

### 15.7. Pastoral Accompaniment for People in Irregular Situations

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The sacrament of marriage, instituted by Christ, is a source of grace and salvation for the baptized spouses (cf. AL 72). In God's plan, the marriage covenant is based on fidelity and indissoluble: "They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). Pope Francis states that "in no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage" (AL 307). He also strongly emphasizes the role of God's grace operating in the sacraments and the need to appreciate the pastoral work that opens the way for grace.<sup>836</sup>

It should be noted that although the family is generally recognized and respected, many faithful, regarding marriage with some mistrust, prefer contracting only a civil union or postpone the celebration of the sacrament of marriage (see AL 293-294). Moreover, different factors are weakening the conjugal bond and leading to the destruction of the marital community and the painful breakup of married couples. This is causing difficult situations and dramas in the conjugal and family life of many faithful, whose relations with God and the Church are often marked by irregularities (see FC 79).

The Church's salvific activity also embraces people living in irregular situations. The exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* considers, together with those living in trial marriages and factual free relationships, Catholics who are only civilly married, the separated, and divorcees who have not formed new unions, those divorced who, after getting married in the Church have entered into new civil unions or are living in new relationships without any institutional bond.<sup>837</sup> A separate chapter of this book deals with the pastoral care of people in free relationships, i.e., those living together "as if married" without any canonical impediments. At this point, we will discuss the pastoral care for the remaining groups of people living in irregular situations. It is worthwhile recalling some fundamentals of the pastoral care for the separated and divorced who have not formed new unions. Then, we need to highlight the elements of pastoral accompaniment for civilly married Catholics without canonical impediments. Finally, we will consider some issues of pastoral accompaniment for Catholics who, after the dissolution of a sacramental mar-

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<sup>836</sup> AL 36-37, 73, 89, 295, 297, 303, 310 passim; cf. J. Goleń, "The Renewal of Pastoral Care of the Family in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*," RT 64(2017) fasc. 6, 968.

<sup>837</sup> See FC 79-84; Pontifical Council for the Family, Family, Marriage and *de facto* Unions, (26 July 2000): [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/family/documents/rc\\_pc\\_family\\_doc\\_20001109\\_de-facto-unions\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001109_de-facto-unions_en.html) (consulted on 30.09.2017).

riage, are living in unions without any legal bond or after the breakdown of their sacramental marriage and divorce have formed new civil unions.

### Accompanying Separated and Divorced Catholics Who Have Not Formed a New Union

Different reasons lead to rifts in married couples, to separation, and the destruction of the conjugal bond. When symptoms of crisis or threats to marriage appear, it is good to make all possible efforts and to seek professional help in order to reconcile and reunite the spouses. Yet, in spite of everything, the desired result is not always reached.

The civil divorce of spouses united by the sacrament of marriage is a serious offense against the natural law and injures the covenant of salvation (cf. CCC 2384). In certain cases, canon law provides for separation without dissolution of the bond (see CIC, can. 1151-1155). The *Catechism* does, however, mention special situations where divorce is tolerated: “If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense” (CCC 2383).

People who are abandoned and rejected, separated or divorced, experience loneliness and injustice, and sometimes suffer from deep wounds caused by violence (cf. AL 242). They urgently need the Church’s pastoral accompaniment, support, and help in discernment. The ecclesial community has the task of supporting them while showing them respect, solidarity, and understanding, and giving them concrete help so that they may remain faithful in their difficult situation (cf. FC 83). Pope Francis adds that one must first hear and appreciate the suffering of these people (cf. AL 242). A proven form of assistance in such situations is the pastoral ministry of reconciliation, which leads to forgiving the injuries, and sustains or restores the readiness to perhaps return to married life with the sacramental spouse (cf. FC 83).

The separated and divorced who have not formed new unions for religious and moral motives can be witnesses before the world and the Church of marital fidelity, the accomplishment of family obligations and Christian responsibility. Nothing hinders these people from receiving the sacraments. Therefore, they should be encouraged to “find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life” (AL 242). The support of priests and confessors, prayer, meetings of religious associations, and especially communities for married couples in difficulty are also helpful.

Separated or divorced parents often need help in raising their children and other types of assistance that requires the people of the Church to be

open-hearted. They, indeed, face the very difficult challenge of not involving their children in the marital conflict. It is good to recall Pope Francis' appeal to parents: "Never, never, take your child hostage! You separated for many problems and reasons. Life gave you this trial, but your children should not have to bear the burden of this separation or be used as hostages against the other spouse. They should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and their father speak well of their mother. It is irresponsible to disparage the other parent as a means of winning a child's affection, or out of revenge or self-justification. Doing so will affect the child's interior tranquillity and cause wounds hard to heal" (AL 245). The accompaniment and support of the Church community, including professional assistance, can help parents to avoid educational mistakes with regard to children who have experienced the drama of the breakup of the marriage and the family. The Christian love of other families is also very valuable to children affected by the drama of their parents' separation.

#### Accompanying Civilly Married Catholics Without Canonical Impediments

The legal and social obligations that these people have contracted through civil marriage need to be appreciated. Pope John Paul II saw that, in these situations, "there is at least a certain commitment to a properly defined and probably stable state of life" (FC 82). Pope Francis explains different reasons for contracting only a civil union and speaks about the need to appreciate the signs of God's love and constructive elements in situations that are not yet compatible or no longer correspond to the Church's teaching about marriage (cf. AL 292, 294). He also mentions seeds that are still waiting to grow. He emphasizes that it is necessary to patiently lead people to an ever richer understanding and fuller integration of Christ's mystery into their lives (AL 76).

It must be remembered that, for the baptized, a valid marriage cannot exist without its being a sacramental marriage (CIC, can. 1055, § 2). Although civil marriage may be one of the steps on the way to the fullness of marriage, the pastors of the Church cannot admit these people to the sacraments at this stage of life (cf. FC 82). However, this situation does not prevent giving these people pastoral care; on the contrary, it requires integrating them and accompanying them towards maturity. The Church recognizes the fruitfulness of this accompaniment in the "continual increase in the number of those who, after having lived together for a long period, request the celebration of marriage in Church" (AL 294).

An outgoing pastoral ministry that is close to the people (AL 230) should be charitable and help those living in civil unions to participate in the life of ecclesial

communities. The pastor's invitation to listen to the Word of God, to retreats, personal and community prayer, as well as the support of the ecclesial community can help to strengthen their faith and lead them to discover their vocation to marriage and to build their couples and families in the light of the Gospel (AL 294). Pastorally, everything possible must be done to "induce them to regularize their situation" (FC 82). The pastors' task is to patiently interact through personal dialogue, inviting people to reflect on God's salvific pedagogy in their lives and to understand love more deeply. For this, it is necessary to renew the pastoral zeal to care for all the hundred sheep (cf. AL 309). A pastoral approach characterized by gentleness and patience can help overcome reluctance and prejudice against the Church and the fear of a permanent commitment.

It must be clearly stated that conducting pastoral discussions on such difficult topics requires of the pastor personal resources as well as adequate preparation and experience. It is also known that the fruitfulness of such interaction depends on the support of prayer and openness to grace. Therefore, these people should be surrounded by the prayer of ecclesial communities, of consecrated persons, and of the pastors themselves.

#### Accompanying Catholics Living Without Legal Bond or in a New Civil Union After the Breakdown of Their Sacramental Marriage

Some people, after the drama of the breakup of their marriage, enter into new unions and, thus, find themselves in an irregular situation. After the break-up of a sacramental marriage, the marital institution may be injured, and, consequently, some no longer want to be married at all, not even civilly. Others, on the contrary, decide to get married again civilly and to build new families, hence incurring new legal, civil, and moral obligations.

The people living in informal relationships after the failure of their marriage and those who have married again civilly remain baptized members of the Church, Christ's living Body (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). Pope Francis clearly states that, despite their irregular situation, "the grace of God works also in their lives" (AL 291). Therefore, it is important that through inclusion in the Church, they experience this joyfully and fruitfully. Moreover, they can bring to the communities the gifts and charisms that the Holy Spirit gives them for the good of all (cf. AL 299). As children of the Church, they should not feel alone in their suffering, excluded from God's mercy and from brotherly love, prayer, and care for their salvation.<sup>838</sup> The path of reconciliation is also open

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<sup>838</sup> Cf. AL 296; Francis, Address to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Poland on their *Ad Limina Visit* on 7 Feb. 2014.

for them (see FC 84); consequently, there is no reason for them to distance themselves from the life of faith and its confession, and from the community of the Church. While their irregular condition and life “as if married” (*more uxorio*) make it impossible for them to receive absolution and Holy Communion (cf. FC 84; SCa 29), this situation also implies the need to undertake a path of discernment together with the pastors (cf. AL 297).

The history of each marital drama is different and, so, it is necessary to look at the individual with love for the person who is looking for a possibility to be reconciled with God and the Church. The first step in the pastoral accompaniment should be an invitation to talk, to patiently listen, and try to understand the subjective reasons and causes that have led the person to their way of life. Some of these people will already have looked at their situation and reflected on it in the light of the Gospel; they want to convert and are willing to correct their mistakes. In this case, the second step can then be taken. It is good, whenever possible, to encourage and support these people on the path of reconciliation and returning to the sacramental spouse. Here, the participation in associations supporting married couples in difficulty, retreats or workshops run by experienced priests, spouses, and specialists can be helpful. However, if the person is not ready to take this path, and after attempts at reconciliation, is subjectively convinced of the impossibility of returning to the sacramental spouse (cf. AL 298), the accompanying pastor should encourage him or her to engage in deeper Christian formation—for example by participating in retreats or meetings of a religious community.

Formative support seems necessary to continue in the Christian spirit. Even when the person is receiving guidance and the priest does not see a real chance for him or her to go back to the sacramental spouse, at this stage of accompaniment, the important task for the Christian is to enter the path of forgiveness and reconciliation and to redress any possible wrongs. This step may require not only pastoral support but also specialized psychological help.

The next step in the pastoral accompaniment is to help the ecclesiastical tribunal to examine the validity of the canonical marriage. At present, it is quite common for sacramental marriages to be annulled for various reasons. The current *Code of Canon Law* seems to be “sensitive” to many situations in which marriage may be considered void. The list of the reasons has been widened by Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* (15 Aug. 2015).<sup>839</sup> It

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<sup>839</sup> See Francis, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* by which the canons of the Code of Canon Law pertaining to cases regarding the nullity of marriage are reformed, Chap. V, art. 14 § 1: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio\\_20150815\\_mitis-iudex-dominus-iesus.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio_20150815_mitis-iudex-dominus-iesus.html) (consulted on 06.04.2018).

seems that in countries where the network of church tribunals is developed, with applicable legal and canonical regulations, there are few cases of invalid marriages in which the annulment process would encounter significant difficulties. Consequently, if there are doubts about the validity of a marriage, the pastor should help the person to contact the ecclesiastical court. Some people resist taking this step, even when they suspect the invalidity of their canonical marriage.

The bishops must ensure the presence and pastoral character of ecclesiastical courts in a given territory and provide for a sufficient number of competent clerical and lay employees so that they may function correctly and efficiently (SCa 29; cf. AL 244). The episcopal conferences are to support, encourage and help the bishops of particular churches in the organization of the judiciary authorities so that the closeness between the judges and the faithful is restored, and the trials are made free of charge.<sup>840</sup> The dioceses also have the responsibility to provide information, counseling and mediation services in connection with the pastoral care of families, from which people could benefit before the preliminary inquiry of the matrimonial process (AL 244). It is important that priests give appropriate guidance and encourage people to ask for this kind of assistance.

At the same time, one cannot lose sight of the purpose of pastoral accompaniment, intended to help divorced persons living “as if married” in a new union to persevere in faith and hope. This is possible with the help of God’s grace, if they listen willingly to the word of God, participate in the Mass and Eucharistic adoration. Spiritual communion is particularly valuable in this context.<sup>841</sup> Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “even in cases where it is not possible to receive sacramental communion, participation at Mass remains necessary, important, meaningful and fruitful. In such circumstances, it is beneficial to cultivate a desire for full union with Christ through the practice of spiritual communion” (SCa 55).<sup>842</sup> Persevering in prayer and participation in the life of the ecclesial community are both indispensable for the preservation of faith

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<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, VI.

<sup>841</sup> Cf. I. Mroczkowski, “Rozeznawanie odpowiedzialności moralnej w sytuacjach nieprawidłowych,” in: J. Goleń (ed.), *Towarzyszyć małżeństwu i rodzinie. Inspiracje adhortacji apostolskiej Amoris laetitia dla duszpasterstwa rodzin*, Lublin, 2017, 293-4; I. Mroczkowski, *Etos miłosierdzia a wierność małżeńska. Moralne dylematy osób żyjących w związkach niesakramentalnych*, Płock, 2017, 85-90.

<sup>842</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the reception of the Holy Communion by the divorced and remarried members of the faithful (14 Sept. 1994): [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_14091994\\_rec-holy-comm-by-divorced\\_en.html#top](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_14091994_rec-holy-comm-by-divorced_en.html#top), no. 6 (consulted on 04.04.2018).

and hope and constitute an important support in raising children in the Christian faith, for performing works of love, nurturing the spirit, and penitential acts (cf. FC 84; SCa 29; AL 246). Spiritual direction is also helpful and likewise honest conversations with a priest with the aim of discerning God's action in one's life and finding a way to deepen the union with Him.

a) Accompanying Divorcees in New Unions in the Discernment of Moral Responsibility

There are many indications that Pope Francis does not intend to change the norms with regard to granting absolution and admission to Holy Communion to divorced persons living in new unions (cf. AL 3, 297, 300-301, 307). Therefore, the Church remains faithful to her teaching, in which she has repeatedly confirmed "the practice, based on Sacred Scripture (cf. Mk 10:2-12), of not admitting the divorced and remarried to the sacraments, since their state and their condition of life objectively contradict the loving union of Christ and the Church signified and made present in the Eucharist" (SCa 29; cf. FC 84).<sup>843</sup> This position is justified by the objective fact that these people persist in the sin of adultery, which makes it impossible to receive absolution in the sacrament of penance. Both the awareness of the sacredness of the sacrament of marriage (cf. Eph 5:31-32) and the conviction of the gravity of the sin of adultery (cf. Deut 5:18; Mt 5:27-28) as an "inner evil" with its consequences (see VS 81-82) oblige the pastors to take into account the objective state.

While the post-Conciliar Church recognizes that the conscience of the faithful may, for various reasons, not be well-formed, She demands development and formation based on the original act of faith and the teaching of the Church (see VS 63-64; AL 302-303). Pope Francis, concerned about Her children living in new unions, and especially those whose situation is particularly difficult to regulate, emphasizes more strongly than ever the need to consider the role of the conscience of the faithful (cf. AL 37, 303) and draws attention to subjective conditions and limitations (factors) which cannot be omitted in the moral evaluation of a person's concrete act (see AL 301-302).

Consequently, in the light of Pope Francis' Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, one should, on the one hand, bear in mind the Church's teaching about God's plan for marriage and the family. In *Amoris Laetitia*, we read: "in order to avoid all misunderstanding, I would point out that in no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God's plan in all its grandeur" (AL 307). On the other hand, in exceptionally complex moral situations, one

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<sup>843</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

must go a step further than the Church's previous indications and give more importance to the "consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations" (AL 37). In this spirit, Francis points to the urgent need to approach—lovingly and with understanding—the divorced living in new unions, without betraying and ignoring the truth about marriage and sin. He emphasizes the need to provide pastoral accompaniment to these faithful so that their conscience may be formed in the spirit of the Gospel (cf. AL 303, 312) and, at the same time, to help them to discern the moral responsibility within their concrete particular conditions. Among the subjective conditions to be considered, the Pope includes difficulties in understanding the values contained in the moral norm and external conditions that do not allow someone to act differently (AL 301). Furthermore, the limitations placed on the human act (*actus humanus*) include factors limiting the ability to make decisions and moral responsibility—e.g., ignorance, compulsion, fear, habits, emotional immaturity, anxiety (cf. AL 302). Accordingly, the responsibility for moral choices in some cases can be reduced because of these factors, so that a person in an objectively sinful situation does not commit a mortal sin. This is the case when external conditions make it difficult or impossible to act in accordance with the moral norm, and subjective restrictions—such as serious difficulties in understanding the values contained in the norm or limiting the ability to make decisions<sup>844</sup>—diminish or abolish the moral responsibility.

In this context, the Pope states that "the degree of responsibility is not equal in all cases [...] Therefore, while clearly stating the Church's teaching, pastors are to avoid judgements that do not take into account the complexity of various situations and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition" (AL 79). When discerning responsibility, one should take into account the difference between those who sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who, by their own fault, destroyed a valid marriage. "Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid" (FC 84). Sometimes people feel powerless and look for support and help in a new union. Others, however, have repeatedly failed to fulfill their family obligations (see AL 298). There is also a difference between those who want to convert and express sorrow with regard to their situation and

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<sup>844</sup> AL 301-302, 305; cf. *ibid.*, 300 note 336; *ibid.*, 302 note 344; F. Coccopalmerio, *Il capitolo ottavo della esortazione apostolica post sinodale "Amoris laetitia,"* Vatican City, 2017, no. 3.3.



others flaunt objective sin and want to impose something that the Church does not teach (cf. AL 297). From the Christian perspective, it is also important whether or not people are willing to take the *via caritatis*, because “love covers many sins” (1 Pt 4:8; cf. AL 306). For all these reasons, the process of individual discernment of responsibility and looking for ways to repair wrongs appears necessary. Deep understanding of moral responsibility seems particularly important for assessing the behavior of divorced persons living in a new union, who, despite attempts, have failed to regulate their situation on the legal and ecclesiastical level, although they are subjectively convinced of the invalidity of their sacramental marriage (cf. FC 84; AL 298).

The moral responsibility should be discerned by the individual with the help of a priest. The most appropriate place for this discernment is the internal forum, in a meeting with a confessor who knows the situation well (cf. AL 300). This insight should fully integrate two dimensions: 1) the responsibility for the destruction of the sacramental marriage and the fulfillment of obligations; and 2) responsibility for the present state.

1) In the first case, the possible moral guilt for the disintegration of the sacramental marriage is examined. If the person doing the discerning bears guilt, it is important to recognize this and to enter the path of repentance, penance, and reparation. The account of conscience should also refer to attempts at reconciliation with the spouse and behavior towards their children during the conjugal crisis. This should be followed by an examination of conscience focused on justice and the care for the situation of an abandoned spouse and children. Since the entry into a new union has to a certain extent sealed the destruction of the sacramental marriage, one must also ask about the consequences that the new relationship has for the rest of the family and for the community of the faithful (cf. AL 300). This discernment may reveal the presence of subjective conditions and limitations of the capacity for human action, which should be taken into consideration in the discernment of responsibility.

2) The second dimension of responsibility concerns the present state, i.e., life in a new union. The discernment of responsibility should cover the circumstances of its conclusion along with the subjective conditions as well as other factors and the question of living “as if married.” New unions are often formed in face of the conviction that returning to the sacramental spouse is impossible and motivated by the search for support in one’s personal life and parental tasks.<sup>845</sup> The aforementioned conditions and subjective limitations (cf. AL 301-302) may affect not only the decision to enter into a new union and persist in it but also the existing moral choices made.

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<sup>845</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter..., 4.

The discernment should, above all, focus on the obstacle impeding full participation in the life of the Church. This may be the intercourse of the divorced who are living together as if they were married (*more uxorio*), as long as they voluntarily remain in that state and manifest no repentance and conversion.<sup>846</sup> This state is objectively incompatible with God's law because of the sin of adultery, and these persons, therefore, cannot receive Holy Communion as long as the situation lasts.<sup>847</sup> The Church, however, teaches that if these persons cannot divorce for an important reason, but adopt an attitude of repentance and conversion, with sincere regret, and firmly attest before the confessor that they "live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples" (FC 84; SCa 28), they can receive sacramental absolution and Holy Communion, always trying to avoid scandal in their entourage.<sup>848</sup> Persons who, after fulfilling these conditions, have received sacramental absolution and received Holy Communion but, have not kept their resolution because of human weakness, can come back to the confessor. In this case, the confessor should pay special attention to remorse and regret, sincere determination to remain pure. He should also take into consideration the practical conditions and the subjective limitations.<sup>849</sup> The exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* leaves open the possibility of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation when a person fails in his or her resolution.<sup>850</sup>

In the light of the exhortation, confessors face a special challenge in the field of the discernment of moral responsibility in situations – albeit few, it seems – of divorced people in new unions who, nevertheless, 1) want to receive the grace of the sacraments and adopt an attitude of repentance and conversion; 2) although convinced of the invalidity of the sacramental marriage and the fruitlessness of their efforts, have not obtained a marriage annulment; 3) for an important reason, cannot leave the partner of the new union; and 4) are not ready to live a life of abstinence that is not contrary to the indissolubility of marriage.<sup>851</sup> Mindful of the above-mentioned conditions and subjective limitations, the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* does not close the way to

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<sup>846</sup> Cf. W. Góralski, *Adhortacja apostolska "Amoris laetitia" papieża Franciszka. Prezentacja dokumentu z komentarzem do nn. 300-308*, Plock, 2016, 59, 61.

<sup>847</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, loc. cit.

<sup>848</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>849</sup> Cf. W. Góralski, *op. cit.*, 69-70.

<sup>850</sup> Cf. Buenos Aires Pastoral Region, *Basic Criteria for the Implementation of Chapter VIII of Amoris Laetitia* (5 Sept. 2016), no. 5: <https://cvcomment.org/2016/09/18/buenos-aires-bishops-guidelines-on-amoris-laetitia-full-text/> (consulted on 4.05.2018).

<sup>851</sup> According to *Amoris Laetitia*, it is necessary to take into account the conditioning cited in footnote 329, i.e., that those who accept the possibility of being in a relationship "like brother

the sacraments even to divorcees in new unions who are not ready to live in complete abstinence yet are, at the same time, aware of the sinfulness of their situation, sincerely regret it, and want change their lives but cannot do so at present.<sup>852</sup> The Diocese of Rome proposes that these persons enter, together with the confessor, on a long-term path of change and conversion, made of small steps that are progressively verified. Then, the confessor, once he fully knows the situation and after praying, can at some point make a decision about absolution and the reception of Holy Communion, always trying to avoid scandal.<sup>853</sup> However, if the confessor comes to the conclusion that he cannot give absolution for an important reason, he should support and bless the person, continue with patience, and indicate the path to be followed.

The interpretation presented here has found official confirmation,<sup>854</sup> although discussion about it continues, especially among moral theologians. It is necessary for the bishops of the local churches to interpret the papal exhortation in the light of the Church's teaching and local traditions, and to show confessors and priests how to advance and incorporate these faithful into the community (cf. AL 3, 300). The discernment of moral responsibility requires of all who are called to exercise it, humility before God, full respect for His law and for the binding discipline of the sacraments, as well as the courage of love and mercy.

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Pope Francis urgently calls for pastoral care that includes everyone, so that all may experience the unmerited and unconditional mercy of God. At the same time, he recalls the aspiration to conversion on the path of the Gospel (see AL 297). "The Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work" (AL 78).

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and sister" discover that if there are not enough words of intimacy, "faithfulness can sometimes be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined" (GS 51).

<sup>852</sup> AL 301, 305 n. 351. See F. Coccopalmerio, *op. cit.*, nos. 3.3-3.5; 3.7-3.8; Buenos Aires Pastoral Region, *op. cit.*, no. 6.

<sup>853</sup> Cf. Diocese of Rome, *La Letizia dell'Amore: Il Cammino delle Famiglie a Roma* (19.09.2016), 4. VI I: <http://www.romasette.it/wp-content/uploads/Relazione2016ConvegnoDiocesano.pdf> (consulted on 3.05.2018).

<sup>854</sup> Francis, Carta del Santo Padre Francisco a los Obispos de la Región Pastoral de Buenos Aires en respuesta al documento "Criterios básicos para la aplicación del capítulo VIII de la *Amoris laetitia*" (5.09.2016): [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160905\\_regione-pastorale-buenos-aires.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160905_regione-pastorale-buenos-aires.html) (consulted on 3.05.2018).