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## **Care for Incomplete Families**

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# CATHOLIC FAMILY MINISTRY

*The Scientific Reflection  
and the Practical Ministry of the Church*

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**Preface of Kevin Cardinal Farrell**

*Prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life*

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life. Illness is a great task for the family, but at the same time it brings with it challenges that can do a lot of good. It helps to strengthen personal bonds, leads to mutual support, and breaks down many long-standing conflicts. The closest milieu of the sick person, especially the family, must carry out important tasks. Supported by organizations, institutions, and the structures of the parish community, it can serve the sick and the dying.

### 15.5. Care for Incomplete Families

JACEK GOLEŃ

An essential underlying factor the changes in the family, parental functions and attitudes towards marriage is ethical individualism. It belittles the truth of the human person who is called to oblation love and work for the good of people and communities.<sup>724</sup> Because of these changes, the phenomena of incomplete families<sup>725</sup> is spreading, and the number of people living in them is increasing.<sup>726</sup> This situation has both unexpected consequences independent of our will and results coming from our own decisions. In fact, incomplete families are often the result of the decision of parents to educate their children alone, even though this implies serious complications in life (LtF 2) and contradicts the Catholic teaching about marriage.<sup>727</sup>

An incomplete family is a "structure in which one parent is caring for at least one dependent child."<sup>728</sup> Most often it consists of a mother living with her children and raising them.<sup>729</sup> Depending on the reason for the absence of the second parent, the family may be permanently or temporarily incomplete. A variety of causes lead to the formation of single-parent families, e.g.,

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<sup>724</sup> Individualism leads to excessive of freedom, egocentrism, and selfishness. It is expressed in so-called free love, which is based on feelings and uses human weakness dishonestly. People try to justify it and the honest remorse is being soothed by its apparent generosity and the public approval. LtF 14.

<sup>725</sup> Currently, with the tendency to assimilate all relationships and the frequency of alternative forms of family life, the expression "incomplete family" is synonymous with "single-parent family." K. Slany, *Alternatywne formy życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego w ponowoczesnym świecie*, Kraków, 2006, 124.

<sup>726</sup> Cf. M. Raław-Markowska – M. Środoń – M. Rymsza, "Portrety samotnego macierzyństwa," in: M. Rymsza (ed.), *Samotne macierzyństwo i polityka społeczna*, Warsaw, 2001, 98.

<sup>727</sup> Cf. G. Pyżlak, "Rodzina niepełna i jej wpływ na sytuację wychowawczą dziecka," RPK 2010, vol. 2 (57), 92–4.

<sup>728</sup> E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Praca socjalno-wychowawcza z rodziną niepełną*, Warsaw, 1980, 16.

<sup>729</sup> Cf. E. Adamczuk, "Samotne matki wobec dylematów wychowawczych," *Problemy Rodziny*, no. 1, 1991, 2.

divorce, separation, the death of one of the spouses, abandonment of the family, and extramarital birth (cf. AL 252). Most single mothers are divorced, separated, or widowed. Women do not usually become single mothers before the baby is born but during his childhood or early adolescence. That is when the greatest number of divorces take place.<sup>730</sup> Temporarily incomplete families are the result of one parent's incarceration, professional needs, lengthy hospital treatment, or a long stay abroad.<sup>731</sup>

The cause of single parenthood is seen in the social change in marriage and family life<sup>732</sup> as well as on the individual level. Individual reasons include the early initiation of girls to sexual intercourse. Often it is related to the situation and experiences in the family of origin,<sup>733</sup> the parents' absence in education, and the mental absence of mother and father that leads to a sense of abandonment, a lack of parental feelings, loneliness, and poor understanding.<sup>734</sup> In the case of adult women who choose single parenting, the cause may be a traumatic complex toward men connected with their fathers, a lack of a positive model of woman and wife and of the matrimonial relationship, fear of responsibility, abandonment, and commitment. This situation is often the result of permissive attitudes, the acceptance of sexual freedom,<sup>735</sup> immaturity with regard to marriage expressed (among other things) irresponsibility<sup>736</sup> and hasty decisions.<sup>737</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* points to cultural tendencies that impose unrestricted, narcissistic, inconstant, and variable affectivity, which is not conducive to reaching maturity. Consequently, the spouses sometimes stay in the early stages of emotional and sexual

<sup>730</sup> Cf. K. Slany, *op. cit.*, 124, 126.

<sup>731</sup> Cf. E. Kozdrowicz, *Sytuacja dziecka w rodzinie samotnej matki. Skrypt dla studentów pedagogiki*, Warsaw, 1989, 15.

<sup>732</sup> L. Dyczewski, *Wyobrażenia młodzieży o małżeństwie i rodzinie pomiędzy tradycją a nowoczesnością*, 103–5. See K. Slany, *art. cit.*, 84–115, 124–8.

<sup>733</sup> A. Maciarz, *Macierzyństwo w kontekście zmian społecznych*, Warsaw, 2004, 7

<sup>734</sup> Poor contact with parents and their coldness often cause a child to search for compensation for the lack of love. In any cases, girls consent to sexual intercourse to express gratitude for acceptance and understanding. Cf. U. Kempieńska, *Małżeństwa młodocianych – przyczyny i konsekwencje*, Włocławek, 2005, 48–52; A. Januszewski, "Doświadczenie osamotnienia u młodzieży a postawy rodzicielskie," in: D. Kornas-Biela (ed.), *Rodzina – źródło życia i szkoła miłości*, Lublin, 2000, 297.

<sup>735</sup> Cf. W.B. Skrzydlewski, *Palące problemy seksualności*, Krakow, 2003, 55–9. See id., *Etyka seksualna. Przemiany i perspektywy*, Krakow, 1999, 31–5.

<sup>736</sup> Cf. S. Steuden, "Psychologiczne aspekty dojrzałości do zawarcia małżeństwa," in: G. Witaszek, R. Podpora (eds.), *Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie: drogi i bezdroża. Materiały z „DWA – 94,”* Lublin, 1996, 117–20.

<sup>737</sup> Cf. G. Pyżlak, *Rodzina niepełna i jej wpływ na sytuację wychowawczą dziecka*, 93.

life—they are uncertain, hesitant, and struggle to find ways of developing (AL 41). Idealized expectations and illusions about conjugal life can also lead to a feeling of obligation and hasty decisions about separation (cf. AL 221).<sup>738</sup> Moreover, confronting superficially, without the courage to have patience and reflect, marital crises, mutual forgiveness, reconciliation, and sacrifice give rise to new relationships, new couples, civil unions and marriages that are problematic from the Christian point of view (AL 41).

At the level of social loneliness, the undermining of the meaning and purpose of marriage as a community of life and love, the misunderstanding and disregard of the role of the sacrament of marriage, and the incapacity, because of immaturity, to create a lasting community of life are perceived as the visible underlying causes of single parenthood.<sup>739</sup> These causes are related to the rejection of the Christian moral with the norms that regulate conjugal life.<sup>740</sup> The Pontifical Council for the Family indicates, among the causes of the increase in the number of broken marriages, permissive legislation, the negative influence of the media and international organizations, and the inadequate Christian formation of the faithful. In turn, the crisis of married couples destabilizes the family leads to separation and divorce, with their serious consequences for individuals and society (AL 41).

The pastoral care of single-parent families is a part of the Church's ministry to families in difficult and irregular situations.<sup>741</sup> The pastoral accompaniment of these people—especially for those who are separated, divorced, and abandoned—is urgent and requires special discernment. The pastoral service to those whose marriages have broken down is also urgent (cf. AL 242, 238). The Church, through Her action, can prevent the formation of single-parent families, support single parents who are raising their children, and care for the children of single-parent families.

### Preventing the Formation of Incomplete Families

The Church has to strengthen marriage and support the family in its function and so prevent the formation of incomplete families. "The Church cannot remain indifferent to the fact that the number of these situations is rising." She cannot accept customs that undermine the value of marriage and approve

<sup>738</sup> Cf. P.M. Zulehner, *Bóg jest większy od naszego serca* (1J 3,20). *Teologia i duszpasterstwo miłosierdzia*, transl. by J. Serafin, Krakow, 2010, 189–90; V. Albisetti, *op. cit.*, 27–44.

<sup>739</sup> Cf. G. Pyżlak, "Samotne rodzicielstwo," RT 55:2008 fasc. 10, 223–4; K. Slany, *op. cit.*, 105–10.

<sup>740</sup> FC 7; cf. PŻMR 27–29.

<sup>741</sup> FC 77; DDR 71, 73.

whatever threatens its indissolubility (DOR). Pastoral and catechetical work with youth and families can shape a positive and mature view of human sexuality and respect for human fertility.<sup>742</sup> The Church reveals the fullness of the truth about human love and the moral values of responsible love.<sup>743</sup> She prepares young people for making mature decisions with regard to marriage, proclaims the religious and moral norms that protect marriage and the family, and explains the basic conjugal and family responsibilities long before marriage. Thus, She acts preventively by promoting personal responsibility for oneself and in marital and family life (cf. DDR 73).

The family is an educator and, at the same time, one of the agents of family ministry (cf. FC 72). In virtue of the sacrament of marriage, the spouses are called to accomplish their educational duties as an ecclesial ministry.<sup>744</sup> One of the family's tasks is to prepare the young generation for married life (LtF 16) and, at the same time, to prevent the formation of incomplete families (DOR I).

The parents' educational work produces its best results when it is carried out in a spirit of service (FC 21). The family atmosphere, permeated by the love of God, forms in them the attitude of self-giving and prepares them to live in accordance with the Christian moral principles. The parent's bond of mutual love and their love for the children awakens trust in them, encourages love, and provides reliable protection for their emotional equilibrium that makes them able to orient their fears and aspirations (see LP 51-52). In a climate of love, children are more likely to respect authority and imitate their parents, including their sexual and social roles. The example of the parents' fidelity to God, to one another, to the indissolubility of marriage and conjugal chastity is especially important. The example of the parents' life and prayer, together with positive detailed explanations of the principles of Christian morality, help adolescents to observe chastity. It is above all important for them to pray and to receive the sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist.<sup>745</sup>

Pastoral care should, through moral and religious training of the young and by guiding them towards spiritual maturity and fidelity, prevent the formation of *de facto* unions. It must help them understand the human and supernatural richness of sacramental marriage. Furthermore, it is useful to mention the instability and dangers of living in free unions (cf. FC 81).

<sup>742</sup> Cf. A. Dzióba, *Narzeczeni wobec ludzkiej płodności. Studium pastoralne*, 215–20.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. B.M. Parysiewicz, *Wychowanie do miłości. Studium z duszpasterstwa rodzin*, Lublin, 2010, 244–6, 458.

<sup>744</sup> FC 38, 53; LtF 16; AL 200.

<sup>745</sup> TMHS 102; FC 20; DOR II; PŻMR 38, 40.

Marriage preparation in the ecclesial community at the proximate stage gives people to possibility to get familiarized with important issues of marriage and responsible parenthood. In order to prevent the formation of incomplete families, young people must be prepared to conduct their families, to educate children and carry out the family apostolate, to work with other families, and to participate in movements and associations (FC 66). The immediate preparation allows the engaged to deepen their knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, the meaning of grace, and the responsibility of the Christian marriage.<sup>746</sup> Pastors are encouraged to prepare their young engaged couples through adult catechesis, showing married life as a path of sanctification, shaping pro-life attitudes, enabling them to renew their faith life and receive the Church's sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation and the Eucharist (LKSW 128). This preparation can help them to build a common prayer life and strengthen their spirit of prayer. This may be of help when conjugal and family crises arise (PŻMR 42).

Pastoral ministry can prevent the breakdown of marriages by showing the value of marriage and the family, promoting the indissolubility of marriage, and supporting the family. The Church is aiming to "to promote in every ecclesial community an adequate and integrated program of pastoral care for the family" (EE 91). Each parish community is called to care for young couples, who are the most likely to experience difficulties during the first years of marriage and risk falling apart.<sup>747</sup> Pastors should strive to ensure that as many young couples as possible find their place in all sorts of family communities, movements, or associations. A proven form of assistance to spouses is the organization of family retreats in the parish (PŻMR 44-45). They are an opportunity for spiritual formation, closer meeting with other spouses, sharing experience, as well as for psychological, social, and spiritual support (cf. LtF 16).

All members of the local church community are obliged to help married couples to live out their vocation and strengthen their bonds of love. The

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<sup>746</sup> The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* underlines that the preparation is particularly necessary for engaged couple who still have some deficiencies and have difficulties accepting the doctrine and the practice of the Christian life. FC 66.

<sup>747</sup> FC 69. In the United States, the majority of marriages break during the first two years. According to the 2008 CSO survey in Poland, the highest proportion of marriages break during the first ten years. In 2007, the average divorced couple survived for eight years. Cf. In the United States, the largest number of marriages break up during the first two years of marriage. According to the 2008 CSO survey in Poland, the highest proportion of disintegrating marriages is in the first ten years of marriage. On average, marriages divorced in 2007 survived eight years. Cf. H. Cudak, *Zagrożenia emocjonalne i społeczne dzieci z rodzin rozwiedzionych*, Torun, 2010, 13, 17.

Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* particularly emphasizes the urgent need to accompany the spouses in the church community, in order to develop their faith and fortify their bond of love. Mature and formed spouses should assist pastors in accompanying the younger spouses.<sup>748</sup> Discreet, gentle, and generous help from mature spouses seems to be very valuable to the young ones. The Church encourages the latter to accept and appreciate their help.<sup>749</sup> Pope Francis sees all of the pastoral care of families in the perspective of caring for the conjugal and family ties (AL 211) and as “the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307). Perceiving the breakup of marriages as a drama of our times, the pope states that “our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love [and help] to heal wounds” (AL 246).

Pastoral care for marriages and families affected by problems that are a leading cause of divorce is a direct way to prevent marriage breakup.<sup>750</sup> Pastoral work can limit pathological family situations and help spouses to overcome marital and family conflicts or crises by finding constructive solutions without resorting to divorce. The intensification of these interventions is required notably in the pastoral care in cities, where the number of divorces is higher than in rural areas.<sup>751</sup>

Appreciable pastoral initiatives have been undertaken to support spouses and strengthen their conjugal bond. These include pastoral marriage counseling which aims at strengthening the conjugal community, by diagnosing and averting possible threats.<sup>752</sup> For many couples and families, group sobriety and abstinence and retreats can help to eliminate habits that harm the family (PŻMR 45). When spouses have trouble getting along and communicating, meetings and retreats including marriage dialogue are useful.<sup>753</sup>

Pope Francis also sees the role played by the spouses’ deep Paschal faith and prayer in difficult moments, when there is a risk of their breaking up, when he says: “In the darkest hours of a family’s life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup” (AL 317). Direct support for families at risk of breaking down is proposed by SYCHAR – the Community for Difficult Marriages<sup>754</sup> and the crusade of prayer for married couples in danger

<sup>748</sup> Cf. AL 41, 120 ff., 217 ff., 246, 307.

<sup>749</sup> FC 69-70; DOR II.

<sup>750</sup> Cf. DOR I; H. Cudak, *Zagrożenia emocjonalne i społeczne dzieci z rodzin rozwiedzionych*, Torun, 2010, 21-5.

<sup>751</sup> H. Cudak, *op. cit.*, 13.

<sup>752</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 425-33.

<sup>753</sup> See <http://www.spotkaniamalzenskie.pl/>.

<sup>754</sup> See <http://en.sychar.org/>.

of breaking up.<sup>755</sup> The necessary information for spouses and parents should be included in relevant diocesan documentation and available in parishes as well as through the Catholic press, Catholic media, and websites. The pastoral visit – “kolęda” – (PŻMR 45) is also helpful for establishing or deepening the contact with families.

In the pastoral care, attention and preventive care should also be given to temporarily incomplete families, where the situation is primarily due to the departure of one of the spouses for professional reasons. These trips cause long interruptions of the spouses' direct contact, conjugal problems, and growing estrangement. These factors are increasing the divorce rate among migrant families.<sup>756</sup> Therefore, it is important to point out how these trips endanger the permanence of marriage and the family. It seems valuable to encourage the spouses to leave together as a family, and so preserve their intimacy while supporting one another and protecting the children against negative consequences.<sup>757</sup> During this difficult period, spouses and children at home can find support in frequent contact with the parish, the reception of the sacraments, prayer, and involvement in parish groups. It may also be helpful to get support from a parish or family counseling center (see DDR 38-43).

### Support for Spouses and Parents of Incomplete Families

The unique situation of all incomplete families calls for pastoral support. Unmarried women who raise their children alone, the death of one parent, breakups, or abandonment of the family create excessive burdens and difficulties in both the family and education.<sup>758</sup> In addition, incomplete families at times face specific problems and threats.

Today changes are observed in how single parenthood is considered in society, where it is becoming an alternative form of parental responsibility. According to popular belief, a woman can become a mother if she so desires.<sup>759</sup> There are several categories of families of single mothers, e.g., widowed, divorced, and unmarried women with children, and married women whose

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<sup>755</sup> See <http://malzenstwo.zw.pl/krucjata-modlitwy-w-intencji-malzenstw-zagrozonych-rozbiciem/>.

<sup>756</sup> P. Landwójtowicz, *Duszpasterskie poradnictwo małżeńskie w Polsce*, 386, S. Kozak, *Patologia eurosieroctwa w Polsce*, 87.

<sup>757</sup> Cf. P. Landwójtowicz, *op. cit.*, 387-90.

<sup>758</sup> Cf. M. Raclaw-Markowska, “Sytuacja materialno-bytowa rodzin samotnych matek,” in: M. Rzymsza (ed.), *Samotne macierzyństwo i polityka społeczna*, 33-4.

<sup>759</sup> G. Pyżlak, “Samotne rodzicielstwo,” 222.

husbands are temporarily or permanently absent.<sup>760</sup> The negative effects of single parenting include housing problems and financial difficulties caused by the lack of a second family income and relatively low earnings.<sup>761</sup> Often the need to find extra work at the expense of repose leads to overburdening, overwork, fatigue, and moodiness. Single mothers are unable to devote sufficient time to their children, and that fact leads to stress, feelings of guilt and remorse, and both physical and mental health problems,<sup>762</sup> which are aggravated, in turn, by the lack of time for proper health care.<sup>763</sup>

Among parents raising children alone, there are spreading phenomena of abandoning or limiting social contacts and self isolation. There is also a sense of rejection by society. This leads mothers to limit their contact with friends and even with their own family, restricting it exclusively to the children. These women are, consequently, more susceptible to mental breakdowns and depression, feelings of emptiness and helplessness.<sup>764</sup> Another difficulty comes from the inability to legalize the relationship with the child's father,<sup>765</sup> as well as from the lack of help from the family and society. When increasing difficulties pile up, the mother may become indifferent or feel reluctance towards the child, whom she perceives as an obstacle to the realization of her plans in life.<sup>766</sup>

Divorced people constitute a high percentage of single parents.<sup>767</sup> The phenomenon of the impermanence of marriage often leads to separation, abandonment, loneliness, and injustice, and distress in child-rearing (see DDR 73). Divorce causes serious injury to the abandoned spouse and to the children, who are shocked by their parents' divorce. Increasing the number of decaying marriages is also reinforcing the negative patterns of social behavior (cf. CCC 2385).<sup>768</sup>

In women, divorce produces strong emotional stress associated with the disintegration of the relationship, divorce trauma, low self-esteem and guilt

<sup>760</sup> M. Raclaw-Markowska, art. cit., 36.

<sup>761</sup> PChK 21; cf. E. Sikora, *Samotne matki*, 229; H. Kubicka, *Bezdomność rodzin samotnych matek, społeczno-wychowawcze aspekty zjawiska*, Łódź, 2005, 47.

<sup>762</sup> J. Brągiel, *Wychowanie w rodzinie niepełnej*, Opole, 1990, 43–4.

<sup>763</sup> Cf. E. Adamczuk, art. cit., 230–1; H. Kubicka, *op. cit.*, 48.

<sup>764</sup> J. Brągiel, *op. cit.*, 45.

<sup>765</sup> This inability is caused by the lack of emotional bonds, short-lived relationships, including the fact that the child's father is married or also quite young. H. Kubicka, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>767</sup> Cf. S. Rydz, "Psychologiczne skutki samotnego rodzicielstwa," in: I. Janicka (ed.), *Rodzice i dzieci w różnych systemach rodzinnych*, Kraków, 2010, 153.

<sup>768</sup> The growing number of divorces is perceived as one of the sources of the contemporary family crisis. Cf. T. Miklos, "Rodzina w posoborowym nauczaniu Kościoła," in: J. Zimny (ed.), *Współczesne zagrożenia rodziny*, Sandomierz, 2006, 28.

feelings, a sense of guilt towards loved ones and the children, and the impression of having failed in life.<sup>769</sup> It is also followed by the loss and change of identity, deterioration in health, and the trap of regression.<sup>770</sup> The process of adapting to single parenthood is slow. Disorganization of the whole lifestyle requires coping with one's own emotions, reorganizing life, acquiring new modes of behavior, and assuming additional functions in the family.<sup>771</sup>

The Church is, however, aware that, in some cases, when all reasonable interactions prove futile, the spouses' separation may be inevitable. Yet, She strives to protect the dignity of the child and the good of children against any injustice, violence, chronic lack of respect, humiliation, and serious wounds. Then, from a moral point of view, divorce may be necessary (AL 241). Likewise, in some cases, civil divorce is the only possible way to safeguard the legitimate rights of family members, and it does not constitute a moral offense (CCC 2383). The process of civil divorce frequently goes hand in hand with the ecclesiastical process for the annulment of canonical marriage.

Many people abandoned by their spouse in the name of fidelity to marriage do not enter into a new union but, with great austerity, bear witness to the Christian faith (cf. DOR III f.). *Amoris Laetitia* encourages these people to find in the Eucharist the nourishment that will support them and the source of grace to forgive the injustice inflicted upon them. On the other hand, it is recommended that the local community and pastors accompany these people with care (AL 242). There are, however, both single mothers and divorced parents who choose to cohabit.<sup>772</sup> This topic is dealt with in a separate section (15.7).

The Church's pastoral action should provide maternal care and aid families in difficulty, especially single mothers, separated and divorced spouses. Its role is to encourage, assist, and support families, both individually and in associations in this work, and to obtain genuine and adequate family policies from the individual States (cf. EE 91). The Church also encourages families to exercise their apostolate through spiritual and charitable works, helping abandoned spouses, unmarried mothers, orphans, and mothers-to-be who, in difficult situations, are tempted to abort (cf. FC 71). Pope Francis adds

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<sup>769</sup> S. Rydz, art. cit., 156.

<sup>770</sup> Women experience a double regression, in relation to their own child and in their role as their own parents' incompetent child. The first is often the source of the emotional tension and affects the woman's activities as mother. As a result of the second regression, the adult daughter's parents replace her in the duties at home and take charge of their grandchildren; this can lead to the woman's dependency and loss of autonomy. H. Kubicka, *op. cit.*, 48–9.

<sup>771</sup> Cf. J. Brągiel, *op. cit.*, 42.

<sup>772</sup> Cf. K. Slany, art. cit., 124.

that, when helping teenage mothers, single women, and children abandoned by their parents, the larger family—including not only relatives and family members, but also friends, other families, and communities of families—should be particularly important (cf. AL 196-197).

Among society's proposals, single parents can benefit from the help of institutions and non-governmental organizations that provide assistance as part of their basic tasks.<sup>773</sup> Foundations are being created to assist single mothers.<sup>774</sup> Workshops are organized for them, and there are internet clinics. However, for a variety of reasons, the percentage of people using this kind of assistance is still small.<sup>775</sup>

Among the forms of assistance given by the Church, there are homes for single mothers, often run by ecclesial institutions. There, women who are alone can prepare for their child's birth in decent conditions, learn to be independent and responsible, and to do the simplest household tasks. They also receive psychological support to build up their self-esteem and give them the self-confidence necessary for caring for the child.<sup>776</sup> Single mothers also receive assistance from pro-life movements and associations.<sup>777</sup>

For married couples going through crises, single parents, for those who are separated, abandoned and experiencing different kinds of difficulties, help is given free of charge in parish family counseling centers as well as in the specialized centers of deaneries, districts, and dioceses (cf. AL 244). In the specialized centers, in addition to the help of a priest, they can benefit from the help of psychologists, pedagogues, jurists, doctors, court mediators, and other specialists. Efforts should be made to allow greater access to these specialized centers and to develop new models of support for spouses and families.

Catholic kindergartens and form of parish housing are appreciated and sought by the single parents (cf. DDR 50). By providing competent educational care, they allow parents who are overworked and burdened with

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<sup>773</sup> Cf. S. Rydz, art. cit., 153–60.

<sup>774</sup> Cf. Fundacja "Samotna Mama," *O nas*: <http://www.fundacjasamotnamama.org/o-nas> (consulted on 16.08.2011).

<sup>775</sup> A. Malec, "O sytuacji młodocianych matek," *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze* 2004/02, 37.

<sup>776</sup> Cf. W. Przygoda, *Posługa charytatywnej Kościoła w Polsce*, 196.

<sup>777</sup> The Polish Federation of Pro-Life Movements, founded in 1992, associates 137 major pro-family organizations. Their aim is to support women during unplanned pregnancy and to change the social attitudes towards parenthood and abortion, while promoting natural methods of planning conception. The federation provides aid, for example, by saving lives, providing direct assistance and care to pregnant women, and preventive pedagogical and educational activities. Cf. E. Bogdańska, "Dom dla matki i dziecka," in: J. Brągiel – Badora (eds.), *Formy opieki, wychowania i wsparcia w zreformowanym systemie pomocy społecznej*, Opole, 2005, 193–4.

responsibilities to find time to deal with other important issues, to care for their health, and to rest.

Pastors should know the married couples who are formally separated or living separately, as well as the abandoned spouses and single parents, and provide them with adequate support within the Church's ministry of charity. These people often need individualized spiritual direction and other pastoral encounters to help them live in accordance with the Church's teaching (cf. PŽMR 51).

In addition to offering counseling, pastors should strive to bring these people into parish groups where they can benefit from the multifaceted support of a community and open hearts to others. Helping these people to engage more fully in parish life can transform the pain of their loneliness into good rendered to the needy (see DDR 71,73).

In order to properly care for people who, for different reasons, cohabit in informal unions the pastors and the local community must know what led to this situation and accompany them with respect, care, and patience so that they may more easily reach a solution.<sup>778</sup> Pastors should help the faithful to discern the possibility of turning to an ecclesiastical tribunal to obtain an invalid marriage (DOR II). Pope Francis stresses, on the one hand, the urgent need for patient discernment and accompaniment for persons who are separated, divorced, and abandoned (AL 242), and the need to make marriage annulment procedures more easily accessible and less time consuming, and so provide the faithful easier access to church justice (AL 244).

### Assisting Children of Incomplete Families

Children being raised in incomplete families have personal difficulties and often experience educational problems. In this kind of family, the child does not feel the peace and security that a family should give him. There are many disturbances associated with the absence of one parent or a family's disintegration. Some of these difficulties are experienced by children in families that are temporarily incomplete.

Single parents often manifest negative emotional attitudes towards children that affect their mutual relations and their relationships with others.<sup>779</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> FC 81; cf. SCa 29; AL 244.

<sup>779</sup> Single parents display two types of attitudes towards their children: excessive distance or excessive emotional concentration. The first attitude leads to disobedience, quarrels, lies, emotional instability, and awakens the child's sense of enmity. The second type can cause social immaturity, manifested by a sense of submission, helplessness, or emotional hyperactivity. A single mother with an excessive emotional focus on the child deprives him of the possibility to organize his own stimulating environment, exposing him in adulthood to future family failures.

Single mothers are prone to feeling aversion to the child. The emotional chill experienced in childhood and the lack of love leave a deep mark in the personality, with life-long consequences for the young person.<sup>780</sup> Single motherhood degrades the child's social relationships.<sup>781</sup> It makes it impossible to identify with the father on whom the quality of the child's socialization depends. The lack of proper fatherly proximity in many ways distorts his upbringing and the learning of new social roles.<sup>782</sup> The father's absence limits access to positive behavior patterns and to a coherent system of norms and values, and this, in turn, leads to difficulties in the children's development and social functioning.<sup>783</sup> Children of single parents are more burdened with chores at home and, having, therefore, less time for fun and friendships, they become socially passive.<sup>784</sup>

The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* points out the effects of separation or divorce for children, who are innocent victims of these situations (AL 245). Family breakup produces a strong psychological shock in the child and permanent trauma, that influences his sense of worth and frustration. The first traumatic situation experienced by a child in an incomplete family is the marital conflict that precedes the family's disintegration. It jeopardizes his sense of security and self-esteem. The second difficult situation for a child, which produces multiple frustrations, is growing up in a family with a single personal model.<sup>785</sup> Every family breakup has negative consequences that are fixed for life in the child's memory, modify his personality and subsequently affect his interpersonal relationships. The model of the incomplete family largely influences the person's character, attitudes, self-esteem and, later, models of interpersonal relationships.<sup>786</sup> In some cases, the break of the parents' emotional relationship can cause even the appearance of psychopathic traits in the child.<sup>787</sup>

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Cf. S. Lipiński, "Poczucie koherencji u chłopców i dziewcząt wychowywanych przez samotne matki," in: G. Poraj – J. Rostowski (eds.), *Zagrożenia życia rodzinnego*, Łódź, 2003, 39–41.

<sup>780</sup> Cf. A. Januszewski, art. cit., 297.

<sup>781</sup> H. Kubicka, *op. cit.*, 39–52.

<sup>782</sup> Cf. M. Oleś, "Rodzina a umiejętności psychospołeczne dzieci," in: D. Kornas-Biela (ed.), *Rodzina: źródło życia i szkoła miłości*, Lublin, 2000, 274; M. Przetacznik-Gierowska – Z. Włodarski, *Psychologia wychowawcza*, vol. 2, Warsaw, 1998, 143.

<sup>783</sup> D. Zimacka, *Rodzina niepełna i jej skutki: Rodzina jako grupa społeczna*: [http://www.sp4zambrow.pl/publikacje/dorota\\_z/rodzina.pdf](http://www.sp4zambrow.pl/publikacje/dorota_z/rodzina.pdf) (consulted on 16.06.2015). Cf. Lipiński, art. cit., 39–40.

<sup>784</sup> J. Brągiel, *op. cit.*, 48.

<sup>785</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>786</sup> Cf. S. Rydz, art. cit., 153.

<sup>787</sup> B. Baran, "Samoocena i aspiracje perspektywistyczne dzieci z rodzin niepełnych," in: K. Suszek (ed.), *Rodzina a rozwój dzieci i młodzieży*, Szczecin, 1995, 32–51.

For different social, psychological, or moral reasons some single and divorced parents do not want to get married but prefer living and raising their children in free unions. This situation often does not solve the child's problems, but rather creates new ones for both him and his parents (cf. FC 81).

Pope Francis, aware of the consequences of divorce, addressed this plea to separated parents: "Never ever, 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 tranquility and cause wounds hard to heal" (AL 245).

Frequently the meetings of a pastor with a single mother or divorced parents living in free unions are linked to a request for baptism. Although Canon Law does not prohibit the baptism of a child living in this kind of situations, it does impose certain conditions (CIC, can. 868 §1). The baptism of the child should be an occasion to deepen the faith of the parents and to encourage those living in a non-sacramental union who can get married to do so.

Parents who cannot get married should be given pastoral care, encouraged to pray in the family, to give the children a Christian education, to practice penance, and accomplish acts of mercy. Good knowledge of their individual problems, along with pastoral esteem and patience, can make it easier for them to sort out their situation (FC 81). In his exhortation, Pope Francis emphasizes the need for Christian communities (especially parishes) to care for the divorced living in new unions. He states that these communities should involve them and accompany them in their educational role. "Helping heal the wounds of parents and supporting them spiritually is also beneficial for children" (AL 246).

Children raised by single mothers and in broken families are wounded by the lack of responsible love on the part of their loved ones and should experience that love in the Church, so that they may develop normally. They require special spiritual care, specific catechesis, positive models, and educational care, as well as material support.<sup>788</sup> Children in incomplete families may have some educational difficulties, especially during catechism in school. However, this cannot be a reason to neglect giving them the care that they need. To meet their developmental and social needs, they should be invited to join parish children's groups and to take part in organized holidays and vacations (DDR 73).

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<sup>788</sup> Cf. DDR 73; DOR II.

These children are greatly helped through the parish canteen, where they can get warm meals after school and do their homework under the guidance of tutors (DDR 50). In collaboration with a family counseling center or a specialized center, the children can receive assistance in day-care centers, where psychologists can support their development and effectively counteract negative tendencies. It is advisable that a priest should be available in the parish or socio therapeutic common room, organized in partnership with the parish.

In the event of the death of both parents, divorce, and the lack of care for a child, especially if the parental rights are withdrawn, it is necessary to assure the child's placement in a foster family, and family-like homes for orphans should be created (DDR 48-49). All abandoned children should be surrounded by maternal care and assistance (cf. EE 91).

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The Church is aware that the family fulfills its primary function by educating the young, and She embraces with maternal care all those who do not have a complete family. Her ministry to incomplete families, as wide as Christ's Heart, should lead them closer to the Word of truth and convey goodness, understanding, and hope by actively taking part in their sufferings. The Church has the task of gratuitously helping them to approach the ideal of the family shown in creation and redemption. In this work, the Church's activity should be progressive, following the family and accompanying it in its formation and development (FC 65). The Church should approach the difficult situations of broken and incomplete families with goodness, without judging them but rather illuminating the darkness of human drama with the light of God's word, and support them with the testimony of her mercy (EE 93).

#### *15.6. Pastoral Care for Mixed Marriages*

WIESŁAW BAR

The term "mixed marriage" is not uniformly understood. The phenomenon has always been present in the life of the Church, and in the course of time, in a variety of circumstances, the doctrine and the discipline have evolved, as we see in the documents of the Catholic Church, especially after Vatican II. Today, migration and new forms of social communication are leading to an increase in the number of mixed marriages that calls for more careful pastoral care in marriage preparation and its continuation after the wedding.