

AMORIS LAETITIA CHAPTER 6: SOME PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

A partner is defined as a person who takes part in an undertaking with another or others. Between the people of Faith and the Church, we make for excellent partners on a journey that leads us through life and to God. An exceptionally important part of this journey is that of marriage. To every person, marriage is an exciting mystery filled with potential which requires our best effort to understand and responsibility to develop: truly it engages us all.

Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* speaks to how the partnership of marriage involves a role and responsibility of man and woman to become a committed couple. It recognizes how a couple shares something with one another which they will not and could not share with any other person on this earth: it is a love unique between them and from any other form of human relationship to be found. This is so because God designed it to be so; God created us to connect with another and we sense this within our very selves. The first experience of this bond of love is within our families. It begins and is felt in child to parent, it is seen between mother and father, and it is developed in families to our communities. Indeed, the qualities and intention of a strong marriage are its own reward; we follow this by the example of those who live it well and the way in which they inspire others to live and give to the same.

Within any new relationship there is always excitement and challenge. As education prepares us for our future, so a quality formation in marriage will assist in preparing couples for a life lived between two and among the wider community. A couple does not know what they may encounter together; but they desire to be prepared, both to overcome challenges and delight all the more in the joys which will surely occur. The Church stands ready and willing and is eager to offer pastoral assistance through this time of early growth. Sound preparation and mature formation will become the foundation to their success. And, the simple ways can often be the surest of ways to achieving this success: intimate time together, communication in community, and speaking with God. Over time, and as this couple matures, they will then be able to give back in witness and wisdom perhaps to children and hopefully to younger couples who explore and learn this for themselves. In so doing, each person of every family will pass on the tradition and values received, and so contribute to the experience and heritage for a future generation.

Amoris Laetitia affirms how love is always a gift from God; like any good gift, we seek to show and share it with those around us. A married couple in love naturally share their love with those around them. The Church in general, and the Parish in particular, are places which recognize, celebrate, assist, protect and promote their relationship. In turn, the couple will receive affirmation, advice, and assistance as we would within a home. However, if a married couple no longer attends the Church or choose not to draw on their Faith which brought them to each other, it may become similar to walking a long path alone. Such a path is indeed private and a couple will have one another on which to draw support, but it eventually becomes lonely and they risk becoming lost or subject to greater difficulties without help. Furthermore, to do so would be for them to miss out on a shared experience of past and present with others, while the rest of the community misses their contribution for the present and the future.

The Church continues to offer and desires to share the sacredness of the Sacrament of Marriage. Like a guide on a journey or an expert within a field, so the Church can and will be for a couple who are searching their hearts in love: it is and will always be a companion who seeks to introduce and relay God's will for them. The Church has travelled this road of life for over two thousand years and so can point out what to do, where we should be, with whom we should seek company, when we ought to arrive, and why we are capable of doing so successfully. It is through this purpose which *Amoris Laetitia* expresses and confirms how husband and wife are always special partners to each other, and how married couples are vital and valuable partners with the Church; together, we will then be and become the faithful partner to God - God who is and remains our pastoral partner for life and for all.

~Father Dean Dowle