

First Family Gathering on *Amoris Laetitia* and *We Are Family*

Introduction to the Apostolic Exhortation

I. WELCOME and OPENING PRAYER – at Holy Mass or in the place where the gathering is to be held*

- ◆ We gather as faithful sons and daughters of the Church
- ◆ And as faithful sons and daughters of Don Bosco
- ◆ To live the call being made to us by the Holy Father and by the Rector Major

PRESENTATION (Presentation and Theme of the Strenna from *We Are Family*)

On January 1, 2006, my predecessor Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, the Rector Major at that time, gave us as a Strenna: “‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2,52).” [1] It was an invitation by the Rector Major to renew our commitment on behalf of the family, taking up the invitation issued by John Paul II to defend life through the family. It also marked the 150th anniversary of the death of Mama Margaret, Don Bosco’s mother and a true mother to the boys of the Oratory of Valdocco.

Ten years later I offer the whole Salesian Family around the world this new strenna, which is meant to focus our attention on families in the most diverse situations in which we find ourselves. The subject has been suggested, and it could not be otherwise, by the priority that the Church is giving to the need for ever greater and more appropriate pastoral care for families.

Pope Francis decided to devote two synods to reflection on the family, following up some of the pastoral ideas that he had proposed in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013. There was the extraordinary synod in 2014 and the ordinary one in 2015. After these synods came the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, signed by the Pope on March 19, 2016.

I think that this present period in the Church’s life demands that we, the Salesian Family of Don Bosco throughout the world, ought to give priority to the educational-pastoral care that we must devote to families.

As is the case every year, the strenna is addressed to every one of the members and all the groups of the Salesian Family, with the aim of making us more aware of our task and our duty toward families, so that we may find practical ways of carrying out the service of accompaniment that is expected of us.

THE TOPIC OF THE STRENNA

When we say, “We are Family! Every home, a school of life and love,” we want to declare from the start that all of us, each one of us, has had the experience of having been born into the bosom of a family, with the beauty and the limitations of every single family; so it was for us. We were born into the bosom of a family and are marked as having been part of a family where, ideally, we find a school of life and love. We are convinced that the family is the concrete human reality in which we should learn the art of life and love.

The family, all families throughout the world – while being different – are made up of individuals who love, speak to, and communicate with each other, who share and make sacrifices for each other, who look out for each other and protect each other’s lives.

In general, we developed as persons living in a family, enjoying the warmth of that home and receiving in that home our name, from one or both of our parents, and the dignity this brings. In the family we experienced affection for the first time and enjoyed the intimacy of “feeling at home.” In the family we learned to say thank you, ask for forgiveness, and ask for permission.

We are well aware that not all babies who are born have the good fortune of experiencing this, but while taking into account the diversity of contexts and cultures, I think it can be said that most of us have experienced this kind of family life.

Someone might say: What does this have to do with us as the Salesian Family? It is relevant precisely because we ourselves, as the Salesian Family of Don Bosco, are the first to whom this message is addressed, since we are well aware of the links that bind us together as a religious family. It is a family within which, while taking into account the diversity of our 31 groups (congregations, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, associations of the faithful, etc.), the respective constitutions, regulations, or statutes present the family spirit and the family atmosphere as the constitutive element of our being, our identity, and they make explicit reference to pastoral activity in the family and with families.

This helps us realize our responsibility as Salesian Family, a responsibility that in practical terms means that we cannot turn our gaze in a different direction than the one to which the Universal Church under the guidance of Pope Francis is strongly committed. It is a responsibility that demands that we as educators of boys and girls, teenagers and young people, gaze through “Salesian eyes” at the real situation of families nowadays, and offer our humble contribution.

“BLESSED IS THE FAMILY” FROM THE SALESIAN FAMILY SPIRITUALITY DAYS 2017*

Blessed is the family whose God is the Lord, and that walks in His Presence.

Blessed is the family founded on love and whose attitudes, words, gestures, and decisions spring forth from love.

Blessed is the family open to life, welcoming children as a gift, valuing the presence of the elderly, and sensitive to the poor and suffering.

Blessed is the family that prays together to praise the Lord, entrusting to Him its concerns and hopes.

Blessed is the family that lives what ties it together with freedom, allowing everyone the autonomy to grow as a unique individual.

Blessed is the family that finds time for dialogue, to relax and have fun and to celebrate together.

Blessed is the family that is not a slave to the television and that chooses programs of value and meaning.

Blessed is the family in which differences do not create “drama” but which provide the setting where each one can grow in respect, goodness, and mutual forgiveness.

Blessed is the family where peace reigns within and among all: therein are found the roots that will nourish world peace.

Blessed is the family that lives in harmony with the universe, and that commits itself to construct a world that is ever more human.

Blessed is the family that decides that it is possible to live some of these beatitudes even if it does not recognize itself in all of them.

Blessed is the family in which life is a joy, being apart brings homesickness, and returning there is a cause for celebration.

*(Opening prayer if gathering held outside of Holy Mass)

II. VIDEO, POWER POINT PRESENTATION, OR GUIDED GROUP READING

[Introduction by Fr. Pat Angelucci, SDB*](#) (also on Don Bosco Salesian Portal YouTube Channel)

Power Point Series on *Amoris Laetitia* by Sr. Theresa Kelly, FMA*

Diocese of Broken Bay Study Guide*

The Joy of Love: Group Reading Guide by Bill Huebsch (will need to be purchased)

N.B. – All of the above come with prepared discussion questions

*Available for viewing/downloading from the homepage of <https://DonBoscoSalesianPortal.org>

III. PERSONAL REFLECTION TIME and MEAL & SHARING AT TABLE/SMALL GROUP SHARING

IV. LARGE GROUP SHARING

Bringing back to the large group the discussion held at table or in the small groups

V. HOMEWORK (Future sessions will also have a practical commitment, based on the lesson)

We follow the call of the Rector Major to read the Introduction to and Chapter 1 of *Amoris Laetitia*:

AN INVITATION TO A CALM AND QUIET READING, WITH A HEART PREPARED FOR DIALOGUE AND ENCOUNTER WITH THE APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA

I now invite all of you to read carefully and calmly, with a heart open to dialogue and personal involvement, what the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (AL) is saying to us, in order to discover what the document is offering to us and requesting from us.

Anyone who is a believer and loves the Church will realize that this apostolic exhortation is indeed a service to the human race and a true spiritual and pastoral treasure. It is from our awareness of being the “Salesian Family” that we want to become involved.[2]

Pope Francis’s exhortation is based on the magisterium of the recent Popes, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and on the two synods of 2014 and 2015, whose final reports are quoted in abundance. It therefore sums up the Church’s reflection over many years, but at the same time it introduces a change of tone, language, and perspective that moves from the canonical plane to a more pastoral one. The Supreme Pontiff himself declares: “We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times ... we have proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.”[3]

Introduction (AL nos. 1-7)

The exhortation speaks about the joy of love as it is lived in the family and about the Church’s rejoicing over this reality. As we have said, it brings together the contributions of two synods [4] and points out that the family has very many complex and varied features in which religious, political, cultural, economic, and legal aspects all come together. In this vast context, we are all called to safeguard family life with love. Rather than being a problem, families are an opportunity. In fact, we can say that in spite of the crises with which the family nowadays is faced, the new generations still see it as the safest place for them, a place where they can find unconditional acceptance.

[1] Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Letter of the Rector Major: “‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in favor with God and man’ (Lk 2,52),” AGC no. 392, pp. 3-46.

[2] Editor's note: This paragraph is not in the Spanish version of the commentary, but it is in the Italian.

[3] *Amoris Laetitia*, 36.

CONCLUDING PRAYER:

PRAYER TO THE HOLY FAMILY FROM *AMORIS LAETITIA*

“Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.” – Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 325.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer.
Amen.

Materials necessary:

Laptop, LCD Projector, and Internet

Handouts: Reflection Booklets or Photocopies of Readings/Reflection Questions

Folders, pens, and a holy card with the Prayer to the Holy Family

Copies of *We Are Family* and *Amoris Laetitia* (also available on Don Bosco Salesian Portal in multiple languages)

N.B. – Future sessions will add a section on the RM's comment on the chapter being studied