



AMORIS LAETITIA

STUDY GUIDE

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OVERVIEW

AMORIS LAETITIA

SUMMARY

As a post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* is supposed to summarize the synods of the previous two years and give the Pope's recommendations drawn from them. These two synods have been on the family so *Amoris Laetitia* is a summary of what the Church should do to help the family. As such, Francis mixes analysis of the current situation, theological reflections on marriage and the family, and recommendations going forward.

The first sentence sets the tone for the whole document: "The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church." Francis has decided to focus principally on the positive aspects and even when he goes into the negative aspects he prefers to focus on the exceptions over coming down hard and fast with lots of rules.

There has been a lot of confusion in the media regarding a few comments made in this document while the rest of it has been forgotten. This guide will mention those items and clarify them but consciously try to focus on the positive message that Pope Francis wants to get across over discussions of those controversies.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

Marriage and Family, Education of Children, Family, Love (especially Marital Love).

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF SESSIONS

This guide recommends eleven sessions: one for the intro and one for each chapter, except chapter four which is split into two.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Participants need a copy of *Amoris Laetitia*, available at: w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf
- Participants need a copy of this study guide

- **OPTIONAL:** *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- **OPTIONAL:** *Familiaris Consortio* by John Paul II which is a papal exhortation written in similar circumstances and referred back to quite a bit by Francis, available at: w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Basically anyone can participate because the Pope addresses the document to pastoral workers in the Church but also so that it can be understood by the faithful. Given the themes, however, it probably works best for those already married or considering marriage in the short to medium term (about 18+ but not a strict limit).

STRUCTURE

Each session begins with an introduction to the material followed by questions, occasionally with interpretation notes between them. The introduction can be read before reading the chapter and as a reminder of what was previously read when you begin a group discussion. The questions here are meant to help you understand and reflect on the text, and to apply the text to your life and the lives of those around you. I have included paragraph numbers after each question so if nobody knows the answer, you can look it up. I have generally focused on questions pertaining to couples and not those pertaining to pastoral workers or pastors. Some study sessions contain short notes to avoid misinterpretation. (The most controversial chapter, eight, gets over half the total notes.)

HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

Between the sessions, each individual needs to read the text. The break up into multiple sessions means that the average is only 20 pages per session, and these pages are small with wide margins. The introductions



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SESSION 4

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING TO JESUS: THE VOCATION OF THE FAMILY, PARAGRAPHS 58–88

OVERVIEW

Instead of beginning with dry doctrine to explain the Church's teaching, Francis focuses on the vocation or calling of individuals to join in families. This vocation is an individual's call of love from God, the other spouse, and ultimately from one's children.

NOTES

- Paragraph 68 has something interesting of a historical note we can easily miss. There are objective arguments against contraceptives and subjective arguments based on the interiority of the person. Historically, the objective arguments were the focus and *Humanae Vitae* is the first Church document to bring in the subjective (it has both). John Paul II developed the subjective aspect of these arguments quite a bit. Francis seems to return the focus to the objective arguments.
- Paragraph 78 is not justifying irregular unions but trying to present a path for couples already in that situation to move towards marriage rather than pointing out to them something they probably already know: that cohabitation is immoral.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What message should resound in the family? What should be our response to this message? (58)
2. Should our message on marriage be dry and doctrinal? What should inform our message? (59)
3. What does the New Testament teach us about marriage? Why is it a gift? What can I do in the next week to make it more consciously a gift? (61)
4. Is divorce possible? Why or why not? How does Christ redeem marriage? (62–63)
5. Francis gives the Holy Family of Nazareth and Jesus' encounters with families as models for Christian families. What lessons can I take from the Holy Family? Which one of the examples of Jesus' encounters inspires me? In what aspect? (64–66)
6. How does the family help the Church understand my mission? What can I do to make my family a model for the Church? (67)
7. How do the teachings of Francis sit with the teachings of previous Popes? What does his summary of Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI in 68-70 show in this regard?
8. Is marriage a "Social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment"? Why or why not? What does it represent? What are some consequences for my marriage from this understanding? (71–73)
9. What is the relationship between sexual union, marriage vows, and common life? (74)
10. Can we understand natural marriage without the sacrament of marriage? How does the sacrament change our view of all marriages? (77)
11. What does Francis say to couples who are unable to have children? (80)
12. Why do children deserve to be born in love and as a gift? What forms of conceiving a child go against this? (81)
13. How does Francis mention that a family can be a "Sanctuary of life"? Are there any other ways we can make our families "Sanctuaries of life"? (83)
14. How does Francis relate the roles of the Church and of parents in raising their children? What practical implications does this have for what I need to transmit to my kids? (84–85)
15. How do Vatican II and the Catechism envision families as models of the Trinity? (86)
16. Francis says every family is, "A gift for the Church." What does that mean? Can I think of two or three examples of how families have been a gift to the Church? (87)



SESSION 5

CHAPTER 4: LOVE IN MARRIAGE, PART I: OUR DAILY LOVE, PARAGRAPHS 89–119

OVERVIEW

This chapter is a profound meditation on the meaning of love and its application in Christian marriage. The first half of this chapter is an extended meditation on St. Paul's hymn of love in I Corinthians 13. Francis seeks to develop this hymn in light of marriage. This may be the most beautiful part of the exhortation and the one that can most easily be taken to prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Reading the hymn of love, which of the characteristics of love initially attracts me most? Why? (90)
2. What is the meaning of *makrothyméi* or “patient”? What is the difference between being patient and being a doormat? (91–92)
3. What is the meaning of *chrestéuetai* or “kind”? How does Francis respond to the idea that love is a feeling? (93–94)
4. What is the meaning of *zelói* or “jealous”? How is such jealousy different from envy? How does this relate to the last two Commandments? (95–96)
5. What is the meaning of *perpereúetai* or “arrogant”? What recommendation does Francis give regarding this characteristic of love and unknowledgeable family members? Can I apply it? (97–98)
6. What is the meaning of *aschemonéi* or “rude”? How is rudeness related to making others suffer? What is the difference between a kind look and being antisocial? (99–100, note: here refers to being against society and using others, not just “asocial”, so the Pope isn’t condemning introverts.)
7. What is the meaning of *zeteí ta heautés* or “insist on its own way”? Should we seek to love or be loved? (101–102)
8. What is the meaning of *paroxýnetai* or “irritable”? What suggestion does Francis give for when we are annoyed? (103–104)
9. What is the meaning of *logízetai to kakón* or “resentful”? How does this relate to family communion and forgiveness? (105–108)
10. What is the meaning of *chárei epì te adikía* or “rejoices with others”? How can my family become a greater place of joy? (109–110)
11. What is the meaning of *panta stégei* or “bears all things”? How should the speech of married couples be between each other? (112–113)
12. What is the meaning of *panta pisteúei* or “believes all things”? What bearing does this have on controlling other family members? Can this be related to “helicopter parenting”? How can I apply this in my life? (114–115)
13. What is the meaning of *panta elpízei* or “hopes all things”? How does our love relate to our inevitable death? Does love go beyond the grave? (116–117)
14. What is the meaning of *panta hypoménei* or “endures all things”? Should we ever give up? How do we apply this in a family? Can our love grow stronger? (118–119)
15. What lessons can you draw from the various characteristics of love that Francis articulated? Is there something you can change this week about how you love your family?
16. After reading through Francis’s meditation which of the characteristics of love attracts me most? Why? Has it changed?

NOTES



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SESSION 8

CHAPTER 6: SOME PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES, PARAGRAPHS 199–258

OVERVIEW

The first part of the chapter deals with marriage prep. Then a large chunk of this chapter discusses various specific problems that can arise in marriage, such as illness of a spouse or communication breakdown. The Pope gives good but fairly general advice similar to what most good pastors would give.

NOTES

- To understand, “They are not excommunicated,” (243) we need to understand the distinction between 2 different practices. Excommunication is a canonical reality either imposed or triggered when someone consciously and persistently chooses to believe something against a dogma or to act contrary to the authority of the Church. Receiving the Eucharist is to help the weak not just for the perfect; however, when Catholics are conscious of an unconfessed mortal sin or consciously persist in a state of life not approved by the Church, they are asked to refrain from receiving the Eucharist, since in this case there is an objective contradiction between worthily receiving Communion and refusing to live as Jesus clearly taught. Francis is talking about the 1st level not the second.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why are Christian families the principal agents of the Church as family apostolate? What value does their “Joy-filled witness” have in this regard? (200)
2. Is any Christian exempt from the missionary mandate of the Church? What ways can you see for families to live their missionary mandate? (201)
3. What role does Francis see for the parish in family ministry? Does your parish live the harmony he hopes for? How can you live it? (202)
4. What way should the Church help couples prepare for marriage? What is the value of premarital chastity? Is it just preparation a few months before the marriage or is something more being asked for? How should the community help the engaged couple to be aware of the challenges of marriage? (205–211)
5. What elements should couples know but are often ignorant of? How should we prepare couples theologically and not just practically for the marriage ceremony? (214–216)
6. Francis warns about love growing stagnant early in the marriage. What alternatives does he offer both as a view of love and as aids to young couples? Do we see those aids? If not, can we create some here and now? (217–220)
7. Francis talks about “Unduly high expectations about conjugal life” as a cause of divorce. What does he mean? Have I ever seen it? What expectations did I have when I got married and do I have now? (221)
8. Francis talks about openness to children making love truly human: why and how? (222)
9. What are some of the means Francis proposes to “Encourage families to grow in faith”? Which do I do? Are there any I can add to my family’s routine? (227)
10. Every marriage will encounter crises. How should we deal with them? What advice does Francis give so we can grow from them rather than stagnate in them? What is the role of communion? Of communication? What advice that he gives might help a friend of mine? (232–238)
11. Is separating from a spouse necessarily sinful? How should the Church help those abandoned by spouses? What about those entering new unions? What about the children of divorced couples? How does the Church care for them? (241–243, 245–246)
12. Why should we show respect for homosexuals? How is this an expression of “love the sinner but hate the sin”? (250)
13. What problems arise from homosexual unions being treated as marriages? (251)



SESSION 9

CHAPTER 7: TOWARDS A BETTER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN, PARAGRAPHS 259–290

OVERVIEW

This chapter is short and focused on raising children properly. It will not be quoted much in the media, except maybe out of context to further agendas unrelated to educating children in the faith. Nonetheless, it has some important lessons about teaching hope to children and leading them to a self-giving love with others.

NOTES

- “A person may clearly and willingly desire something evil, but do so as the result of an irresistible passion or a poor upbringing.” (273) This may seem to grant permission to do anything, but in fact it refers to the person’s conscience, where they may be unaware that a certain thing is a sin. We need to raise children in such a way that this doesn’t happen.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Can parents ignore the moral development of their children? Do parents have a duty to control what their children are exposed to? How can each of us improve our influence on our children’s moral development? (259–260)
2. What about “helicopter parenting”? Francis distinguishes between “obsession” and “education”: how do we distinguish if we are educating or obsessing over our children? How does this distinction help us in teaching children responsibility? (261)
3. Are schools helpful in the moral education of children? Can parents leave all moral education to the school? (263)
4. Is, “Judging what seems best’ or knowing clearly what needs to be done,” enough? Why not? What level do children need to reach? (265)
5. Francis lists 12 ways of cultivating moral education. Can I remember them all? Which do I apply? Is there one or two I can add to the way I cultivate moral education in my own children? (267)
6. Is discipline or correction wrong? How can it be an incentive and encouragement? How can it be a discouragement? Is there something I learned about disciplining my own children from this section? (268–270)
7. How should we form children’s consciences? Should we teach them sacrifice? Are there consequences to not forming their conscience? (271–273)
8. Francis lists a number of ways family life is the environment in which children are educated. How does the family teach human values? How does it teach hope? How does it socialize children? How does it teach sensitivity to others’ sufferings? (274–277)
9. Why shouldn’t the parents be domineering? Why should they help children to learn how to trust others? What consequences come from domineering parents? (279)
10. What does Francis say about sex education? Why does he focus on love and mutual self-giving? What is the danger of focusing on “safe sex”? (280–286)
11. “Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the faith.” Why? How can this be done? (287)
12. Francis mentions that education in the faith needs to adapt to each child. With such an admonition, can we be satisfied with weekly catechism class with 20 other kids? What characteristics, personalities or difficulties do my children have that will require me to adapt how I present the faith? What about my nieces, my nephews, my grandkids, or my friends’ kids? (288)
13. Is teaching knowledge and concrete dogma enough? Why does Francis encourage families to live an “Evangelizing mission”? (289)



SESSION 10

CHAPTER 8: ACCOMPANYING, DISCERNING AND INTEGRATING WEAKNESS, PARAGRAPHS 291–312

OVERVIEW

This is by far the most controversial chapter of the document and the one with the most media coverage, but it deals with a very narrow set of cases and doesn't change the doctrinal or moral judgment of the Church – it just focuses on the role of forming consciences over the role of judging the morality of particular actions, the Church having both roles. Much of the interpretation of this chapter in the media and public discourse has been beyond the text and even at times against the text. Francis reaffirmed the judgments of John Paul II, so he clearly wants to be in harmony with traditional Catholic doctrine.

NOTES

- “The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone for ever.” (296) Francis is not denying the reality of hell but speaking of punishment rules within the Church – the sacrament of confession is open to all and reconciliation for every punishment within the Church is possible, although some situations require changes in behavior on the part of the individual.
- In paragraph 298 Francis does not explicitly state that couples who want to remain in second unions are called to celibacy in those unions, but this can be clearly implied in three ways: first, he refers back to *Familiaris Consortio* and agrees with its conclusions which explicitly include celibacy; second, footnote 327 speaks of couples living as “Brothers and sisters” which is another way to say living celibacy; and third, he doesn't legitimize this second union as a true marriage and all sexual intercourse outside of true marriages is illicit.
- Footnote 327 in paragraph 300 does not authorize Communion for those who are cohabitating—whether in a second civil marriage or otherwise—without a commitment or at least an attempt to live as brothers and sisters. Francis refers back to *Evangelii Gaudium* where he exhorted priests to give God's grace in the sacrament of confession abundantly and not require someone to be

absolutely perfect to receive it. I think what he refers to here is a greater leniency in regards to couples who authentically try to live as brother and sister for the sake of their children but occasionally fail. It is important to note that in the same paragraph he explicitly states, “Neither the Synod nor this Exhortation could be expected to provide a new set of general rules.”

- “It is possible that in an objective situation of sin—which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such—a person can be living in God's grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church's help to this end” (305). This refers to people who live in what has generally been called a “State of sin” (like cohabitation or a civil, non-sacramental marriage) without realizing that what they do is sinful and, thus, they may not be responsible for the sin.
- Footnote 351 in paragraph 305 is like footnote 327—not authorizing the Eucharist to fornicating or adulterous couples, but asking priests to be generous with those who attempt to live the Church's teaching but occasionally fail. The repetition can be noted in that he refers to the same two paragraphs (44 and 47) in *Evangelii Gaudium* in both footnotes.
- It is worth noting that Francis uses “participating fully” for young people considering marriage in paragraph 307, while he refers to the divorced and civilly remarried only being “fully integrated” or “participating” in the Church, indicating he realizes there are some limitations on their full participation.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The Church recognizes that marriages shouldn't break up but that people are weak. How can we love the sinner while hating the sin in this situation? (291)
2. What do you think of the definition of marriage in paragraph 292? How does it relate to Christ and the Church? What does the sacrament do? Do all



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