

Teams Of Our Lady  
International Leading Team

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# **SECOND UNION COUPLES**

*Pastoral Letter from the ERI*

Paris, July - 2023



**PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE ERI**  
Sensitizing Team Couples  
to an Evangelizing Action  
in Accompaniment of  
Second-Union Couples

*“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).*

**Pope Francis,**  
*Evangelii Gaudium, no. 169.*

**Paris, July 2023**



Teams of Our Lady

### **Responsability**

International Responsible Team  
49, rue de la Glacière – 7<sup>ème</sup>  
75013 – Paris – France  
Tel + 33 (0) 143 319621  
contact@equipes-notre-dame.com

### **Content coordination and execution**

International Responsible Team

### **Assembly and Realization (Brasil)**

Nova Bandeira – Prod Editoriais  
novabandeira@novabandeira.com

### **Cover Image**

Can Stock Photo

### **Layout**

Douglas D. Rejowski (Brasil)

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# 1. Introduction

This document has a well-defined and simple objective: to sensitize and stimulate the team couples, or the team members in general, to engage in a pastoral and evangelizing action - in their parish or diocese - that helps to welcome, accompany and integrate second union couples into the life of the Church.

Pope Francis, in his message to the Teams of Our Lady Movement at the end of his personal meeting with Team members at the Third International Regional Couples Gathering in September 2015, said the following:<sup>1</sup>

(...) I cannot but encourage the couples of the Équipes Notre Dame to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards people whose marriage has failed.<sup>2</sup>

Father Caffarel, in a document entitled “Christian Marriage in the Church of the 20th Century”, dated December 1960, in which he deals with a number of important issues for the pre-Vatican II Church, suggests a pastoral and evangelizing effort in the fields of marriage and the family, such as attention to “divorced people who remarry”. And it states textually:<sup>3</sup>

Some of them are unable to leave their partner because they have children whose education must be continued. But there are among them those who, having discovered or rediscovered the Christian faith, aspire to a spiritual life, even though they know that the practice of the sacraments is forbidden to them. *Would it not be the case to do something for them?*

In more than 60 years, what has been done - from the pastoral and evangelizing perspective - in favor of remarried couples, in a second or new union?

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- 1 Pope Francis' address to participants at the Third International Meeting of Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady, held in Rome on September 10, 2015. See in: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150910\\_equipes-notre-dame.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150910_equipes-notre-dame.html)
  - 2 Pope Francis uses this term or category of “failed marriages” in some situations.
  - 3 Fr. Henri Caffarel. “Christian Marriage in the Church of the 20th Century.” In: *The Mission of the Christian Couple: Origin and Course of the Teams of Our Lady*. Texts compiled by Jean E. Annick Allemand. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1990 (Brazilian Edition coordinated by the Teams of Our Lady), pp. 150-165.

There are many initiatives being implemented, but, the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in its chapter VIII, redirects, in a way, what needs to be done in favor of couples who live a new or second union, that is, couples “who show signs of a wounded and troubled love.” (AL, 291)<sup>4</sup>

In fact, there is absolutely no question of incorporating these second union couples, who aspire to a more intense “spiritual life”, into the Teams of Our Lady Movement, because this would mean disfiguring its founding charisma, which is aimed at couples who have received the sacrament of Marriage and wish to deepen and cultivate the spirituality resulting from this sacrament as a couple, as an itinerary of sanctification, while perfecting their missionary and evangelizing spirit.

Fr. Caffarel’s question is, “wouldn’t it be the case to do something for couples living in a second union?”

And Pope Francis’ response is: that the couples in the Teams of Our Lady be instruments of the mercy of Christ and the Church toward people whose “marriage has failed.”

*What does it mean to be an instrument or sign of mercy for the other?* It is to welcome the other; it is to be available to listen to the other; it is to visit the other; it is to help instruct the other; it is to console the other; it is to understand the needs of the other; it is to feed and clothe the other; it is to host and welcome the other; it is to forgive the other; it is to help the other in his process of personal and spiritual discernment.

Therefore, to be an instrument of mercy of Christ and of the Church means to be at the service of the other; it is to give oneself to the other in his or her need, be it material, social, self-fulfillment, or even spiritual.

4 In an address to participants in the Training Course for Bishops on the “New Matrimonial Process” promoted by the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota on November 18, 2016, Pope Francis refers to people who “*are separated from the ecclesial community or who are considered as outside of it due to the failure of their marriage.*” He emphasizes that “they are and continue to be incorporated in Christ by virtue of Baptism. Thus, we have the grave responsibility of exercising the munus, received from Jesus the Divine Pastor, physician and judge of souls, of never considering them as extraneous to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. We are called not to exclude them from our pastoral concern, but to address them and their irregular and painful situation with all solicitude and charity”.

For this reason, this sensitizing document, prepared by the International Leading Team (ERI), does not intend to be doctrinaire or exhaustive on the issue of the second union, nor a manual of Canon Law, a *Vademecum*, but an instrument to motivate and urge team members to work in this pastoral area, so sensitive and in need of “instruments or signs of mercy”.

Therefore, we will try to understand, even if only slightly, what *Amoris Laetitia* proposes about the second union couples, and eventually other Church documents, so that there are no doubts about what the Teams of Our Lady Movement, as a structure and an instrument of the Church, through its members, can offer with regard to this challenging ecclesial reality in the area of marriage and family.

It is necessary to emphasize that, already at the beginning of the Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis invites everyone to continue deepening the doctrine and pastoral practice on marriage and the family, due to the complexity of the topics dealt with. (AL, 2)

## 2. What does *Amoris Laetitia* propose?

Pope Francis, in chapter VIII of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, recalling that “the work of the Church is similar to that of a field hospital,” states that

the Church must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled 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. (AL, 291)

When referring to the discernment of the various situations of rupture of the marriage bond, the so-called “irregular” situations,<sup>5</sup> affirms that the Church’s path must be that of mercy and integration of human fragility, and not that of condemnation, because this is not the logic of the Gospel. All must be integrated into the ecclesial community, in their own way, respecting their expectations and limits.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis employs the word in quotation marks, and refers to a Catechesis, June 24, 2015, where he says, “All around us we find several families in so-called irregular situations - I don’t like this word - and we ask ourselves many questions”.



And he states in consensus with the Synod Fathers:

In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God's plan for them", something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. (AL, 297)

In the logic of integration, which is the key to this pastoral accompaniment, even knowing that there are no simple recipes for this pastoral work, (AL, 298) Pope Francis encourages a "responsible personal and pastoral discernment of particular cases" by priests and bishops, but also encourages the organization of itineraries of accompaniment and discernment by the whole Church that can guide "these faithful in becoming aware of their situation before God."<sup>6</sup>

The central issue is to avoid being taken to think that the Church holds a "double standard" or that there is an attempt to "diminish the demands of the Gospel" regarding Christian marriage, without losing thereby the essence of Christianity: Love.

Pope Francis makes a clarification: pastoral discernment regarding people who live a second marriage, whatever it may be, must be done in a way

to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one's pastor, and to encourage an ever-greater trust in God's grace. Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the

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6 Conversation with the priest, in the internal forum, contributes to the formation of a correct judgment on what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and on what steps can foster it and make it grow. Given that gradualness is not in the law itself (cf. Familiaris Consortio, 34), this discernment can never prescind from the Gospel demands of truth and charity, as proposed by the Church. For this discernment to happen, the following conditions must necessarily be present: humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it. (AL, 300)

most generous response which can be given to God and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one's limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal. (AL, 303)<sup>7</sup>

In calling for the application of the “logic of pastoral mercy,” and not the simple application of moral laws, of a cold office morality, or an interpretation that everything is black or white, but that one must walk the path of charity, Pope Francis emphasizes that the Church must not “renounce to propose the full ideal of marriage, God's project in all its greatness,” and that it must not treat this pastoral care as if it were a “pastoral care of the failed”, making every pastoral effort to consolidate marriages and thus avoid breakups. (AL, 307)

Therefore, as for couples who live in a second union, Pope Francis wants everyone to have the certainty that they are part of the Church, because they always integrate the ecclesiastical communion in function of their Baptism.

These situations require careful discernment and accompaniment with profound respect, avoiding any language and attitude that makes couples feel discriminated against, but that promotes their participation in the life of the ecclesial community.

The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity” (AL, 243)

### **3. Background on the issue in the END (teams)**

In the document *The Second Wind* (1988), in part 4, which deals with “living in communion in order to respond to a vocation and carry out a mission”, several actions are proposed to team members in the area of family ministry, where we can highlight: *helping couples in difficulties and divorced people who have remarried*.

There is no information about it, but it is quite possible that many couples in the Teams of Our Lady began to dedicate

<sup>7</sup> All pastoral workers are reminded “that this discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized”. (AL, 303)

themselves to this pastoral work in their parishes and dioceses after the International Gathering in Lourdes in 1988.

At the International Gathering in Fatima in 2018, the document *Vocation and Mission - at the dawn of the third millennium* was presented, which, in part III, asks the following question: what are the concrete challenges that the Movement can respond to, and how?

Based on the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, this document of the Teams of Our Lady highlights the following key words: *discern, welcome, and accompany*, proposing various actions in the area of marriage and the family.

With regard to the art of accompaniment, the document of the Teams of Our Lady proposes an engagement of team couples in pastoral work with couples who have formed a new union, and who desire that this union be durable and lived out in faith in Jesus Christ and in his Church. The document describes this pastoral urgency in this way:

For many years, Popes and Bishops have asked us to come to terms with this reality. The address of Pope Francis to the Teams of Our Lady in 2015 is very clear with regards to this.

“Therefore, it is necessary that you be able to bring your testimony and your experience to help Christian communities to discern the concrete situations of these persons, and to receive them with their wounds, and help them to walk in faith and in truth, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd.”

The document *Vocation and Mission* cites the “Reliance” teams in France, which are a proposal for accompaniment by team couples, but insists that progress is still needed in this field if we want many and growing numbers of couples in a second marriage to experience God’s mercy.

The document *Vocation and Mission*, prepared by the ERI, in agreement with the International College of the Teams of Our Lady, also states that it is necessary that the Movement of the Teams of Our Lady, at the level of Sectors or Regions, as the case may be, create reflection groups, launch experiences and be in close relationship with the dioceses, which seems to be the most adequate level to allow a good spread of this pastoral priority and an adequate pastoral, missionary and evangelizing insertion of the team member.

In this regard, Clarita and Edgardo Bernal, the current couple in charge of the ERI, at the International College in 2012,<sup>8</sup> presented a summary of very concrete pastoral work that Team members were developing in some Super Regions with couples in different situations, sometimes in difficulty or experiencing “irregular” situations in relation to their Marriage, highlighting the experiences of the Super Regions of France-Switzerland-Luxembourg (Tandem Teams and Reliance Teams), Brazil (Community Experience and Couples in Second Union) and Hispanoamerica (+Pareja and Amor en Pareja).

As they say in this intervention, these are proposals that are inspired and supported by the charism, mystic and pedagogy of the Teams of Our Lady, with a clear mission consciousness of the team members.

Considering all this journey and the experiences mentioned, we can affirm that this process of sensitization to an evangelizing action together with the second union couples is not something new for the Teams of Our Lady Movement, but a faithful continuity to its charismatic history, because the great challenge is to stimulate the missionary spirit of the team members and to continuously generate a missionary culture.

#### **4. Different realities involving second union couples**

Pope Francis makes it clear in *Amoris Laetitia* that divorced people living a new union can find themselves in very different situations, under multiple aspects, whether in terms of their state of grace, union consolidated over time, new children, Christian commitment, awareness of the irregularity of their situation, or of “culpability,” for example.<sup>9</sup>

The Apostolic Exhortation states that the Synod referred to different situations of fragility or imperfection, and that the way of the Church is always that of Jesus: the way of mercy and integration.

The way of the Church is not to condemn anyone forever; it is to pour out the balm of God’s mercy on all those who

8 Clarita and Edgardo Bernal. “The commitment of the Teams of Our Lady to couples in difficulty.” Presented at the meeting of the International College, July 2012.

9 *Amoris Laetitia*, see especially no. 296-303.

ask for it with a sincere heart (...). For true charity is always unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous”.

Consequently, there is a need to avoid judgements which do not take into account the complexity of various situations and to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience distress because of their condition. (AL, 296)

Therefore, to understand the concept of “second union” it is necessary to consider all the realities of imperfection, but the common point of all of them is usually life in a recomposed or reconstituted family.<sup>10</sup>

Next, in a non-exhaustive attempt, and only for knowledge and the presentation of a few examples, we try to list some of these so-called “irregular” situations, according to what is understood from documents of the Magisterium of the Church. Here they are:

- a) A person who is sacramentally married in the Church, divorced, and civilly remarried, regardless of whether for one spouse it is the first union;
- b) A person who is sacramentally married in the Church, divorced, and living in a de facto relationship without civil formalization;
- c) A person who is sacramentally married in the Church, divorced, with recognition of the nullity of the marriage sacrament, and civilly remarried.

As has already been pointed out, there may be situations that are not mentioned here, since we have tried to exemplify only a few, indicating those situations that are more commonly observed in our societies and in the Church regarding the second union.

However, not all divorced or separated persons who have formed a new union are in the same pastoral situation. From numbers 297 to 301, of *Amoris Laetitia*, the following cases can be distinguished:

- a) Those who sincerely strove to save their marriage, but were unjustly abandoned, and contracted new marriages because they could not bear the loneliness;

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<sup>10</sup> The reconstructed family is the family structure originated in a marriage or a stable union of an affective pair, where one or both members have children from a previous marriage or relationship. The formation of a new family model is not subject to fixed criteria. In this sense, there are several existing possibilities.

- b) Those who entered into a new union because they were convinced that their previous union had not been valid;
- c) Those who understand that they have contracted a valid marriage but have not persevered and formed a new family;
- d) Those who have entered into a new union seeking a benefit for others, such as, for example, the education of their dependent children.

Pastoral and evangelizing care needs to be adapted to each of these cases, giving them a peculiar and personalized attention, according to the couple's different circumstances.

As Pope Francis says, when referring to gradualness in pastoral care, that

Whatever the case, “all these situations require a constructive response seeking to transform them into opportunities that can lead to the full reality of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel. These couples need to be welcomed and guided patiently and discreetly”. That is how Jesus treated the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:1-26): he addressed her desire for true love, in order to free her from the darkness in her life and to bring her to the full joy of the Gospel. (AL, 294)

## 5. What is the art of accompaniment?

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis is dedicated to the theme of the personal “art of accompaniment” of those who need a friendly, supportive presence to move before the other—whether ordained ministers or other pastoral workers—in their process of spiritual growth and maturation in Christian life.

The Pope affirms:

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 Pope points out some necessary characteristics for those – men and women – who dedicate themselves or want to dedicate themselves to the exercise of spiritual accompaniment:

- They must lead ever closer to God; to make a pilgrimage together with Christ to the Father. (EG, 170)
- They must proceed with prudence, understanding, the art of waiting, and docility to the Spirit. (EG, 171)
- They must exercise the art of listening, which is more than hearing. It is the capacity of the heart that makes closeness possible, without which there is no true spiritual encounter. (EG, 171)
- They must use a “pedagogy” that introduces the person - step by step - until he arrives at the full appropriation of the mystery; that is, give time to time so that the person is able to make totally free and responsible decisions. (EG, 171)
- They must know how to recognize that each person’s situation before God and his life in grace is a mystery that no one can fully know from the outside, which implies not passing judgment on his responsibility and guilt. (EG, 172)
- They must let themselves be accompanied and healed by the proclamation of the Gospel in order to be patient and understanding with others, which enables the companion to find ways to awaken in them trust, openness, and the will to grow. (EG, 172)

And Pope Francis concludes in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

Genuine spiritual accompaniment always begins and flourishes in the context of service to the mission of evangelization. Paul’s relationship with Timothy and Titus provides an example of this accompaniment and formation which takes place in the midst of apostolic activity. Entrusting them with the mission of remaining in each city to “put in order what remains to be done” (*Tit* 1:5; cf. *1 Tim* 1:3-5), Paul also gives them rules for their personal lives and their pastoral activity. This is clearly distinct from every kind of intrusive accompaniment or isolated self-realization. Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples. (EG, 173)

As we saw earlier, Pope Francis takes up, in Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*, the question about the Church’s need to

*accompany, discern and integrate human fragility*, whatever it may be: of individuals, of couples, of families.

For him, to accompany is to care for the person-couple-family; it is to give priority to each specific case; it is to listen to the aspirations and needs in view of the future. For this reason, the art of accompaniment is not a mission exclusive to the clergy, or the religious, or the laity, but *is a charism of the whole Church* to be exercised in a spirit of faith and fraternity by every Christian.

One can conclude that the mission of accompaniment, whether it is done by priests or lay people, is to help discern and form the conscience of couples by showing and “teaching” them the Catholic doctrine on marriage and the family in its entirety, helping them to recognize the situation in which they find themselves and to seek the best possible way to integrate them into the life of the ecclesial community.

*It can be said that accompanying couples and families should be a charismatic occupation of any Team couples.*

Pope Francis, in his speech to the regional leaders of the Movement in September 2015, insisted on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady and, consequently, of the Team couples. He said at the time:<sup>11</sup>

Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from its Team experience, and its conjugal life is deepened by refining itself through the spirituality of the Movement.

However, after receiving from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness to and pass on what he has received.

And he insisted on four fundamental points in the context of the New Evangelization and of a Church going forth:

- To witness, to announce and to communicate outside the Movement the marvels experienced in marriage and in the family, so that other couples, in their turn,

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis' address to participants at the Third International Meeting of Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady, held in Rome on September 10, 2015. See in: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150910\\_equipres-notre-dame.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150910_equipres-notre-dame.html)



will follow this path that each team member is following thanks to the pedagogy offered;

- Commit in an ever more concrete way, and with ever renewed creativity, to activities that can be organized to welcome, form, and accompany in the faith, particularly young couples, before and after marriage;
- to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable.
- Finally, I cannot but encourage the couples of the *Équipes Notre Dame* to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards people whose marriage has failed.

Pope Francis continues to speak to the couples of the Teams of Our Lady:

Never forget that your conjugal fidelity is a gift of God, and that mercy has been exercised on behalf of each one of us. A united and happy couple can understand better than anyone else, as from within, the wound and the suffering caused by abandonment, betrayal, failure of love.

Therefore, it is necessary that you be able to bring your testimony and your experience to help Christian communities to discern the real situations of these people, and to accept them with their wounds, and help them to walk in faith and in truth, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, to play an appropriate role in the life of the Church. Nor should you forget the unspeakable suffering of youngsters who experience these painful family situations: you can give them much.

Therefore, this is a strong call made by Pope Francis to the Movement of the Teams of Our Lady which, as a Movement with a charismatic dimension, but ineluctably ecclesial, cannot evade or omit it.

omme un mouvement qui a une dimension charismatique qui fait partie de son essence et inéluctablement ecclésiale.

## 6. Itinerary or path of discernment and formation of conscience

Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia* addresses the issue of “*ACCOMPANYING, DISCERNING AND INTEGRATING WEAKNESS*”, that is, the Church accompanying and caring with attention and solicitude for her children - baptized - who are more fragile, marked by wounded and misplaced love, giving them back trust and hope, like the light of a lighthouse in a harbor or a torch lit in the midst of the people to illuminate those who have lost their way or are in the midst of a storm. (AL, 291) This is because no one can be condemned forever, because this is not the logic of the Gospel. (AL, 297)

Therefore, the first step is *welcoming, accompaniment and care*, about which we have already spoken in the previous item.

The second step is the *discernment of* each so-called “irregular” situation, that is, a step capable of helping - in a constructive and encouraging way - those people who “have failed in their marriage”, by valuing the signs of love present in their new conjugal relationships and transforming them into an opportunity for a journey towards the fullness of marriage and family in the light of the Gospel. (AL, 294)

In this discernment, one must always be clear that the new union, resulting from a divorce or separation, is not the ideal that the Gospel proposes for marriage and the family, and thus avoid the risk of thinking that the Church supports a double standard. The “new couple” should be encouraged to reflect on all the conditions and circumstances which have led to this “irregular” situation.

Thus, *Amoris Laetitia*, encourages a responsible personal and pastoral discernment of each particular case, in which one must recognize “the degree of responsibility” that exists (AL, 300) and of the conditioning that determined the failure of

the marriage, (AL, 302)<sup>12</sup> with a view to integration into the life of the Church.

In this discernment process, done with a spiritual accompaniment (preferably with a priest), *Amoris Laetitia* states:

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. (AL, 300)

What is at issue with regard to discernment is its transformation into a sincere reflection capable of guiding these faithful in becoming aware of their situation before God. And, through dialogue with the priest, in the internal forum, to contribute to the formation of a correct judgment about what hinders the possibility of a fuller participation in the life of the Church and about the steps that can favor it and make it grow.<sup>13</sup>

12 Regarding these conditioning factors, the Catechism of the Catholic Church expresses itself categorically: "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". In another paragraph, the Catechism refers once again to circumstances which mitigate moral responsibility, and mentions at length "affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability". For this reason, a negative judgment about an objective situation does not imply a judgment about the imputability or culpability of the person involved. On the basis of these convictions, I consider very fitting what many Synod Fathers wanted to affirm: "Under certain circumstances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person's properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations. Even the consequences of actions taken are not necessarily the same in all cases". (AL, 302)

13 Besides the word "discernment," another idea very present in *Amoris Laetitia* is the valuing of the conscience of the faithful, so present in the conciliar theology (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16). Pope Francis admits: "We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them." (AL, no. 37).

And *Amoris Laetitia* continues:

Given that gradualness is not in the law itself (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 34), this discernment can never prescind from the Gospel demands of truth and charity, as proposed by the Church. For this discernment to happen, the following conditions must necessarily be present: humility, discretion and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God's will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it".

These attitudes are essential for avoiding the grave danger of misunderstandings, such as the notion that any priest can quickly grant "exceptions", or that some people can obtain sacramental privileges in exchange for favours.

When a responsible and tactful person, who does not presume to put his or her own desires ahead of the common good of the Church, meets with a pastor capable of acknowledging the seriousness of the matter before him, there can be no risk that a specific discernment may lead people to think that the Church maintains a double standard.

Discernment, therefore, helps to perceive which is the path to take for full communion in the ecclesial life, which cannot do without the evangelical demands of truth and charity proposed by the Church, rather than an adaptation of the "moral law" to the wishes of the couple in second union.

And the third step, after "encouraging the maturing of an enlightened conscience", consequently, is **the integration of the couple into church life**, where they will be open to new stages of growth and new decisions that will allow them to realize the ideal of marriage and the family in a more complete way, that is, of "building a house on the rock".

Therefore, in this slow process of discernment towards ecclesial integration - "because it is a matter of integrating everyone" - each person must be helped to find his or her own way of participating in the ecclesial community, so that he or she feels that they are the object of an undeserved, unconditional, and

gratuitous mercy, aimed at seeking the living God and themselves in their spiritual journey.<sup>14</sup>

As we see, **integration is the goal of accompaniment and discernment** (formation of conscience). The summit of all integration is the insertion of each person who is in a non-regular situation into the life of the Church. That is, of a fuller communion in the life of the Church, as well as in the ministry of the Church.

It is about introducing each person into the community of missionary disciples, in an atmosphere of love, charity and sincere consideration for the uniqueness of the person, so that he or she feels embraced by the great family-Church.<sup>15</sup>

It is worth repeating, **the logic of integration is the key to pastoral and evangelizing accompaniment**, so that people not only know that they belong to the Body of Christ, which is the Church, but can have a happy and fruitful experience of it. As the Final Report of the Synod makes clear,<sup>16</sup> the baptized who are divorced and remarried

(...) they are brothers and sisters; the Holy Spirit pours into their hearts gifts and talents for the good of all. Their participation can be expressed in different ecclesial services which necessarily requires discerning which of the various forms of exclusion, currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional framework, can be surpassed.

Such persons need to feel not as excommunicated members of the Church, but instead as living members, able

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14 The Apostolic Exhortation “*Sacramentum Caritatis*” of Pope Benedict XVI, in No. 29, reaffirms the invitation for second union couples to cultivate, as much as possible: “to live as fully as possible the Christian life through regular participation at Mass, albeit without receiving communion, listening to the word of God, eucharistic adoration, prayer, participation in the life of the community, honest dialogue with a priest or spiritual director, dedication to the life of charity, works of penance, and commitment to the education of their children.”

15 “She (the Church) knows that Jesus himself is the shepherd of the hundred, not just of the ninety-nine.” (AL, 309)

16 SYNOD OF BISHOPS. XIV Ordinary General Assembly. THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE FAMILY IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD. THE FINAL REPORT OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS TO THE HOLY FATHER, POPE FRANCIS, Vatican City, 24 October 2015, no. 84.

to live and grow in the Church and experience her as a mother, who welcomes them always, who takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel.

This integration is also needed in the care and Christian upbringing of their children, who ought to be considered most important. That the Christian community cares for these people is not a weakening of her faith and witness in the indissolubility of marriage: to the contrary, in this very way, the Church expresses her charity.

An issue that is always delicate, but recurrent among couples who live in a second union and desire their fuller integration in the Church, is that of access to the Sacraments, which is sometimes treated in a simplistic and reductionist way, as synonymous with integration.

Simply accessing the sacraments, or “sacramentalism,” does not solve people’s real existential and marital problems.

It is necessary to open the doors of the ecclesial community - of the Church - to everyone, without exception, because of their condition as baptized, that is, because of the faith they have received through baptism, so that they may go through a “new life” in Christ, overcoming different forms of exclusion currently practiced in the liturgical, pastoral, educational and institutional spheres. (AL, 299)

## **7. What can and should the END (teams) Movement do?**

In this context, many Team couples often question or interrogate their leaders (responsible at different levels of service): what can we do? How can we do it? With what “category” of couple living in a second union should we work pastorally? What material is available that can help us in this pastoral work?

It is important to note that *Amoris Laetitia* has as one of its central objectives the appreciation of the family and married life, together with the encouragement to spouses to cultivate, in the mystic of married life, the joy of their vocation and mission in the Church and in society.

*Amoris Laetitia* does not idealize perfect families, it does not prescribe a perfect and unattainable ideal of family, it does not condemn “irregular” models.

On the contrary, it makes a point of saying that “the perfect families that fallacious and consumerist advertising proposes to us do not exist” (AL, no. 135). Pope Francis invites everyone to the necessary commitment to establish loving relationships, in valuing each member of the family, to attentive listening to the Lord.

The Teams of Our Lady Movement - *that is, the team members* - are constantly being stimulated and challenged to a greater integration and responsibility in the Family Pastoral of the parishes and dioceses where their couples and spiritual counselors are.

In many parishes and dioceses of the Super Regions of the Teams of Our Lady, pastoral work is already being done with couples in a second union, and, consequently, some material already exists to guide the organization of meetings, retreats, reflections, accompaniment in groups, etc.

It is fundamental that the team members integrate and even coordinate some of these pastoral initiatives, assume the missionary protagonism in order to help the second union couples to live their conjugal spirituality, integrating them in the ecclesial community.

On the other hand, together with the parish priest or even the bishop, the team members can work on some form of accompaniment, discernment and integration of the second union couples, helping to form their consciences (not trying to replace them) and to grow in their Christian, spiritual, conjugal and family life.

## **8. In conclusion**

Deepening the knowledge of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and implementing pastoral and evangelizing proposals based on this Exhortation of Pope Francis is an ecclesial mission of the whole Church.

For this reason, it is also the mission of the Teams of Our Lady to propose “ways” for team couples to participate in meetings to study and deepen their understanding of *Amoris Laetitia* and

*to* implement pastoral and evangelization proposals, based on their charism, as we have seen happening previously in several Super Regions where the Movement is present.

At some point, the Teams of Our Lady, also in their SR and RR, will be able to organize specific groups of couples to elaborate and propose itineraries of accompaniment, discernment and integration of couples in second union, as a service of the Movement offered to the whole Church that needs it.

It is important to make it clear that the Teams Movement should only offer knowledge of the Church's guidelines on the subject and tools that help second-union couples on their ecclesial journey, so that they can adhere to the full life of Jesus.

The steps to be taken in the accompaniment and discernment process, as described above, is always subject to the inviolable conscience of the couples living in a new union, in contact and counseling with the priest who guides them internally, and, above all, strengthened by the Grace of God under the intercession of Our Lady.

God, rich in tenderness and mercy, never tires of urging team members to put on the "garment of the mission" and to work for the salvation of the families and couples entrusted to them.

In short: let us be a Movement of servants, missionaries and evangelizers, exercising our baptismal vocation and fulfilling our mission in the field of Marriage and Family.

International Leading Team – ERI – 2018-2024

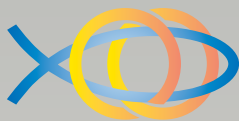


## For reading and study:

1. Pope John Paul II. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. Rome, November 22, 1981.
2. Pope Francis. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, on love in the family. Rome, March 19, 2016.
3. XIV Ordinary General Assembly. *The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world*. Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father Francis, Vatican City, October 24, 2015.
4. Teams of Our Lady. *Vocation and Mission: at the dawn of the third millennium*. ERI - International Responsible Team, Fatima, July 2018.
5. Pope Francis' address to participants at the Third International Meeting of Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady, held in Rome on September 10, 2015. See in: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150910\\_equip-es-notre-dame.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150910_equip-es-notre-dame.html)
6. Clarita and Edgardo Bernal. "The commitment of the Teams of Our Lady to couples in difficulty." Presented at the meeting of the International College, July 2012.







**Équipes Notre-Dame**

**49, rue de la Glacière · 7ème  
75013 · Paris · France  
tel: +33 (0) 143 319621  
contact@equipes-notre-dame.com**