



# ARCHDIOCESE OF PORTLAND

IN OREGON

*Office of the Archbishop*

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At the time I issued my Pastoral Letter, "A True and Living Icon", on the reading of *Amoris Laetitia* in the light of Church teaching, I indicated that I would follow up on the letter with specific and practical guidelines for its implementation. At the Presbyteral Council meeting on January 19, 2017, I reiterated my intention to release these guidelines soon. I am sorry that "soon" is nearly four months later, but I did not want to rush the final editing of such an important and sensitive document.

I release these guidelines now, and I am grateful for those who assisted me in their articulation. I would quote here the final exhortation of these guidelines:

"The sanctity of marriage and God's plan for a joy filled marriage require all those engaged in pastoral ministry to exercise the tremendous responsibility entrusted to them with complete fidelity to Catholic teaching coupled with mercy and compassion. These guidelines seek to accomplish this objective. These guidelines are to be considered normative for the Archdiocese of Portland, and they are to be carefully and faithfully observed.

All those who exercise pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese of Portland are thus encouraged to encounter and accompany couples and families on their faith journey. This should be done with the awareness that, as agents of God's mercy and truth, our primary responsibility is to help lead people into a grace-filled communion with God and his Church that will lead to eternal life."

## **Pastoral Guidelines for Implementing *Amoris Laetitia*<sup>1</sup> Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon**

The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* completes the reflection on the family conducted by the Synods of Bishops of 2014 and 2015, a reflection that engaged the Church throughout the world. In issuing *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis once again calls the Church to renew and intensify the Christian missionary proclamation of God's mercy, while presenting more persuasively the Church's teaching about the nature of the family and the Sacrament of Matrimony.

In all of this the Holy Father, in union with the whole Church, hopes to strengthen existing families, and to reach out to those whose marriages have failed, including those alienated from the life of the Church. *Amoris Laetitia* therefore calls for a sensitive accompaniment of those with an imperfect grasp of Christian teaching on marriage and family life, who may not be living in accord with Catholic belief, and yet desire to be more fully integrated into Church life, including the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. The intent of the guidelines which follow is to provide the necessary pastoral guidance to that accompaniment.

While it is true that the Synods of 2014 and 2015 discussed the issues surrounding wounded marriages and families, it must not be forgotten that *Amoris Laetitia* contains a wealth of beautiful teaching and practical guidance for the strengthening of marriage and family life. The Office of Marriage and Family Life of the Archdiocese of Portland will continue to study this beautiful Apostolic Exhortation, finding ways to use its teaching and counsel to help support those preparing for marriage, those in the early years of marriage, those in stable marriages, those parents raising children and those struggling. The topics covered by these present guidelines are only part of the overall care and outreach of the Church to married couples and their families.

In preparation for issuing these guidelines for the Archdiocese of Portland, Archbishop Alexander K. Sample wrote a pastoral letter entitled *A True and Living Icon*.<sup>2</sup> In this pastoral letter, addressed to the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese, the moral foundation for these guidelines is carefully laid out. In particular, the relationship between the objective moral law and the subjective judgement of an individual conscience is discussed at length. Also discussed are three misuses of *Amoris Laetitia* in support of positions that are not compatible with Church teaching. It would be extremely important to first review *A True and Living Icon* in order to place the guidelines which follow within the framework of the authentic moral doctrine of the Church.

The Holy Father's statements in *Amoris Laetitia* build on the classic Catholic understanding, key to moral theology, of the relationship between objective truth about right and wrong – for example, the truth about marriage revealed by Jesus himself – and how the individual person

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<sup>1</sup> Although there have been many modifications and rearrangement of the material, these guidelines are drawn largely from those issued by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia issued on July 1, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Available on the website of the Archdiocese of Portland ([www.archdpdx.org](http://www.archdpdx.org)) under the tab "Our Archbishop" on the homepage.

grasps and applies that truth to particular situations in his or her judgment of conscience. Catholic teaching makes clear that the subjective conscience of the individual can never be set against the objective moral truth, as if conscience and truth were two competing principles for moral decision-making.

As St. John Paul II wrote, such a view would “pose a challenge to the *very identity of the moral conscience* in relation to human freedom and God's law. . . . Conscience is not an independent and exclusive capacity to decide what is good and what is evil” (*Veritatis Splendor* 56, 60). Rather, “conscience is the application of the law to a particular case” (*Veritatis Splendor* 59). Conscience stands under the objective moral law and should be formed by it, so that “[t]he truth about moral good, as that truth is declared in the law of reason, is practically and concretely recognized by the judgment of conscience” (*Veritatis Splendor* 61).

But since well-meaning people can err in matters of conscience, especially in a culture that is already deeply confused about complex matters of marriage and sexuality, a person may not be fully culpable for acting against the truth. Church ministers, moved by mercy, should adopt a sensitive pastoral approach in all such situations – an approach both patient but also faithfully confident in the saving truth of the Gospel and the transforming power of God’s grace, trusting in the words of Jesus Christ, who promises that “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (Jn 8:32).” Pastors should strive to avoid both a subjectivism that ignores the truth or a rigorist approach that lacks mercy.

As with all magisterial documents, *Amoris Laetitia* must be understood and read within the tradition of the Church’s teaching and life. In fact, Pope Francis himself states clearly that neither Church teaching nor the canonical discipline concerning marriage has changed: “it is understandable that neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules, canonical in nature and applicable to all cases” (*Amoris Laetitia* 300) – a point reiterated by Cardinal Schönborn at the Vatican’s presentation of the document. The Holy Father’s Exhortation should therefore be read in continuity with the great treasury of wisdom handed on by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the witness of the lives of the Saints, the teachings of Church Councils, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and previous magisterial documents.

As *Amoris Laetitia* notes, bishops must arrange for the accompaniment of estranged and hurting persons with guidelines that faithfully reflect Catholic belief. In speaking of the specific concern of the Church for the divorced and civilly remarried, *Amoris Laetitia* states: “Priests have the duty to accompany [the divorced and remarried] in helping them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the bishop.” (#300) What follows are such guidelines for the Archdiocese of Portland. They are meant for priests and deacons, seminarians and lay persons who work in the fields of marriage, sacramental ministry and pastoral care regarding matters of human sexuality.

### **For Catholic Married Couples**

Christian marriage, by its nature, is permanent, monogamous and open to life. The sexual expression of love within a truly Christian marriage is blessed by God; a powerful bond of

beauty and joy between a man and a woman. Jesus himself raised marriage to a new dignity. Every valid marriage between two baptized persons has access, through the Sacrament of Matrimony, to grace and life in Christ, especially through the shared privilege of bringing new life into the world and raising children in the knowledge and love of God.

Marriage and child-rearing are sources of great joy. They have moments (like the birth of a child) when the presence of God is palpable. But an intimately shared life can also cause stress and suffering. Marital fidelity is an ongoing encounter with reality. Thus it involves real sacrifices and the discipline of subordinating one's own needs to the needs of others. *Amoris Laetitia* reminds husbands and wives that their "common life...the entire network of relations that they build with their children and in the world around them, will be steeped in and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament" (*Amoris Laetitia* 74). Integrated into every pastoral plan that seeks to support married couples should be instruction in the sacramental grace available to them and in particular, how they can more fully "tap into" this wellspring of grace, so that they experience the power of the sacrament to strengthen their relationship, not just as an idea but as a reality that impacts their daily married life.

In support of this reality, pastors should stress the importance of common prayer and reading Sacred Scripture in the home, the grace of frequent celebration of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion, and the need for building mutual support with committed Catholic friends and family. Every family is a "domestic church," but no Christian family can survive indefinitely without encouragement from other believing families. The Christian community must especially find ways to engage and help families who are burdened by illness, financial setbacks and marital friction.

### **For Catholics and Christians who are Separated or Divorced and Not Remarried**

Pastors often encounter persons whose marriages face grave hardships, sometimes for reasons that seem undeserved, and sometimes through the fault of one or both married parties. The state of being separated or divorced, and thus finding oneself alone, can involve great pain. It can mean separation from one's children, a life without conjugal intimacy, and for some the prospect of never having children. Pastors should offer these persons friendship, understanding, introductions to reliable lay mentors and practical help, so they can sustain their fidelity even under pressure.

Likewise, parishes should be keenly concerned for the spiritual good of those who find themselves separated or divorced for a long time. Some persons, aware that a valid marriage bond is indissoluble, consciously refrain from a new union and devote themselves to carrying out their family and Christian duties. They face no obstacle related to their marital status to receiving Holy Communion and other sacraments. Indeed, they should receive the sacraments regularly, and they deserve the warm support of the Christian community, since they show extraordinary fidelity to Jesus Christ. God is faithful to them even when their spouses are not, a truth that fellow Catholics should reinforce.

## **For Catholics and Christians who are Divorced and Civilly-Remarried**

*Amoris Laetitia* has a special concern for divorced and civilly-remarried Catholics. In some cases, a valid first marriage bond may never have existed. A canonical investigation of the first marriage may be appropriate, as discussed below. In other cases, the first marriage bond of one or both of the civilly-remarried persons may be valid. This would impede any attempt at a subsequent marriage. If they have children from the original marriage, they have an important duty to raise and care for them.

The divorced and remarried should be welcomed by the Catholic community. Pastors should ensure that they do not consider themselves as “outside” the Church. On the contrary, as baptized persons, they can (and should) share in her life. *Amoris Laetitia* states, “They are not excommunicated and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 243) They are invited to attend Mass, to pray, and to take part in the activities of the parish. Their children – whether from an original marriage or from their current relationship – are integral to the life of the Catholic community, and they should be brought up in the faith. Couples should sense from their pastors, and from the whole community, the love they deserve as persons made in the image of God and as fellow Christians.

As already noted above, *Amoris Laetitia* states that priests have the duty to accompany the divorced and remarried in helping them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the bishop. “Useful in this process is an examination of conscience through moments of reflection and repentance. The divorced and remarried should ask themselves: how did they act towards their children when the conjugal union entered into crisis; whether or not they made attempts at reconciliation; what has become of the abandoned party; what consequences the new relationship has on the rest of the family and the community of the faithful; and what example is being set for young people who are preparing for marriage.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 300). The Exhortation continues: “What we are speaking of is a process of accompaniment and discernment which guides the faithful to an awareness of their situation before God...[T]his discernment can never prescind from the Gospel demands of truth and charity, as proposed by the Church.” (*Amoris Laetitia* 300)

In light of this, priests must help the divorced and civilly remarried to form their consciences according to the truth. This is a true work of mercy. It should be undertaken with patience, compassion and a genuine desire for the good of all concerned, sensitive to the wounds of each person, and gently leading each toward the Lord. Its purpose is not condemnation, but the opposite: a full reconciliation of the person with God and neighbor, and restoration to the fullness of visible communion with Jesus Christ and his Church.

In fact, pastors must always convey Catholic teaching faithfully to all persons – including the divorced and remarried – both in the confessional as well as publicly. They should do this with great confidence in the power of God’s grace, knowing that, when spoken with love, the truth heals, builds up, and sets free (cf. Jn 8:32).

In some cases, one can reasonably ask whether an original marriage bond was valid, and thus whether grounds may exist for a decree of nullity (an “annulment”). In our age, such grounds

are not uncommon. People in those circumstances should be strongly encouraged to seek the assistance of a marriage tribunal of the Church. The inquiry in these cases should always be guided by the truth of the situation: *Did a valid marriage exist from the very beginning, i.e. at the time marriage vows were exchanged?* Decrees of nullity are not an automatic remedy or an entitlement. They cannot be granted informally or privately by individual pastors or priests. Because marriage is a public reality, and because a determination about the validity of a marriage affects the lives, the rights, and the duties of all parties touched by it, there must be a canonical process and a decision by the proper authority under canon law. Such matters require that those conducting the inquiry be both compassionate and alert to the truth. They should investigate these matters in a timely way, respecting the rights of all parties, and ensuring that all have access to the Church's canonical procedures. The Church's ministers should be especially solicitous in encouraging and supporting individuals who approach the tribunal for an investigation into the validity of their marriage.

Can divorced and civilly-remarried persons receive the sacraments? (Here we are speaking of those who have not received a declaration of nullity for any previous marriages and have therefore not had their civil marriage convalidated by the Church.) Generally speaking, baptized members of the Church are always in principle invited to the sacraments. The confessional's doors are always open to those seeking God with a contrite heart. What of Holy Communion? *Every Catholic*, including the divorced and civilly-remarried, must sacramentally confess all serious sins with a firm purpose to change, before receiving the Holy Eucharist. In some cases, the subjective responsibility of the person for a past action may be diminished. But the person must still repent and renounce the sin, with a firm purpose to amend his or her life.

Divorced and civilly-remarried persons who wish to do so have essentially two paths to return to the reception of the sacraments. The Church lovingly invites them to take the steps necessary to return to a life of grace and, if possible, to "regularize" their marital situation.

In many cases, divorced and civilly-remarried couples can seek to "regularize" their marital status in the Church. This is the first path. This canonical process begins with seeking a possible declaration of nullity through the diocesan tribunal as described above. The Church's tribunal investigates previous marriages to determine if a valid bond existed in those marriages. If it is judged that no valid bond existed in any previous unions, then that person is free to marry in the Church and return to the sacraments. Again, pastors and those working with such couples should assist and encourage them to approach the tribunal to see what possibilities exist through the canonical process.

With divorced and civilly-remarried persons, Church teaching requires them to refrain from sexual intimacy. This constitutes the second path to the reception of the sacraments. This applies even if they must (for the care of their children) continue to live under one roof. Undertaking to live as brother and sister is necessary for the divorced and civilly-remarried to receive reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance, which could then open the way to reception of the Holy Eucharist. Such individuals are encouraged to approach the Sacrament of Penance regularly, having recourse to God's great mercy in that sacrament if they fail in chastity.

Even where, for the sake of their children, they live under one roof in chaste continence and have received absolution (so that they are free from personal sin), the unhappy fact remains that, objectively speaking, their public state and condition of life in the new relationship are contrary to Christ's teaching against divorce. Concretely speaking, therefore, where pastors give Holy Communion to divorced and remarried persons trying to live chastely, they should do so in a manner that will avoid giving scandal or implying that Christ's teaching can be set aside. This is left to the prudential judgement of the pastor involved. In other contexts care must also be taken to avoid the unintended appearance of an endorsement of divorce and civil remarriage; thus, divorced and civilly remarried persons would not hold positions of responsibility in a parish (e.g. on a parish council), nor would they carry out liturgical ministries or functions (e.g., lector, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion).

This may be a hard teaching for some, but it corresponds with our belief about the nature of the Holy Eucharist, marriage and the Church. Of course if any previous marriages have received a declaration of nullity by a Church tribunal, the couple is free to marry in the Church and return to the sacraments.

Special mention should be made of those who are preparing to be baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church, usually through the RCIA process. It is extremely important that their marital situation be assessed at the beginning of their inquiry. If they are in an irregular marriage, they cannot be received into the Church (thus receiving the sacraments) until their marital status is (if possible) resolved. They could commit to live as brother and sister until such resolution occurs, but they must be reminded that a declaration of nullity for a previous marriage is not guaranteed.

The grace of Jesus Christ is a real and powerful seed of change in the believing heart. The lives of many saints bear witness that grace can take great sinners and, by its power of interior renewal, remake them in holiness of life. Pastors and all who work in the service of the Church should tirelessly promote hope in this saving mystery.

### **For Unmarried Couples Who Cohabitate**

Cohabitation of unmarried couples is now common, often influenced by convenience, financial concerns, immigration issues, fear of a final commitment, or a desire to "try out" relationships. Many children are born to these relationships, which are not founded on a permanent commitment. Cohabiting couples and couples who use contraception often enter RCIA, or seek to return to the Catholic faith, only dimly aware of the problems created by their situation.

Working with such couples, pastors should consider two issues. *First*, does the couple have children together? A natural obligation in justice exists for parents to care for their children. And children have a natural right to be raised by both parents. Pastors should try, to the degree possible and when a permanent commitment of marriage is viable, to strengthen existing relationships where a couple already has children together. *Second*, does the couple have the maturity to turn their relationship into a permanently committed marriage? Often couples who live together refrain from making final commitments because one or both persons is lacking sufficient maturity or there exist other significant obstacles to entering a valid union. Here,

prudence plays a vital role. Where one or another person is not capable of, or unwilling to commit to, a permanent marriage, the pastor should urge them to separate.

Where the couple is disposed to marriage, they should be encouraged to practice chastity until they are sacramentally or canonically married. They will find this challenging, but again, with the help of grace, mastering the self is possible -- and this fasting from sexual intimacy is a strong element of spiritual preparation for an enduring life together. Of course, persons should also be guided to an awareness of their situation before God, so that they can make a good confession before their wedding, and so begin their married life in a state of grace and with joy in the Lord.

Absent children, such couples should ready themselves for marriage by a time of domestic separation. Where a cohabiting couple already has children, the good of the young may require the couple to remain living together, but in chastity and continence.

### **For Persons who experience Same-Sex Attraction**

The same call to chastity and holiness of life applies equally to *all* persons, whether attracted to the same or opposite sex. The pastoral care of persons with same-sex attraction should be guided by the same love and respect the Church seeks to offer all people. Ministers of the Church should emphasize to such persons that they are loved by God, that Jesus desires them to receive an inheritance as adopted sons and daughters of the Father, and that, as with every Christian, this is made possible through the gift of grace.

Those who work in pastoral ministry often encounter persons with diverse forms of same-sex attraction. Many such persons have found it possible to live out a vocation to Christian marriage with children, notwithstanding experiencing some degree of same-sex attraction. Others have found it difficult to do so. Because Christian marriage with children is a great good, those who find themselves unable to embrace this good may suffer from a sense of loss or loneliness. And, as with those who are attracted to the opposite sex, some can find chastity very difficult. Pastoral care of such persons must never lose sight of their individual calling to holiness. The power of God's grace can make union with Jesus Christ a real possibility for their lives.

Catholic belief, rooted in Sacred Scripture, sacred Tradition and the natural law, reserves all expressions of sexual intimacy to a man and a woman covenanted to each other in a valid marriage. We hold this teaching to be true and unchangeable, tied as it is to our nature and purpose as children of a loving God who desires our happiness. Those with predominant same-sex attractions are therefore called to struggle to live chastely for the kingdom of God. In this endeavor they have need of support, friendship and understanding even if they fail. They should be counseled, like everyone else, to have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, where they should be treated with gentleness and compassion. In fact, more than a few such persons, with the help of grace and the sacraments, live exemplary and even heroic Christian lives.

## **The pastoral situation of same-sex couples**

When two persons of the same sex present themselves openly in a parish as a same-sex couple (including those who may have entered into a same-sex union under civil law), pastors must judge prudently how best to address the situation, both for the sake of the authentic spiritual good of the persons involved, and the common good of the believing community. It is important to remember that some same-sex couples live together in chaste friendship and without sexual intimacy, and many pastors have had the experience of counseling such couples. The Church welcomes all men and women who honestly seek to encounter the Lord, whatever their circumstances. But two persons in an active, public same-sex relationship, no matter how sincere, offer a serious counter-witness to Catholic belief, that can only produce moral confusion in the community. Such a relationship cannot be accepted into the life of the parish without undermining the faith of the community, most notably the children.

Those living openly same-sex lifestyles would not hold positions of responsibility in a parish, nor would they carry out any liturgical ministry or function until they are reconciled with the Church and are living in accord with the Church's moral teaching.

## **Final Exhortation**

The sanctity of marriage and God's plan for a joy filled marriage require all those engaged in pastoral ministry to exercise the tremendous responsibility entrusted to them with complete fidelity to Catholic teaching coupled with mercy and compassion. These guidelines seek to accomplish this objective. These guidelines are to be considered normative for the Archdiocese of Portland, and they are to be carefully and faithfully observed.

All those who exercise pastoral ministry in the Archdiocese of Portland are thus encouraged to encounter and accompany couples and families on their faith journey. This should be done with the awareness that, as agents of God's mercy and truth, our primary responsibility is to help lead people into a grace-filled communion with God and his Church that will lead to eternal life.