (707) 566-3325

Email: BpVasa@SRDiocese.org



# Diocese of Santa Rosa

P.O. Box 1297

Santa Rosa, California 95402

January 2015

My dear People of God:

Pope Francis has engaged the Church in a discussion of marriage and family as an integral part of the Synod on the Family or more specifically on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*.

The Holy Father has also asked for a very broad based consultation and, with this in mind, has provided a document (i.e., *Lineamenta*) for study and a “series of questions aimed at knowing how the document is received and to generate an in-depth examination of the work initiated during the Extraordinary Assembly.”

In the *Lineamenta* preface we read, “It is a matter of re-thinking ‘with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church’s faith, tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family’ (*Relatio Synodi*, no. 4). From this vantage point, we have “one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront” (Pope Francis, *Concluding Discourse*, 18 October 2014). The results of this consultation, together with the *Relatio Synodi*, will serve as the basis for the *Instrumentum laboris* of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of 2015.”

I provide the entire People of God in this diocese the same materials given me for consultation and offer you the opportunity to engage in the synodal process. The document is in two parts: Pages 1-18 present the text issued by the III Extraordinary Assembly and pages 20-27 present the questions from the Holy See to which responses are invited.

If you choose to engage in this process—and I pray you do—then please send your completed responses to the chancery (address above) no later than Monday, March 9, so we can compile them and send them to the Bishop’s Conference for transmission to the Holy See.

Asking every good grace and blessing of God upon you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name 'Robert F. Vasa' in a cursive script.

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa  
Bishop of Santa Rosa

# SYNOD OF BISHOPS - - XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY IN THE CHURCH AND CONTEMPORARY WORLD

### *LINEAMENTA*

Vatican City  
2014

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Preface: *Relatio Synodi* of the III Extraordinary General Assembly – Page 3**

**Introduction - P. 3 (Para. 1-4)**

**Part I - - Listening: The Context and the Challenges of the Family - P. 5 (para. 5-11)**

The Socio-Cultural Context - P. 5 (para. 5-8)

The Importance of Affectivity in Life – P. 6 (para. 9-10)

Pastoral Challenges – P. 7 (para. 11)

**Part II - - Looking at Christ: The Gospel of the Family - Page 7 (Para. 12 -28)**

Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation – P. 7 (para. 12-14)

The Family in the God's Salvific Plan – P. 8 (para. 15-16)

The Family in the Church's Documents - P. 8 (para. 17-20)

Indissolubility of Matrimony and the Joy of Sharing Life Together - P. 9 (para. 21-22)

The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Broken and Fragile Families - P. 10 (para. 23-28)

**Part III - - Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives – P. 11 (para. 29-61)**

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts - P. 11 (para. 29-38)

Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage - P. 13 (para. 39)

Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage - P. 13 (para. 40)

Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together - P. 13 (para. 41-43)

Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried, Single-Parent Families) - P. 14 (para. 44-54)

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies - P. 16 (para. 55-56)

The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of the Declining Birthrate - P. 16 (para. 57-59)

Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization - P. 17 (para. 60-61)

**Conclusion - P. 18 (para. 62)**

## **OVERVIEW OF THE QUESTIONS:**

### **Questions Aimed at a Response to and an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi***

#### ***Preliminary Question Applicable to All Sections of the Relatio Synodi***

#### ***Questions for Part I***

##### **Listening: The Context and the Challenges of the Family**

The Socio-Cultural Context  
The Importance of Affectivity in Life  
Pastoral Challenges

#### ***Questions for Part II***

##### **Looking at Christ: The Gospel of the Family**

Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation  
The Family in the God's Salvific Plan  
The Family in the Church's Documents  
Indissolubility of Matrimony and the Joy of Sharing Life Together  
The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Broken and Fragile Families

#### ***Questions for Part III***

##### **Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives**

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts  
Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage  
Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage  
Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together  
Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried, Single-Parent Families)  
Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies  
The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of the Declining Birthrate  
Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization

## Preface

At the conclusion of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, celebrated in 2014 to treat the topic, *The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Pope Francis decided to make public the *Relatio Synodi*, the document which concluded the synod's work. At the same time, the Holy Father indicated that this document would be the *Lineamenta* for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly to take place from 4 to 25 October 2015 to treat the topic, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*.

The *Relatio Synodi*, which is sent as the *Lineamenta*, concludes in the following words: "These proposed reflections—the fruit of the synodal work that took place in great freedom and with a spirit of reciprocal listening—are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view that will later be developed and clarified through reflection in the local Churches in the intervening year leading to the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops" (*Relatio Synodi*, n. 62)

The *Lineamenta* has a series of questions aimed at knowing how the document is received and to generate an in-depth examination of the work initiated during the Extraordinary Assembly. It is a matter of re-thinking "with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church's faith, tells us about the beauty, the role, and the dignity of the family" (*Relatio Synodi*, n. 4). From this vantage point, we have "one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront" (Pope Francis, *Concluding Discourse*, 18 October 2014). The results of this consultation, together with the *Relatio Synodi*, will serve as the basis for the *Instrumentum laboris* of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of 2015.

For this purpose, the episcopal conferences are asked to choose a suitable manner of involving all components of the particular churches and academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations.

### ***Relatio Synodi* of the III Extraordinary General Assembly**

(5-19 October 2014)

## Introduction

1. The Synod of Bishops, gathered around the Holy Father, turned its thoughts to all the families of the world, each with its joys, difficulties, and hopes. In a special way, the Assembly felt a duty to give thanks to the Lord for the generosity and faithfulness of so many Christian families in responding to their vocation and mission, which they fulfill with joy and faith, even when living as a family requires facing obstacles, misunderstandings, and suffering. The entire Church and this Synod express to these families our appreciation, gratitude and encouragement. During the prayer vigil held in St Peter's Square on 4 October 2014 in preparation for the Synod on the family, Pope Francis evoked, in a simple yet concrete way, the centrality [of the experience] of the family in everyone's lives: "Evening falls on our assembly. It

is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table, in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received, of the encounters which warm the heart and make it grow, good wine which anticipates the unending feast in the days of man. It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the bitter twilight of shattered dreams and broken plans; how many people trudge through the day in the blind alley of resignation, of abandonment, even resentment: in how many homes the wine of joy has been less plentiful, and therefore, also the zest — the very wisdom — for life [...]. Let us make our prayer heard for one another this evening, a prayer for all.”

2. Within the family are joys and trials, deep love and relationships which, at times, can be wounded. The family is truly the “school of humanity” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52), which is much needed today. Despite the many signs of crisis in the family institution in various areas of the “global village,” the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant, especially among young people, and serves as the basis of the need of the Church, an expert in humanity and faithful to her mission to proclaim untiringly and with profound conviction the “Gospel of the Family,” entrusted to her together with the revelation of God’s love in Jesus Christ and ceaselessly taught by the Fathers, the masters of spirituality and the Church’s Magisterium. The family is uniquely important to the Church and in these times, when all believers are invited to think of others rather than themselves, the family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization. Think of the witness of so many families that fulfill their Christian mission.

3. At the Extraordinary General Assembly of October, 2014, the bishop of Rome called upon the Synod of Bishops to reflect upon the critical and invaluable reality of the family, a reflection which will then be pursued in greater depth at its Ordinary General Assembly scheduled to take place in October 2015, as well as during the full year between the two synodal events. “The *convenire in unum* around the bishop of Rome is already an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment.” These were the words used by Pope Francis in describing the synodal experience and indicating the task at hand: to read both the signs of God and human history in a twofold yet unique faithfulness which this reading involves.

4. With these words in mind, we have gathered together the results of our reflections and our discussions in the following three parts: *listening*, so as to look at the reality of the family today in all its complexities, both lights and shadows; *looking*, our gaze is fixed on Christ to ponder, with renewed freshness and enthusiasm, what revelation, transmitted in the Church’s faith, tells us about the beauty, the role and the dignity of the family; and *confronting the situation*—with an eye on the Lord Jesus—to discern the ways in which the Church and society can renew their commitment to the family founded upon the marriage between a man and a woman.

## **PART I**

### **Listening: the context and challenges of the family**

#### **The Socio-Cultural Context**

5. Faithful to Christ's teaching, we look to the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows. We turn our thoughts to parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters, close and distant relatives and the bonds between two families forged by marriage. Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and require an analytic and diversified approach. The positive aspects are first to be highlighted, namely, a greater freedom of expression and a better recognition of the rights of women and children, at least in some parts of the world. On the other hand, equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by a troubling individualism which deforms family bonds and ends up considering each component of the family as an isolated unit, leading, in some cases, to the idea that a person is formed according to his own desires, which are considered absolute. Added to this is the crisis of faith, witnessed among a great many Catholics, which oftentimes underlies the crisis in marriage and the family.

6. One symptom of the great poverty of contemporary culture is loneliness, arising from the absence of God in a person's life and the fragility of relationships. There is also a general feeling of powerlessness in the face of socio-cultural realities that oftentimes end in crushing families. Such is the case in increasing instances of poverty and unemployment in the workplace—which at times is a real nightmare or—in overwhelming financial difficulties, which discourage the young from marrying. Families often feel abandoned by the disinterest and lack of attention by institutions. The negative impact on the organization of society is clear, as seen in the demographic crisis, in the difficulty of raising children, in a hesitancy to welcome new life, and in considering the presence of older persons as a burden. All these can affect a person's emotional balance, which can sometimes lead to violence. The State has the responsibility to pass laws and create work to ensure the future of young people and help them realize their plan of forming a family.

7. Some cultural and religious contexts pose particular challenges. In some places, polygamy is still practiced and in places with long traditions, the custom of "marriage in stages." In other places, "arranged marriages" are an enduring practice. In countries where Catholicism is the minority, many mixed and interreligious marriages take place, all with their inherent difficulties in terms of jurisprudence, baptism, the upbringing of children, and the mutual respect with regards to difference in faith. In these marriages there can be a danger of relativism or indifference; but there can also be the possibility of fostering the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in a living together of diverse communities in the same place. In many places, and not only in the West, there has been a widespread increase in the practice of cohabitation before marriage or simply cohabitating with no intention of a legally binding relationship. In addition to this, there is often civil legislation which compromises marriage and the family. Because of secularization in many parts of the world, the reference to God is greatly diminished and the Faith is no longer shared socially.

8. Especially in some countries, a great number of children are born outside marriage, many of whom subsequently grow up with just one parent or in a blended or reconstituted family. Divorces are increasing, many times taking place solely because of economic reasons. Oftentimes, children are a source of contention between parents and become the real victims of family break-ups. Fathers who are often absent from their families not simply for economic reasons need to assume more clearly their responsibility for children and the family. The dignity of women still needs to be defended and promoted. In fact, in many places today, simply being a woman is a source of discrimination, and the gift of motherhood is often penalized rather than esteemed. Not to be overlooked is the increasing violence against women, where they unfortunately become victims, often within families and as a result of the serious and widespread practice of genital mutilation in some cultures. The sexual exploitation of children is still another scandalous and perverse reality in present-day society. Societies experiencing violence due to war, terrorism or the presence of organized crime are witnessing the deterioration of the family, above all in big cities, where, in their peripheral areas, the so-called phenomenon of "street-children" is on the rise. Furthermore migration is another sign of the times to be faced and understood in terms of its onerous consequences to family life.

### **The Importance of Affectivity in Life**

9. Faced with the aforementioned social situation, people in many parts of the world are feeling a great need to take care of themselves, to know themselves better, to live in greater harmony with their emotions and feelings, and to seek affective relationships of quality in the best manner possible. These proper aspirations can lead to a desire to put greater effort into building relationships of self-giving and creative reciprocity that are empowering and supportive like those within a family. In this case, however, individualism and living only for one's self are a real danger. The challenge for the Church is to assist couples in their emotive maturation and affective development through fostering dialogue, virtue, and trust in the merciful love of God. The full commitment required in marriage can be a strong antidote to the temptation of a selfish individualism.

10. Cultural tendencies in today's world seem to set no limits on a person's affectivity in which every aspect needs to be explored, even those which are highly complex. Indeed nowadays the question of affective fragility is a pressing one; a narcissistic, unstable, or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity. Particularly worrisome is the spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet and reprehensible situations where people are forced into prostitution. In this context couples are often uncertain, hesitant, and struggling to find ways to grow. Many tend to remain in the early stages of their affective and sexual life. A crisis in a couple's relationship destabilizes the family and may lead, through separation and divorce, to serious consequences for adults, children, and society as a whole, weakening its individual and social bonds. The decline in population—due to a mentality against having children and promoted by the world politics of reproductive health—creates not only a situation in which the relationship between generations is no longer ensured but also the danger that, over time, this decline will lead to economic impoverishment and a loss of hope in the future. The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on the birthrate.

## **Pastoral Challenges**

11. In this regard the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope that is based that man comes from God, and that, consequently, a reflection capable of reframing the great questions about the meaning of human existence can be responsive to humanity's most profound expectations. The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to the search that characterizes human existence, even in these times of individualism and hedonism. People need to be accepted in the concrete circumstances of life. We need to know how to support them in their searching and to encourage them in their hunger for God and their wish to feel fully part of the Church, including those who have experienced failure or find themselves in a variety of situations. The Christian message always contains in itself the reality and the dynamic of mercy and truth that meet in Christ.

## **PART II**

### **Looking at Christ: the Gospel of the Family**

#### **Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation**

12. In order to "walk among contemporary challenges, the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and in adoration of His face. ... Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up" (Pope Francis, *Discourse*, 4 October 2014). Jesus looked upon the women and the men He met with love and tenderness, accompanying their steps with patience and mercy, in proclaiming the demands of the Kingdom of God.

13. Since the order of creation is determined by its orientation towards Christ, a distinction needs to be made without separating the various levels through which God communicates to humanity the grace of the covenant. By reason of the divine pedagogy, according to which the order of creation develops through successive stages to the order of redemption, we need to understand the newness of the Christian sacrament of marriage in continuity with natural marriage of the origins, that is, the manner of God's saving action in both creation and the Christian life. In creation, because all things were made through Christ and for Him (cf. Col 1:16), Christians "gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows; they ought to follow attentively the profound changes which are taking place among peoples" (*Ad Gentes*, 11). In the Christian life, the reception of baptism brings the believer into the Church through the *domestic church*, namely, the family; thus beginning "a dynamic process [which] develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 9), in an ongoing conversion to a love that saves us from sin and gives us fullness of life.

14. Jesus Himself, referring to the original plan of the human couple, reaffirms the indissoluble union between a man and a woman, though saying to the Pharisees that "for your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so"(Matt 19: 8). The indissolubility of marriage ("what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" Matt 19:6), is to be understood not as a "yoke" imposed on persons but as a "gift" to a husband and wife united in marriage. In this way, Jesus shows how God's humbling act of coming to earth might always accompany the human journey and might heal and transform a

hardened heart with His grace, orientating it towards its principle, by way of the cross. The Gospels make clear that Jesus' example is paradigmatic for the Church. In fact, Jesus was born in a family. He began to work His signs at the wedding of Cana, and He announced the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores the original divine plan (Matt 19:3). At the same time, however, He put what He taught into practice and manifested the true meaning of mercy, clearly illustrated in His meeting with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30) and with the adulteress (John 8:1-11). By looking at the sinner with love, Jesus leads the person to repentance and conversion ("Go and sin no more"), which is the basis for forgiveness.

### **The Family in God's Salvific Plan**

15. The words of eternal life, which Jesus gave to His disciples, included the teaching on marriage and the family. Jesus' teaching allows us to distinguish three basic stages in God's plan for marriage and family. In the beginning, there is the original family, when God the Creator instituted the first marriage between Adam and Eve as the solid foundation of the family. God not only created human beings male and female (Gen 1:27), but He also blessed them so they might be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28). For this reason, "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and the two become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This union was wounded by sin and became the historical form of marriage among the People of God, for which Moses granted the possibility of issuing a bill of divorce (cf. Deut 24:1ff.). This was the principal practice in the time of Jesus. With Christ's coming and His reconciling a fallen world through His redemption, the period begun by Moses ended.

16. Jesus, who reconciled all things in Himself, restored marriage and the family to their original form (Mark 10:1-12). Marriage and the family have been redeemed by Christ (Eph 5:21-32), restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which every true love flows. The spousal covenant—originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation—receives its full meaning in Christ and His Church. Through His Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion. The Gospel of the Family spans the history of the world from the creation of man in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27) until it reaches, at the end of time, its fulfillment in the mystery of the Christ's Covenant with the wedding of Lamb (cf. Rev 19:9) (cf. John Paul II, *Catechesis on Human Love*).

### **The Family in the Church's Documents**

17. "Throughout the centuries, the Church has maintained her constant teaching on marriage and family. One of the highest expressions of this teaching was proposed by the Second Vatican Council in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which devotes an entire chapter to promoting the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 47-52). This document defined marriage as a community of life and love (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48), placing love at the center of the family and manifesting, at the same time, the truth of this love in counter distinction to the various forms of reductionism present in contemporary culture. The 'true love between husband and wife' (*Gaudium et Spes*, 49) implies a mutual gift of self and includes and integrates the sexual and affective aspects according to the divine plan (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48-49). Furthermore *Gaudium et Spes* 48 emphasizes the grounding of the spouses in Christ. Christ the Lord 'comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony' and remains with them. In the Incarnation, He assumes human love, purifies it, and brings it to

fulfilment and gives to the spouses, with His Spirit, the capacity to live that love, permeating every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the bride and groom are, so to speak, consecrated and, through His grace, they build up the Body of Christ and are a domestic church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11), so that the Church, in order fully to understand her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests her in a real way" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 4).

18. "In the wake of Vatican II, the papal Magisterium has further refined the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a special way Bl. Pope Paul VI in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* displayed the intimate bond between conjugal love and the generation of life. Pope St. John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love, his *Letter to Families (Gratissimam Sane)* and, especially, his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. In these documents, the Pope called the family the 'way of the Church,' gave an overview on the vocation of man and woman to love, and proposed the basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. In specifically treating 'conjugal love' (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13), he described how the spouses through their mutual love receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 5)

19. "Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* again took up the topic of the truth of the love between man and woman, which is fully understood only in light of the love of Christ Crucified (cf. *Deus Caritas Est*, 2). The Pope emphasized that 'marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and His people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love' (*Deus Caritas Est*, 11). Moreover in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he emphasizes the importance of love as the principle of life in society (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, 44), the place where a person learns to experience the common good" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 6).

20. "Pope Francis in his encyclical *Lumen Fidei*—treating the connection between the family and faith—writes: 'Encountering Christ, letting themselves (young people) be caught up in and guided by His love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness' (*Lumen Fidei*, 53)" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 7).

### **The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together**

21. Mutual self-giving in the sacrament of marriage is grounded in the grace of baptism, which establishes the foundational covenant of every person with Christ in the Church. In accepting each other and with Christ's grace, the engaged couple promises a total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life. The married couple recognizes these elements as constitutive in marriage, gifts offered to them by God, taking seriously their mutual commitment, in God's name and in the presence of the Church. So in faith it is possible to assume the goods of marriage as commitments which are more sustainable through the help of the grace of the sacrament. God consecrates the love of husband and wife and confirms its indissolubility, offering them assistance to live their faithfulness, mutual complementarity and openness to life. Therefore, the Church looks to married couples as the heart of the entire family, which, in turn, looks to Jesus.

22. From the same perspective, in keeping with the teaching of the Apostle [Paul] who said that the whole of creation was planned in Christ and for Him (cf. Col 1:16), the Second Vatican Council wished to express appreciation for natural marriage and the valid elements present in other religions (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2) and cultures, despite their limitations and shortcomings (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 55). The presence of the seeds of the Word in these cultures (cf. *Ad Gentes*, 11) could even be applied, in some ways, to marriage and the family in so many non-Christian societies and individuals. Valid elements, therefore, exist in some forms outside of Christian marriage — based, however, on a stable and true relationship of a man and a woman — which, in any case, we maintain are oriented towards Christian marriage. With an eye to the popular wisdom of different peoples and cultures, the Church also recognizes this type of family as the basic, necessary, and fruitful unit for humanity's life together.

### **The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Broken and Fragile Families**

23. With inner joy and deep comfort, the Church looks to families who remain faithful to the teachings of the gospel, encouraging them and thanking them for the testimony they offer. In fact they witness in a credible way to the beauty of a marriage which is indissoluble and faithful forever, while always remaining faithful to each other. Within the family, "which could be called a domestic church" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), a person begins a Church experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the Mystery of the Holy Trinity. "In a family, a person learns the effort and the joy of work, fraternal love, and generosity in forgiving others — always renewed — and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1657). The Holy Family of Nazareth is a wondrous model in whose school we "understand why we have to maintain spiritual discipline, if we wish to follow the teachings of the Gospel and become Christ's disciples" (Bl. Pope Paul VI, *Address at Nazareth*, 5 January 1964). The Gospel of the Family also nourishes the seeds which are still waiting to grow; and serves as the basis for caring for those trees which have withered and must not be neglected.

24. The Church, a sure teacher and caring mother, recognizes that the only marriage bond for those who are baptized is sacramental and any breach of it is against the will of God. At the same time, the Church is conscious of the weakness of many of her children who are struggling in their journey of faith. "Consequently, without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur. [...] A small step in the midst of great human limitations can be more pleasing to God than a life which outwardly appears in order and passes the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love that is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings" (*Gaudium Evangelii*, 44).

25. In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or are simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy [i.e., teaching/education] of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of the God's plan for them. Looking to Christ, Whose light illumines every person (cf. John 1:9; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22), the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work.

26. The Church looks with concern at the distrust of many young people in relation to a commitment in marriage and suffers at the haste with which many of the faithful decide to put an end to the obligation they assumed and to take on another. These lay faithful, who are members of the Church, need pastoral attention that is merciful and encouraging and that adequately distinguishes situations. Young people who are baptized should be encouraged to understand that the sacrament of marriage can enrich their prospects of love, and that they can be sustained by the grace of Christ in the sacrament and by the possibility of participating fully in the life of the Church.

27. In this regard, a new aspect of family ministry is requiring attention today — the reality of civil marriages between a man and woman, traditional marriages, and, taking into consideration the differences involved, even cohabitation. When a union reaches a particular stability, legally recognized, characterized by deep affection and responsibility for children, and showing an ability to overcome trials, these unions can offer occasions for guidance with an eye towards the eventual celebration of the sacrament of marriage. Very often, on the other hand, a couple lives together not in view of a possible future marriage but without any intention of a legally binding relationship.

28. In accordance with Christ's mercy, the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and lost love, by restoring in them hope and confidence, like the beacon of a lighthouse in a port or a torch carried among the people to enlighten those who have lost their way or who are in the midst of a storm. Conscious that the most merciful thing is to tell the truth in love, we go beyond compassion. Merciful love—as it attracts and unites, transforms and elevates—is an invitation to conversion. We understand the Lord's attitude in the same way. He does not condemn the adulterous woman. Rather He tells her to "go and do not sin again" (John 8:1-11).

### **Part III**

#### **Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives**

##### **Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts**

29. Discussion at the Synod focused on some of the more urgent pastoral needs to be addressed in the local Churches, in communion *cum Petro et sub Petro*. Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family is urgently needed in the work of evangelization. The Church has to carry this out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Eph 4:15), in faithfulness to the mercy displayed in Christ's *kenosis*. Truth became flesh in human weakness, not to condemn it but to save it (cf. Gen 3:16, 17).

30. Evangelizing is the shared responsibility of all God's people, each according to his ministry and charism. Without the joyous testimony of married people and families—that is, domestic churches—evangelical proclamation, even if done in its proper way, risks being misunderstood or lost in a flurry of words that is characteristic of society today (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50). On various occasions, the Synod Fathers emphasized that Catholic families, by reason of the grace of the sacrament of marriage, are called upon to be the *active agents* in every pastoral activity on behalf of the family.

31. The primacy of grace needs to be highlighted and, consequently, the possibilities the Spirit provides in the sacrament. It is a question of allowing people to experience that the Gospel of the Family is a joy that “fills hearts and lives,” because in Christ we are “set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1). In light of the Parable of the Sower (cf. Matt 13:3), our task is to cooperate in the sowing: The rest is God’s work. Nor must we forget that, in preaching about the family, the Church is a sign of contradiction.

32. Consequently this work calls for *missionary conversion* by everyone in the Church, that is, not stopping at proclaiming a merely theoretical message with no connection to people’s real problems. We must continually bear in mind that the crisis of faith has led to a crisis in marriage and the family, and that, consequently, the transmission of faith itself from parents to children has often been interrupted. In the face of a strong faith, the imposition of certain cultural perspectives which weaken the family and marriage will cause no harm.

33. Conversion also needs to be seen in the language we use so that it might prove to be effectively meaningful. Proclamation needs to create an experience where the Gospel of the Family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person, a response to each one’s dignity and complete fulfillment in reciprocity, communion, and fruitfulness. This does consist not in merely presenting a set of rules but in espousing values that respond to the needs of those who find themselves today even in the most secularized of countries.

34. The Word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family. All pastoral work on behalf of the family must allow people to be interiorly fashioned and formed as members of the domestic church through the Church’s prayerful reading of sacred Scripture. The Word of God is not only good news in a person’s private life but also a criterion of judgment and a light in discerning the various challenges that married couples and families encounter.

35. At the same time, many Synod Fathers insisted on a more positive approach to the richness of various religious experiences, without overlooking the inherent difficulties. In these different religious realities and in the great cultural diversity that characterizes countries, positive possibilities should be appreciated first, and then, on this basis, limitations and deficiencies should be evaluated.

36. Christian marriage is a vocation that is undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discernment and is not to be considered only a cultural tradition or social or legal requirement. Therefore formation is needed to accompany the person and couple in such a way that the life experience of the entire ecclesial community can be united with the teaching of the contents of the Faith.

37. The Synod Fathers repeatedly called for a thorough renewal of the Church’s pastoral practice in light of the Gospel of the Family and for replacing its current emphasis on individuals. For this reason, the Synod Fathers repeatedly insisted on renewal in the training of priests, deacons, catechists, and other pastoral workers with a greater involvement of families.

38. They equally highlighted the fact that evangelization needs to denounce with clarity cultural, social, political, and economic factors (such as the excessive importance given to market logic) that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence.

Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be developed with the social entities and encouragement given to Christian lay people who are involved, *as Christians*, in the cultural and socio-political fields.

### **Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage**

39. The complex social reality and the changes affecting the family today require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included. Among these, chastity proves invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the Synod Fathers jointly insisted on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by favoring the witness of families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the course of Christian initiation as well as emphasizing the connection between marriage, baptism, and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that specific programs were needed in preparing couples for marriage, programs that create a true experience of participation in ecclesial life and thoroughly treat the various aspects of family life.

### **Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage**

40. The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life. Consequently pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, Part III). In this regard experienced couples are of great importance in any pastoral activity. The parish is the ideal place for these experienced couples to be of service to younger couples, with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities. Married couples need encouragement in a basic openness to the great gift of children. The importance of family spirituality, prayer, and participation in the Sunday Eucharist need emphasis so couples might be encouraged to regularly meet to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Meaningful liturgies, devotional practices, and the Eucharist celebrated for families, especially on the wedding anniversary, were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family.

### **Pastoral Care for Couples Civilly Married or Living Together**

41. While continuing to proclaim and foster Christian marriage, the Synod also encourages pastoral discernment of the situations of a great many who no longer live this reality. Entering into pastoral dialogue with these persons is needed to distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel of Marriage in its fullness. Pastors ought to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth. A new element in today's pastoral activity is a sensitivity to the positive aspects of civilly celebrated marriages and, with obvious differences, cohabitation. While clearly presenting the Christian message, the Church also needs to indicate the constructive elements in these situations that do not yet or no longer correspond to it.

42. The Synod Fathers also noted that in many countries "an increasing number of people live together *ad experimentum*, in unions that have not been religiously or civilly recognized" (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 81). In some countries, this occurs especially in traditional marriages that are arranged between families and often celebrated in different stages. Other countries are witnessing a continual increase in the number of those who, after having lived together for a

long period, request the celebration of marriage in Church. Simply to live together is often a choice based on a general attitude opposed to anything institutional or definitive. It can also be done while awaiting more security in life (e.g., a steady job and steady income). Finally in some countries *de facto* marriages are very numerous, not only because of a rejection of values concerning the family and matrimony but primarily because celebrating a marriage is considered too expensive in the social circumstances. As a result material poverty leads people into *de facto* unions.

43. All these situations require a constructive response, seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the fullness of marriage and family in conformity with the gospel. These couples need to be provided for and guided patiently and discreetly. With this in mind, the witness of authentic Christian families is particularly appealing and important as agents in the evangelization of the family.

### **Caring for Wounded Families (Persons who are Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried and Single-Parent Families)**

44. Married couples with problems in their relationship should be able to count on the assistance and guidance of the Church. The pastoral work of charity and mercy seeks to help persons recover and restore relationships. Experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life. Forgiveness between husband and wife permits a couple to experience a never-ending love that does not pass away (cf. 1 Cor 13:8). At times this is difficult, but those who have received God's forgiveness are given the strength to offer a genuine forgiveness that regenerates persons.

45. The necessity for courageous pastoral choices was particularly evident at the Synod. Strongly reconfirming their faithfulness to the Gospel of the Family and acknowledging that separation and divorce are always wounds that cause deep suffering to the married couple and their children, the Synod Fathers felt the urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course based on the present reality of weaknesses within the family, knowing oftentimes that these are more "endured" with suffering than freely chosen. These situations vary because of personal, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Therefore solutions need to be considered in a variety of ways, as suggested by Pope St. John Paul II (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

46. All families should, above all, be treated with respect and love and accompanied on their journey as Christ accompanied the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In a particular way, the words of Pope Francis apply in these situations: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious, and laity – into this 'art of accompaniment,' which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting a closeness and compassion which, at the same time, heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169).

47. A special discernment is indispensable for pastorally guiding persons who are separated, divorced, or abandoned. Respect needs to be primarily given to the suffering of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce, or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral

activity, then, needs to be geared towards reconciliation and mediation of differences, which might even take place in specialized “listening centers” established in dioceses. At the same time the Synod Fathers emphasized the necessity of addressing, in a faithful and constructive fashion, the consequences of separation or divorce on children, who in every case are the innocent victims of the situation. Children must not become an “object” of contention. Instead every suitable means ought to be sought to ensure that they can overcome the trauma of a family break-up and grow as serenely as possible. In each case the Church is always to point out the injustice that very often is associated with divorce. Special attention is to be given in the guidance of single-parent families, so that women who have to bear alone the responsibility of providing a home and raising their children can receive assistance.

48. A great number of Synod Fathers emphasized the need to make the procedure in cases of nullity more accessible and less time-consuming, and, if possible, at no expense. They proposed, among other things, the dispensation of the requirement of a second instance for confirming sentences; the possibility of establishing an administrative means under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop; and a simple process to be used in cases where nullity is clearly evident. Some Synod Fathers, however, were opposed to these proposals. They felt they would not guarantee a reliable judgment. In all these cases the Synod Fathers emphasized the primary character of ascertaining the truth about the validity of the marriage bond. Among other proposals, the role which faith plays in persons who marry could possibly be examined in ascertaining the validity of the Sacrament of Marriage, all the while maintaining that the marriage of two baptized Christians is always a sacrament.

49. With respect to marriage cases, the streamlining of the procedure, requested by many Synod Fathers, in addition to the preparation of a sufficient number of persons — clerics and lay people — primarily dedicated to this work will require increased responsibility of the diocesan bishop. This work could be done through specially trained counselors who would be able to offer free advice to the concerned parties on the validity of their marriage. This work could be done in an office or by qualified persons (cf. *Dignitas Connubii*, art. 113, 1).

50. Divorced people who have not remarried, who oftentimes bear witness to their promise of faithfulness in marriage, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life. The local community and pastors ought to accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty.

51. Likewise those who are divorced and remarried require careful discernment and an accompaniment of great respect. Language or behavior that might make them feel an object of discrimination should be avoided, all the while encouraging them to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community’s care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith or its testimony to the indissolubility of marriage, but, precisely in this way, the community is seen to express its charity.

52. The Synod Fathers also considered giving the divorced and remarried access to the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. Various Synod Fathers insisted on maintaining the present discipline, because of the constitutive relationship between participation in the Eucharist and communion with the Church as well as her teaching on the indissoluble character of marriage. Others proposed a more individualized approach, permitting access in certain situations and with certain well-defined conditions, primarily in irreversible situations and those

involving moral obligations towards children who would have to endure unjust suffering. Access to the sacraments might take place if preceded by a penitential practice, determined by the diocesan bishop. The subject needs to be thoroughly examined, bearing in mind the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances, given that "imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1735).

53. Some Synod Fathers maintained that divorced and remarried persons or those living together can have fruitful recourse to a spiritual communion. Others raised the question as to why, then, they cannot have access to sacramental Communion. As a result the Synod Fathers requested that further theological study in the matter with a view to making clear the distinctive features of the two forms and their connection with the theology of marriage.

54. The problems relative to mixed marriages were frequently raised in the interventions of the Synod Fathers. The differences in the matrimonial regulations of the Orthodox Churches creates serious problems in some contexts, which require due consideration from the point of view of ecumenism. Analogously the contribution of the dialogue with other religions would be important for interreligious marriages.

### **Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies**

55. Some families have members who have a homosexual tendency. In this regard the Synod Fathers asked themselves what pastoral attention might be appropriate for them in accordance with Church teaching: "There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family." Nevertheless men and women with a homosexual tendency ought to be received with respect and sensitivity. "Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, 4).

56. Exerting pressure in this regard on the Pastors of the Church is totally unacceptable. It is equally unacceptable for international organizations to link their financial assistance to poorer countries with the introduction of laws that establish "marriage" between persons of the same sex.

### **The Transmission of Life and the Challenges of a Declining Birthrate**

57. Today the diffusion of a mentality that reduces the generation of human life to one variable of an individual's or couple's plans is easily observable. Sometime, economic factors are burdensome, contributing to a sharp drop in the birthrate that weakens the social fabric, compromises relations between generations, and renders a future outlook more uncertain. Openness to life is an intrinsic requirement of married love. In this regard the Church supports families who accept, raise, and surround with affection children with various disabilities.

58. Pastoral work in this area needs to start with listening to people and acknowledging the beauty and truth of an unconditional openness to life, which is needed if human love is to be

lived fully. This serves as the basis for an appropriate teaching regarding the natural methods for responsible procreation that allow a couple to live, in a harmonious and conscious manner, the loving communication between husband and wife in all its aspects along with their responsibility at procreating life. In this regard we should return to the message of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Bl. Pope Paul VI, which highlights the need to respect the dignity of the person in morally assessing methods in regulating births. The adoption of children, orphans and the abandoned and accepting them as one's own is a specific form of the family apostolate (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, III, 11), and has oftentimes been called for and encouraged by the Magisterium (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, III, II; *Evangelium Vitae*, IV, 93). The choice of adoption or foster parenting expresses a particular fruitfulness of married life, not simply in the case of sterility. Such a choice is a powerful sign of family love and an occasion to witness to one's faith and to restore the dignity of a son or daughter to a person who has been deprived of this dignity.

59. Affectivity needs assistance, also in marriage, as a path to maturity in the ever-deepening acceptance of the other and an ever fuller gift of self, in this sense, the necessity of offering programs of formation that nourish married life and the importance of the laity, providing an accompaniment that consists in a vibrant witness, was reiterated. Undoubtedly the example of a faithful and deep love is of great assistance; a love shown in tenderness and respect; a love that is capable of growing over time; and a love that, in the very act of opening itself to the generation of life, gives an experience of a mystery that transcends us.

### **Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization**

60. One of the fundamental challenges facing families today is undoubtedly that of raising children, made all the more difficult and complex by today's cultural reality and the great influence of the media. Consideration, then, needs to be given to the needs and expectations of families, capable of being places of growth in daily life, places of a concrete and essential transmission of the virtues that give form to our existence. Parents, then, are able freely to choose the type of education for their children, according to their convictions.

61. The Church assumes a valuable role in supporting families, starting with Christian Initiation, by being welcoming communities. More than ever, these communities today are to offer support to parents, in complex situations and everyday life, in their work of raising their children, accompanying children, adolescents and young people in their development through personalized pastoral programs, capable of introducing them to the full meaning of life and encouraging them in their choices and responsibilities, lived in the light of the gospel. Mary—in her tenderness, mercy and maternal sensitivity—can nourish the hunger of humanity and life itself. Families and the Christian people should therefore seek her intercession. Pastoral work and Marian devotion are an appropriate starting point for proclaiming the Gospel of the Family.

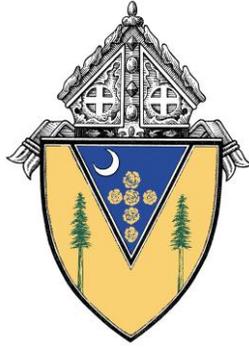
## Conclusion

62. These proposed reflections—the fruit of the synodal work that took place in great freedom and with a spirit of reciprocal listening—are intended to raise questions and indicate points of view that will later be developed and clarified through reflection in the local Churches in the intervening year leading to the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2015 to treat *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World*. These are not decisions taken nor are they easy subjects. Nevertheless in the collegial journey of the bishops and with the involvement of all God's people, the Holy Spirit will guide us in finding the road to truth and mercy for all. This has been the wish of Pope Francis from the beginning of our work when he invited us to be courageous in faith and humbly and honestly to embrace the truth in charity.

# Office of the Bishop

Phone: (707) 566-3325

Email: BpVasa@SRDiocese.org



# Diocese of Santa Rosa

P.O. Box 1297

Santa Rosa, California 95402

January 2015

My Dear People of God:

The questions that follow manifest the breadth of the desire of the Church for a deeper, richer understanding and promotion of family life. Some of the questions concern which pastoral initiatives or programs need to be strengthened or even begun. Many of the questions begin with a doctrinal presupposition and then ask, “How?” How can the family ...? How can an effective testimony ...? How can people be helped ...?

In terms of this diocese, there are certainly many initiatives for the support of the family that need to be established and promoted. It is my hope that the Synod will help give guidance and direction in these.

It may happen that you will find it impossible to offer any suggestions or even opinions about many of the questions posed. This should not, however, dissuade you from making your comments known about those areas in which you have particular interest or about which you have particular knowledge. It is important that the answers be clearly legible and preferably typed and that the specific number of the question to which you are responding is clearly identified.

Even if you choose not to reply to this questionnaire, I ask that you take the time to read and study and pray about both the preliminary document, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World* and the *Questions Aimed at a Response*. I do believe that simply reading and studying these documents will deepen our understanding of the Church’s concern for marriage and family and open up for us graced opportunities to promote and foster a deeper reverence and respect for that graced institution which is marriage and family

Asking every good grace and blessing of God upon you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa  
Bishop of Santa Rosa

## **Questions Aimed at a Response to and an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi***

### ***Preliminary Question Applicable to All Sections of the Relatio Synodi***

*Does the description of the various familial situations in the Relatio Synodi correspond to what exists in the Church and society today? What missing aspects should be included?*

### **Part I**

#### **Listening: The Context and Challenges of the Family**

As indicated in the Introduction (ns. 1-4), the Extraordinary Synod was intended to address all the families of the world in a desire to share their joys, struggles, and hopes. At the same time, considering the many Christian families who faithfully live their vocation, the Synod expressed to them a sense of gratitude and encouraged them to become involved more decisively as the Church strives to “go out of herself” and rediscover the family’s vital character in the work of evangelization, primarily in nourishing for themselves and for families in difficulty the “desire to form a family,” which endures and underlies the conviction that an effective proclamation of the core message of the gospel must necessarily “begin with the family.”

The path of renewal delineated by the Extraordinary Synod is set within the wider ecclesial context indicated by Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, namely, starting from “life’s periphery” and engaging in pastoral activity that is characterized by a “culture of encounter” and capable of recognizing the Lord’s gratuitous work, even outside customary models, and of confidently adopting the idea of a “field hospital,” which is very beneficial in proclaiming God’s mercy. The numbers in the first part of the *Relatio Synodi* are a response to these challenges and provide a framework for reflecting on the real situation of families.

The proposed questions that follow and the reference numbers to the paragraphs in the *Relatio Synodi* are intended to assist the bishops’ conferences in their reflection and to avoid, in their responses, a formulation of pastoral care based simply on an application of doctrine, which would not respect the conclusions of the Extraordinary Synodal Assembly and would lead their reflection far from the path already indicated.

#### **The Socio-Cultural Context (p. 5, para. 5-8)**

- 1. What initiatives are taking place and what are those planned in relation to the challenges these cultural changes pose to the family (cf. ns. 6-7): which initiatives are geared to reawaken an awareness of God’s presence in family life; to teaching and establishing sound interpersonal relationships; to fostering social and economic policies useful to the family; to alleviating difficulties associated with attention given to children, the elderly and family members who are ill; and to addressing more specific cultural factors present in the local Church?*
- 2. What analytical tools are currently being used in these times of anthropological and cultural changes; what are the more significant positive or negative results? (cf. n. 5)*

3. *Beyond proclaiming God's Word and pointing out extreme situations, how does the Church choose to be present "as Church" and to draw near families in extreme situations? (cf. n. 8). How does the Church seek to prevent these situations? What can be done to support and strengthen families of believers and those faithful to the bonds of marriage?*

4. *How does the Church respond, in her pastoral activity, to the diffusion of cultural relativism in secularized society and to the consequent rejection on the part of many of the model of family formed by a man and woman united in the marriage and open to life?*

### **The Importance of Affectivity in Life (p. 6, para. 9-10)**

5. *How do Christian families bear witness, for succeeding generations, to the development and growth of a life of sentiment? (cf. ns. 9-10). In this regard, how might the formation of ordained ministers be improved? What qualified persons are urgently needed in this pastoral activity?*

### **Pastoral Challenges (p. 7, para. 11)**

6. *To what extent and by what means is the ordinary pastoral care of families addressed to those on the periphery? (cf. n. 11). What are the operational guidelines available to foster and appreciate the "desire to form a family" planted by the Creator in the heart of every person, especially among young people, including those in family situations which do not correspond to the Christian vision? How do they respond to the Church's efforts in her mission to them? How prevalent is natural marriage among the non-baptized, also in relation to the desire to form a family among the young?*

## **Part II**

### **Looking at Christ: The Gospel of the Family**

The Gospel of the Family, faithfully preserved by the Church from the time of Christ's Revelation, both written and transmitted through the ages, needs to be proclaimed in today's world with renewed joy and hope, continuing all-the-while to look at Jesus Christ. The vocation and mission of the family is fully configured to the order of creation which develops into that of redemption, as summarized by the desire of the Council, "let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ Who is the principle of life, married people can—by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love—become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by His dying and His rising to life again" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52; cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1533-1535). From this vantage point the questions arising from the *Relatio Synodi* are devised to prompt a faithful and bold response from the Pastors and the People of God in a renewed proclamation of the Gospel of the Family.

## **Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation (p. 7, para. 12-14)**

Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, the Church looks to Christ in His enduring truth and inexhaustible newness, which also sheds light on the family. "Christ is the 'eternal Gospel' (Rev 14:6); He 'is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb 13:8), yet His riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is forever young and a constant source of newness" (*Gaudium Evangelii*, 11).

7. *A fixed gaze on Christ opens up new possibilities. "Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up" (n. 12). How is the teaching from Sacred Scripture utilized in pastoral activity on behalf of families? To what extent does "fixing our gaze on Christ" nourish a pastoral care of the family which is courageous and faithful?*

8. *What marriage and family values can be seen to be realized in the life of young people and married couples? What form do they take? Are there values which can be highlighted? (cf. n. 13) What sinful aspects are to be avoided and overcome?*

9. *What human pedagogy needs to be taken into account — in keeping with divine pedagogy — so as better to understand what is required in the Church's pastoral activity in light of the maturation of a couple's life together which would lead to marriage in the future? (cf. n. 13)*

10. *What is being done to demonstrate the greatness and beauty of the gift of [marriage's] indissolubility so as to prompt a desire to live it and strengthen it more and more? (cf. n. 14)*

11. *How can people be helped to understand that a relationship with God can assist couples in overcoming the inherent weaknesses in marital relations? (cf. n. 14) How do people bear witness to the fact that divine blessings accompany every true marriage? How do people manifest that the grace of the sacrament sustains married couples throughout their life together?*

## **The Family in God's Salvific Plan (p. 8, para. 15-16)**

In creation the vocation of the love between a man and woman draws its full realization from the Paschal Mystery of Christ the Lord, Who, in His total gift of self, makes the Church His Mystical Body. Christian marriage, in drawing on the grace of Christ, thus becomes, for those who are called to it, the path leading to the perfection of love, which is holiness.

12. *How can people be made to understand that Christian marriage corresponds to the original plan of God and, thus, is one of fulfillment and not confinement? (cf. n. 13)*

13. *How can the Church be conceived as a "domestic Church" (Lumen Gentium, 11), agent and object of the work of evangelization in service to the Kingdom of God?*

14. *How can an awareness of this missionary task of the family be fostered?*

## **The Family in the Church's Documents (p.8, para. 17-20)**

The Church's Magisterium—in all its richness—needs to be better known by the People of God. Marital spirituality is nourished by the constant teaching of the pastors who care for the flock and grow through their continual attentiveness to the Word of God and to the sacraments of faith and charity.

15. *The Lord looks with love at the Christian family, and through Him the family grows as a true community of life and love. How can a familial spirituality be developed and how can families become places of new life in Christ? (cf. n. 17)*

16. *What initiatives in catechesis can be developed and fostered to make known and offer assistance to persons in living the Church's teaching on the family, above all in surmounting any possible discrepancy between what is lived and what is professed and in leading to a process of conversion?*

## **The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together (p.9, para. 21-22)**

"Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may effectively lead the spouses to God and may aid and strengthen them in the sublime mission of being father and mother. For this reason Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

17. *What initiatives can lead people to understand the value of an indissoluble and fruitful marriage as the path to complete personal fulfilment? (cf. n. 21)*

18. *What can be done to show that the family has many unique aspects for experiencing the joys of human existence?*

19. *Returning to an ancient ecclesial tradition, the Second Vatican Council expressed an appreciation for natural marriage. To what extent does diocesan pastoral activity acknowledge the value of this popular wisdom as fundamental in culture and society (cf. n. 22)?*

## **The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Wounded and Fragile Families (p. 10, para. 23-28)**

After having considered the beauty of successful marriages and strong families and shown appreciation for the generous witness of those who remain faithful to the bonds of marriage, even when abandoned by their spouses, the Pastors at the Synod asked themselves — in an open and courageous manner but not without concern and caution — how the Church is to regard Catholics who are united in a civil bond, those who simply live together, and those who, after a valid marriage, are divorced and remarried civilly.

Aware of the obvious limitations and imperfections present in many different situations, the Synod Fathers assumed the positive outlook indicated by Pope Francis, according to which “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 44).

20. *How can people be helped to understand that no one is beyond the mercy of God? How can this truth be expressed in the Church’s pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile (cf. n. 28)?*

21. *In the case of those who have not yet arrived at a full understanding of the gift of Christ’s love, how can the faithful express a friendly attitude and offer trustworthy guidance without failing to proclaim the demands of the gospel (cf. n. 24)?*

22. *What can be done so that persons in the various forms of union between a man and a woman — in which human values can be present — might experience a sense of respect, trust, and encouragement to grow in the Church’s good will and be helped to arrive at the fullness of Christian marriage (cf. n. 25)?*

### **Part III**

#### **Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives**

In examining Part III of the *Relatio Synodi*, it is important to be guided by the pastoral approach initiated at the Extraordinary Synod which is grounded in Vatican II and the Magisterium of Pope Francis. The episcopal conferences have the responsibility to continue to examine this part thoroughly and seek the involvement, in the most opportune manner possible, all levels of the local Church, thus providing concrete instances from their specific situations. Every effort should be made not to begin anew, but to continue on the path undertaken in the Extraordinary Synod as a point of departure.

#### **Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts (p. 11, para. 29-38)**

Because of the needs of the family and, at the same time, the many complex challenges present in the world today, the Synod emphasized making a renewed commitment to proclaiming the Gospel of the Family in a bold and more insistent manner.

23. *How is the family emphasized in the formation of priests and other pastoral workers? How are families themselves involved?*

24. *Are people aware that the rapid evolution in society requires a constant attention to language in pastoral communication? How can an effective testimony be given to the priority of grace in a way that family life is conceived and lived as welcoming the Holy Spirit?*

25. *In proclaiming the Gospel of the Family, how can the conditions be created so that each family might actually be as God wills and that society might acknowledge the family’s dignity and mission? What “pastoral conversion” and what further steps towards an in-depth examination are being done to achieve this?*

26. *Are people aware of the importance of the collaboration of social and civil institutions on behalf of the family? How is this actually done? What criteria are used to inspire it? In this regard, what role can be played by family associations? How can this collaboration be sustained even in a bold repudiation of the cultural, economic, and political processes that threaten the family?*

27. *How can relations between family, society, and civil life be fostered for the benefit of the family? How can the support of the State and the international community be fostered on behalf of the family?*

### **Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage (p. 13, para. 39)**

The Synod recognized the steps taken in recent years to facilitate an effective preparation of young people for marriage, stressing, however, a need for a greater commitment of the entire Christian community in not only the preparation but also the initial years of family life.

28. *How is marriage preparation proposed in order to highlight the vocation and mission of the family according to faith in Jesus Christ? Is it proposed as an authentic ecclesial experience? How can it be renewed and improved?*

29. *How does the catechesis of Christian initiation present an openness to the vocation and mission of the family? What practices are seen as most urgent? How is the relation among baptism, Eucharist, and marriage proposed? What emphasis is given to the character of the catechumenate and mystagogy that is often a part of marriage preparation? How can the community be involved in this preparation?*

### **Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage (p. 13, para. 40)**

30. *Does marriage preparation and accompanying couples in the initial years of married life adequately value the important contribution of the witness and sustenance which can be given by families, associations, and family movements? What positive experiences can be reported in this regard?*

31. *The pastoral accompaniment of couples in the initial years of family life — as observed in synodal discussion — needs further development. What are the most significant initiatives already being undertaken? What elements need further development in parishes, dioceses, or associations and movements?*

### **Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married or Living Together (p. 13, para. 41-43)**

The Synod discussed diverse situations resulting from a multiplicity of cultural and economic factors, practices grounded in tradition, and the difficulty of young people to make lifetime commitments.

32. *What criteria in a proper pastoral discernment of individual situations are being considered in light the Church's teaching in which the primary elements of marriage are unity, indissolubility, and openness to life?*

33. *Is the Christian community able to be pastorally involved in these situations? How can it assist in discerning the positive and negative elements in the life of persons united in a civil marriage so as to guide and sustain them on a path of growth and conversion towards the sacrament of matrimony? How can those living together be assisted to decide to marry?*

34. *In a particular way, what response is to be given to problems arising from the continuity of traditional forms of marriage in stages or those between families?*

### **Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried, Single-Parent Families) (p. 14, para. 44-54)**

The Synod discussion highlighted the need for a pastoral based on *the art of accompaniment*, “the pace of [which] must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates, and encourages growth in the Christian life”( *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169).

35. *Is the Christian community in a position to undertake the care of all wounded families so they can experience the Father’s mercy? How does the Christian community engage in removing the social and economic factors that often determine this situation? What steps have been taken and what can be done to increase this activity and the sense of mission which sustains it?*

36. *How can the identification of shared pastoral guidelines be fostered at the level of the particular Church? In this regard, how can a dialogue be developed among the various particular Churches cum Petro and sub Petro?*

37. *How can the procedure to determine cases of nullity be made more accessible, streamlined, and possibly without expense?*

38. *With regard to the divorced and remarried, pastoral practice concerning the sacraments needs to be further studied, including assessment of the Orthodox practice and taking into account “the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances” (n. 52). What are the prospects in such a case? What is possible? What suggestions can be offered to resolve forms of undue or unnecessary impediments?*

39. *Does current legislation provide a valid response to the challenges resulting from mixed marriages or interreligious marriages? Should other elements be taken into account?*

### **Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies (p. 16, para. 55-56)**

The pastoral care of persons with homosexual tendencies poses new challenges today due to the manner in which their rights are proposed in society.

40. *How can the Christian community give pastoral attention to families with persons with homosexual tendencies? What are the responses that, in light of cultural sensitivities, are considered to be most appropriate? While avoiding any unjust discrimination, how can such*

*persons receive pastoral care in these situations in light of the gospel? How can God's will be proposed to them in their situation?*

### **The Transmission of Life and the Challenge of a Declining Birthrate (p. 17, para. 57-59)**

The transmission of life is a fundamental element in the vocation and mission of the family: "They should know they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love in the task of transmitting human life and to raising children; this has to be considered their proper mission" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50).

41. *What are the most significant steps that have been taken to announce and effectively promote the beauty and dignity of becoming a mother or father, in light, for example, of Humanae Vitae of Bl. Pope Paul VI? How can dialogue be promoted with the sciences and biomedical technologies in a way that respects the human ecology of reproduction?*

42. *A generous maternity / paternity needs structures and tools. Does the Christian community exercise an effective solidarity and support? How? Is it courageous in proposing valid solutions even at a socio-political level? How can adoption and foster-parenting be encouraged as a powerful sign of fruitful generosity? How can the care and respect of children be promoted?*

43. *The Christian lives maternity / paternity as a response to a vocation. Is this vocation sufficiently emphasized in catechesis? What formation is offered so that it might effectively guide the consciences of married couples? Are people aware of the grave consequences of demographic change?*

44. *How does the Church combat the scourge of abortion and foster an effective culture of life?*

### **Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization (p. 17, para. 60-61)**

45. *Fulfilling their educational mission is not always easy for parents. Do they find solidarity and support from the Christian community? What suggestions might be offered in formation? What steps can be taken to acknowledge the role of parents in raising children, even at the socio-political level?*

46. *How can parents and the Christian family be made aware that the duty of transmitting the Faith is an intrinsic aspect of being a Christian?*

---

© The General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops and *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*.