The International Formation Encounter on Family

July 2017 Madrid
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“See how they love one another”
A lay Ignatian look at Family
In response to the call for a new family pastoral in
Amoris Laetitia

July 2017 Madrid

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Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................... 5
Edel Beatrice Churu

The IFE Process ............................................................................................................ 9
Denis Dobbelstein

IFE Orientations

Family Pastoral Today .................................................................................................. 20
Rev. José Guillermo Gutiérrez Fernández

A Lay Ignatian Reading of Amoris Laetitia ............................................................... 34
Denis Dobbelstein & Marie-Claire Beaudelot

Witnessing

The Gap Between .......................................................................................................... 46
Angela Chen & Anthonio Huang

At the Service of Family Life ..................................................................................... 58
Véronique

Ignatian Tools

El Reloj - The Family Clock ....................................................................................... 72
Carmen Oliveros

An Exciting Model ....................................................................................................... 79
María Loreto Quijada & Cristián Rodríguez

Families Turning .......................................................................................................... 86
Nancy Wood

An Ignatian Road Map for CLC Family Pastoral .................................................... 90
Fernando Vidal

IFE Final Document .................................................................................................... 104
Introduction

Edel Beatrice Churu - Vice President, World ExCo

The Family: A topic at once ancient and new; always fresh. Yet Pope Francis’ synodal processes on the family and his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia have given greater freshness if also greater urgency still to Family Pastoral in the Church today. We in Christian Life Community have reason to be very grateful that our discernment of the most urgent frontiers towards the Lebanon World Assembly 2013 brought Family, Ecology and Youth among the four leading areas. Our discernment has been confirmed by the focus of the universal Church on these three frontiers through the special emphases of Pope Francis and the synodal processes.

A special development of the last few years has been the emphasis of the use of Ignatian tools for family life and family pastoral. This orientation received a particular strong impetus through the International Family Encounter that CLC held in Madrid in July 2017. The IFE was organized in partnership with the Comillas Pontifical University. This issue of Progressio Supplement, dedicated to Family, brings together the papers and tools presented and reflected upon during the IFE and some reflections thereupon.

A strong and resounding sense was felt during the IFE, of the call to CLC to go to the Family frontier embodying our Ignatian identity and tools. There was no doubt that this sense is experienced throughout the body of CLC Worldwide, and the IFE experience of it was a kind of confirmation. From this perspective of our identity and tools, there is ample scope to be creative and responsive to all the realities that characterize family at the frontiers. Go back to Galilee, you will see me there! By returning to our roots, to the place of our encounter with
the Lord, we are able to share life with others more deeply and to hold out both promise and hope.

The IFE was blessed with the presence and input of Rev. Fr. José Guillermo Gutiérrez Fernández from the new Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. His paper, entitled “Family Pastoral Care Today: Challenges and Orientations” was a great foundation for the reflection of the IFE, challenging and encouraging the CLC to go radically into Family ministry, responding genuinely to the realities on the ground and discerning our response with a greater openness to the guidance of the Spirit. He let us know that the Church counts on us, committed lay communities to indicate directions in which the Family pastoral can be more authentic. He challenged us to bring the gift of our Ignatian formation into the service of the larger Church. Fr. Guillermo’s paper was a special gift to the CLC especially as he was speaking to us from the center of the Church, elucidating the spirit of Amoris Laetitia. The presence of Fr. Guillermo throughout the IFE, even though his paper was the first one delivered, was an even more audible message of support from the Centre of the Church. I hope that the readers of Fr. Guillermo’s paper will be able to catch some of the fire and energy that he injected into the IFE. He reinforced our desire to feel with the Church especially by making us experience how the Church at the center desires to feel with us and our plight.

A second paper reflecting directly on Amoris Laetitia was a special witness from a CLC Couple, Denis Dobbelstein and Marie Claire Beaudelot from French Belgium. They gave us a lay Ignatian reading of Amoris Laetitia. Their ‘reading’ is heavily influenced by the experience of their lived family life as lay Christians, as CLC members. Most of our CLC and other lay readers will certainly enjoy and identify much with this experience where the incarnation
is made so evident. It is a powerful testimony, as indeed are the witnesses of
Angela Chen and Anthonio Huang from CLC Taiwan, a CLC couple from Tai-
wan, and of Véronique from CLC France, both witnessing to their experience
of being on mission in and with families. In all these presentations we expe-
rienced how indeed our mission in and with families is like working in a ‘field
hospital’ and we ourselves are graced to be ‘wounded healers’.

During the IFE we also had a sharing of a selection of tools that CLC members
in different parts of the world have developed for their family pastoral engage-
ment. You will find these tools also shared in this volume. A deeper reflection
(a review) on the process of the IFE is given by Denis Dobblestein on behalf of
the organizing committee. The paper is particularly indicated as this IFE was a
special experience of the power of a communal discernment process. On a dif-
derent gradient, the paper by Dr. Fernando Vidal of CLC Spain and of the Pont-
tifical University of Comillas proposes some of what might be lasting products
of the IFE. After a series of inputs, active listening, reflection, and sharing
among the IFE participants, Fernando presented An Ignatian Roadmap to CLC
Family Pastoral. He provided a synthesis of what transpired during the encoun-
ter, and he proposes a vision for the Ignatian family pastoral The artistic and
diagrammatic presentations from the IFE trajectory, and the explanations thereof
propose rich and promising pathways that CLC might consider moving into in
the future. The particular product of the IFE is asserted in the final statement of
the IFE, also given here. However, it is the experience of the participants that
was the most fecund product of the IFE, and we hope that these papers will help
them and other readers to keep growing in the experience of communal discer-
nment for mission on the Frontiers, and to bring the Ignatian tools into every
level of CLC life and engagement.
Was it reasonable to hold a mini-world assembly one year before the World Assembly?

Apart from our World Assemblies, convened every five years, CLC only organizes world-wide events very exceptionally. We certainly had good reasons for launching the invitation on the theme of the family: this frontier was clearly affirmed by the final document of the Assembly held in Lebanon; it’s a mission that concerns not only each national community but all individual members of the world community; and there is also the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

Nevertheless, this project was a gamble. The intuition and desire of some enthusiastic promoters was yet to undergo the test of the discernment of the national communities. Which ones would be able to send participants? We were demanding: we wanted to bring together experienced people, already involved in family pastoral work and ready to play the role of “multiplier” after the meeting in Madrid. Who would esteem that it was indeed worth it to send delegates to Madrid for a 3 day meeting? Imagine the cost borne jointly by the budget of the national communities and the apostolic fund of the world community.

The Madrid meeting was attended by 73 participants from 28 different countries representing all CLC regions. Obviously, what could appear as a bold gamble was in fact the fruit of just discernment.
However, the meeting in itself is not the only cause of our happiness. The present reflection gives some elements of answer to two more fundamental questions: Is the call we have heard from the Universal Church a call of the Spirit? And will we live up to the challenges we have identified together?

**CLC is not isolated: we want to be at the heart of the world and of the Church**

This is not a mere declaration of intention: it is at the same time a fact and a resolution which we have taken on. Our willingness to dialogue as a global community has been translated in two very concrete ways.

**Partnership with the Family Institute of Comillas University**

I have sometimes heard proud remarks to highlight the fact that CLC identified the family as one of its frontiers of the highest priority as early as 2013. We were not the only ones, but it is true that it was before the two synods. An encouraging indication of our sensitivity to the needs of the world and the expectations of the Church, certainly. The meeting in Madrid was a way for the global community to confront the concrete demands of our principle of readiness.

The originality of the meeting in Madrid is that we organized it in partnership with the Institute of the Family of the Comillas Pontifical University of Madrid. The meeting was very different from a university colloquium. Indeed, the public was composed exclusively of CLC members, engaged in their national community in the pastoral of the family and without an academic profile for the vast majority. However, the partnership with Comillas fundamentally altered the scope of the meeting. The CLC was in fact in dialogue with an institution that had its own codes and criteria of excellence. When Fernando Vidal spoke to us, he did it in his capacity as director of the University Institute of the Family. I heard words that can not leave us indifferent, which push us to
leave our comfort zone: network, sharing skills, contagion of pastoral creativity, impact on large scale, etc. I’ll come back to that.

A fruitful misunderstanding with the representative of the Vatican

The meeting benefited from a second participation that opens us to the universal. We had sent an invitation to the newly created Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. This was not just a polite invitation. We could not be insensitive to the call of Pope Francis. What is more, the World ExCo was very sensitive to the reception given by the Prefect of the Dicastery at the meeting in February 2017. And here the Dicastery accepted the invitation, beyond what we had imagined: Fr. José Guillermo Gutiérrez joined us at L’Escorial and stayed with us throughout the meeting, that is to say the three days of the official program and the day of cultural visit.

To mention the active participation of José Guillermo Gutiérrez, I share an anecdote and a few key words. He was scheduled to take one of the two introductory presentations on the first day. We had his text and we were a little worried about how he would orally present the contents of 11 pages in 30 minutes.

For such a delicate diplomatic mission, we chose Herminio, our world vice-ecclesiastical assistant. Informed that he only had 30 minutes, José Guillermo was not upset but relieved, because he thought he didn’t have enough material to satisfy a public as demanding as the CLC (he had understood that he was to address the assembly for 90 minutes). This misunderstanding was actually extremely fruitful. Confronted with the necessity of giving the essential, José Guillermo spoke from the heart; i.e. he spoke from his position in the heart of the Church but also of his vision of mankind. It was an invaluable gift. He has the art of being completely faithful to his original text, all in giving us much more. His talk freed us and I dare to say that it was one of the keys to the

CLC has its roots in the heart of the Church, but it also goes with confidence to the frontiers. It was important to hear from a representative of the Dicastery that the Pope promotes “a pastoral orientation of indication and not of obligation”.

The IFE Process
success of the meeting. CLC has its roots in the heart of the Church, but it also goes with confidence to the frontiers. It was important to hear from a representative of the Dicastery that the Pope promotes “a pastoral orientation of indication and not of obligation”. We heard an enthusiastic invitation to deploy the creativity of which we are capable as a community.

**Space for community discernment**

The recipe for community discernment includes three principal ingredients: a community, a challenge on which to discern and an adapted method.

1. **A community which precedes and goes beyond the group of participants**

I deliberately avoided a chronological account, which would have led me to speak to you about the welcome at the airport in the introduction. So I made a point of giving priority to the challenges of the meeting. Nevertheless I want to say something about the airport welcome because it says important things about our community. Members of the CLC were already waiting for us in the arrival hall with panels and wearing tee-shirts with the colours of the IFE. Close behind them, other members were ready to lead us to the car (one hour drive), whereas we had received precise indications to take public transport (two hours 30 min). We were expected and especially welcomed. We were disappointed to discover that they would not take part in the meeting. Imagine our amazement at the humility of their service. Each participant was welcomed like a friend, simply because we belong to the same community. Each participant… except Marie-Madeleine and Alain (France), who missed the welcome committee and followed the directions to take the bus.

On arrival at Escorial, the situation was at first paradoxically more complicated. There were known faces. Easy. Others were completely unknown since it was the theme which had determined the choice of the participants and some participants were completely new. There were other guests at the guest house, so we hesitated: CLC or not?
You guess the rest. Here’s a quick photo of events: the official yet warm reception and presentation by our vice-president, Edel Churu. Our very first meeting in small groups was personal and trusting. Shared language and horizons made it possible to be at ease with the diversity of realities. The truthfulness of testimonials set the tone: we wanted to speak about our real lives rather than of a dreamed life.

The joy of being together was palpable. It was especially present the evening of the second day, when a small fiesta was organized with three times nothing: two tables with some drinks and local snacks, “tapas”, a corner of garden plunged into near total darkness, a guitar, dance and the free pleasure of simply enjoying one another’s company.

2. The courage to look at the diversity of situations together

Even after 37 years of CLC membership, I continue to be filled with wonder at how quickly people who are totally unknown to one another can establish a sincere and personal rapport. It is all the more impressive when the subject is so personal and charged with emotions. The participants were not “experts” but nevertheless were people of experience. All were willing to speak of their own personal experience, no matter how difficult, complex or painful. I know that this concern for speaking the truth is rare and thus invaluable. I am personally convinced that the trust we find in our
small sharing groups is based on the one hand on the community’s force (“We belong to the same spiritual family”) as well as on our culture of respectful listening (“It is safe to share”).

This trust is more than just “liking one another” and so accepting of what we have to say. Our sharing is rooted in a positive outlook which gives us the space to take on the invitation to change and to make peace with yet unknown challenges. We began by sharing our personal experiences, personal or pastoral, thus avoiding the risk of theoretical debates or confrontation of idealistic visions.

I was very touched by the pertinence and the respect with which the assembly approached delicate topics. The respect and inner freedom were quite as palpable as the joy evoked in the previous paragraph. How can one not marvel on witnessing an intelligent and serene dialogue on the place of divorcees at the heart of CLC, knowing that for some it’s a theoretical hypothesis and for others it’s an almost ordinary part of everyday life? It was impossible to remain untouched on hearing about the experiences of people who are homosexual, although for some of the participants this is an unknown reality and for others it’s lived right in their families, or for others their bishop has given them the mission of accompanying homosexual couples.

Truthfulness, when we look at our own stories or our pastoral experience, is an essential component to the quality of our sharing. The First Week of the Exercises is not optional; it precedes the Second, always, even for those who are in a “regular” situation. Taking our own vulnerability into stock is the basis of a humble attitude, always looking to adjust to the people who strive to go from being good to being better, carried by our faith in God’s mercy.

3. Space (and method) to kindle creativity

We adopted a clear methodological option for the meeting: it was light on speeches, but favoured interventions which gave a framework and
testimonies which stimulated the desire to work. Indeed, we hoped to benefit from the experience and expertise of the participants.

To encourage the quality of the exchanges, we gave time for silence before the small groups. The sharing groups were very mixed, but permanent throughout the meeting. Each small group meeting had three parts:

a) A personal reaction to the contents of the plenary assembly;
b) then a time to react to what had been shared the first round, so as to come to a common vision;
c) lastly, a summary to be shared at the assembly in the name of the group.

In the plenary assembly, we tried to give feedback from the small group that was closer to spiritual conversation than an exhaustive report. These simple guidelines contributed wonderfully to the progressive construction of a common vision, exceeding what even the most brilliant amongst us could have produced.

The objective of the meeting was not simply to share experiences and competencies. We wanted to get a sense of where the CLC community is at with regards to the family as a place of mission. What is already being done, which calls do we hear, what are we able to do and what answers are we able to find as a world community?

The program of the third and last day was blank. This ultimate methodological option was certainly coherent with the ambition of the meeting. It was however a little stressful. It was like a test of maturity for our world thematic assembly: would we be able to find a common path, to be at once ambitious and also realistic, to dare to dream for the whole community, not like utopians, but like pioneers?
Two compliments which are invitations to face up to our responsibilities

I received two compliments about the assembly, which made me very happy. I was off to the side Fr. José Guillermo Gutiérrez. I’m sure he’ll forgive me for sharing these two messages which were intended, I think, for all the CLC. “I felt an assembly of prayerful people.” Of course, the meeting had included times of prayer, both personal and community. Nevertheless, I heard these positive words from José Guillermo at a deeper, invisible level: like a blessing. I am happy that the CLC shows that its members nourish their understanding of the world through their openness to the mystery of meeting God. Perhaps you are surprised that I only mention prayer toward the end of my article. It is a way of recalling that prayer does not precede reflection, discernment and action. We want to be contemplative in action.

“I was happy to see you at work, seeking God in all things, including in peripheral spaces, which can appear less familiar to some in the Church. Your way of working is invaluable because it is structured while being open to innovation.” These words of encouragement touch us right in the heart. I share his words with you, hearing a call to prepare the next World Assembly with a great sense of our responsibilities, as we dare to believe that CLC is “a gift for the Church and the world”.

I was happy to see you at work, seeking God in all things, including in peripheral spaces, which can appear less familiar to some in the Church. Your way of working is invaluable because it is structured while being open to innovation.

Which call for CLC?

Those who participated in the World Assembly in Beirut certainly remember Fernando Vidal sharing with enthusiasm his conviction that the CLC has resources which could be put to the service of families. In Madrid, in thirty minutes, Fernando literally drew a chart on the board, listing the prospects for an apostolate taken on by the world community.

It is too early to know if one can speak of a prophetic call. It was in any case a visionary talk, in the sense that he proposes an ambitious, long-term vision. The next World Assembly will be called to discern what is
possible and desirable before deciding what concrete steps we will take. The preparatory work, nourished in particular by the testimony of all the participants of the IFE 2017 with their communities of origin will be essential.

I do not want to influence choices that belong to the World Assembly. But I can highlight some challenges that the CLC cannot ignore when it updates its vision of an apostolic Ignatian body:

• As a community, our potential is greater than the sum of the individual efforts of our members engaged in family pastoral work

• It will undoubtedly be interesting to work in a network with other actors, when the CLC cannot take on a mission of the Church

• A network or at the very least internal channels of communication will allow better sharing of competencies already available in CLC

• We want to put our Ignatian tools at the service of our pastoral efforts. This is not wishful thinking. CLC has already showed its capacity to create simple but meaningful tools

• When the Pope calls for pastoral witness, we need to feel completely in our element. We are comfortable with reading and sharing about the traces of God’s presence in our everyday lives, and this can be offered to the Church and the world.

• By our effort to seek God in all things and all circumstances, we are able to evolve at the borders and to explore ways of adjusting our age-old spirituality to the circumstances of the contemporary world.

The meeting in Madrid was both an experience in itself, and also a laboratory for the worldwide CLC. We sounded out the talent and the energy of our community for one of our priorities. At the same occasion, we tested, in conditions close to those of a World Assembly, our capacity to live a time of community discernment “live”, without the security of a prewritten project.

And if this fundamental talent were itself a gift to be shared with the Church and the world…

Original in French, translated by Cecilia McPherson
IFE Orientations

Family Pastoral Today
Challenges and Orientations

Rev. José Guillermo Gutiérrez Fernández
Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life

A Lay Ignatian Reading
of Amoris Laetitia

Denis Dobbelstein - Consultor, World Executive Council
and Marie-Claire Beaudelot - National ExCo, CLC Belgium Fr.
First, let me renew my cordial greetings to each one of you, both personally and on behalf of the Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, where I work. You cannot imagine how touched I was when I received the email of Fernando Vidal inviting me to participate in this meeting. The joy was not only for the possibility of coming to Madrid, where a Mexican always feels well, but also because I felt that raw desire of the Christian Life Community to “sentire cum Ecclesia”, in the steps of the teachings of the Holy Father and journeying with the other brothers in faith. Another reason for my joy is that for our office and for me personally these meetings are a great opportunity to learn. In fact, you are on the front line, announcing, witnessing, accompanying, continually questioning in the light of the Gospel the ways to carry out the mission. Let me therefore sincerely thank you for your commitment and encourage you to go forward, making God’s love present to all.

As you know our office was created by Pope Francis almost a year ago, gathering the former Pontifical Councils for Laity and Family, where I have worked since 2008. In this time, I have been able to see that it is a wonderful international observatory. Every day we receive information from nuncios, ambassadors, movements, universities, from all over the world. I am directly involved in following the Spanish-American scene, including the Hispanic communities of the United States and Canada. Daily contact with people from so many parts of the world and, above all, the extraordinary grace of the two Synods on the Family, have given us an idea of the challenges we have now in the pastoral care of the family. In my conversation, I would like to just share a few of these observations.
Challenges in the different cultural, geographic and geopolitical contexts

I would like to begin by pointing out that although there are several ecclesial, social and cultural contexts in which there are specific challenges, as was evident in the last Synodal process, there are also some cultural traits that cross virtually all societies and give rise to some common challenges. Challenges that invite us to reflect about the accompaniment that we must give to the families so that they live fully in Christ Jesus our Lord. Of course, my aim here is not to make a critique of what some have defined as “a change of epoch” (cf. Conclusive Document of Aparecida, No. 44), nor to make an exhaustive review of all the challenges that we face in this crucial moment of history. The great post-synodal apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia, presents already a good list of these challenges.

Clearly in view of the diversity of situations we face, there is a great variety of solutions and pastoral proposals on how to evangelize and support people, Christian marriages and families. To simplify, I will return to the distinction between countries where the Christian tradition remains alive and those in which the tradition is losing strength due to advanced processes of secularization.

In the first group, we could include, in the Asian continent, the Philippines and South Korea, in India, the region of Kerala, the province of Goa and the great Christian communities of the parishes of Mumbai; In Francophone Africa, Benin or Rwanda; In the American continent, we could mention Mexico, some parishes of the United States, much of Central America, and of course in South America, Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Brazil. In Europe, Poland, some Eastern countries, and some areas of the countries of old Christian tradition. In these countries, we find to a greater or lesser extent, depending on regions and countries, a sophisticated pastoral service. There are many couples who want to prepare for Christian marriage. There is a significant demand and the possibility to respond, albeit with substantial differences, with relevant resources (priests and accompanying married cou-
pies), organizing cycles of formation courses for marriage, small family communities, social networks of families, family encounters, etc. The betrotheds are often accompanied by a priest who meets with them regularly, have the possibility to participate in courses of preparation for Christian marriage. In such a “mildly favourable” context, the teachings can be structured in a rich and substantial way and offer betrotheds and young couples the opportunity to meet on special occasions such as during liturgical celebrations, seminars for families, courses for couples, spiritual retreats, family days, family catechesis, etc. Some ecclesial movements are very active, and other services and support for families can be better organized, having the families themselves as the active and responsible agents of evangelization. Here the most urgent challenges, together with those that I will point out as global challenges, are focused mainly on the problems of poverty, domestic violence, drug trafficking, serious social inequalities, emigration that divides families, and forms of cultural machismo, deeply rooted in people who do not recognize the equality of rights and opportunities for women. Likewise, in many parts of the world it is urgent to attend to those people who move away from the Christian community, be it because of a failed marriage, a teen pregnancy lived in guilt or other causes of discrimination. In many places, persist ancestral forms of quasi-marriages, such as the servinakui of the Andean cultures, so that in some cases the analyses can be wrong, since we have similar effects, with different causes. I give an example. The effect is that few people get married in the Church, but while in the great cities of these countries it is due to the advance of a secularism similar to that of European countries, in the rural populations and in the lower strata of the population it can be due to the influence of these ancestral forms or the lack of economic resources to organize the celebration that accompanies the rite.

In the second group, we can think of countries of old Christian traditions such
as Spain, France, Italy, Portugal and the German-speaking concordat countries (Austria and Germany), Slovakia and Ireland. Here there are greater difficulties for the Church to be present in areas that, until thirty or forty years ago, were spiritually rich. For this reason, although there is still a good pastoral structure in some areas, even more organized than in some areas of the first group, there is more fatigue and increasing difficulties. There, priests are progressively less and getting older, and not all of them are available to prepare the future spouses or accompany the families. Although with notable differences between regions and countries, the organization of family pastoral is often absent or it is deficient. It is not uncommon to see two types of opposing family pastoral that, nonetheless, the Pope has, in several occasions, equally scolded. On the one hand, an overtly doctrinaire pastoral approach content to denounce ideological approaches and ways of life as far from what is identified as the “traditional” and permanent model of the family. On the other hand, rather revisionist forms that seek to adapt to new cultural models, often without clearly having a firm reference point in the Christian revelation (Sacred Scripture as interpreted in the living Tradition of the Church, under the guidance of the Magisterium). Obviously, the effort is to adapt the Christian message to the contemporary world with the intention of bringing the Gospel closer to the concrete lives of people. In this environment preparation for marriage, for example, is limited to two or three meetings, sometimes lacking in serious content, to proposals from expert conferences that fail to bring about a true conversion, or to itineraries that are impracticable in the real world. The challenge really coincides with “re-evangelization” or “new evangelization”, which requires that we proceed in stages, distinguishing what is essential from what comes next and is a consequence of the acceptance of the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Then we find the countries in which the Christian tradition is not Catholic, the orthodox countries like Greece, Russia, Serbia; the Anglican countries (Great Britain and some Commonwealth countries); or countries linked to the tradition
of the Protestant Reformation (Scandinavia). In certain countries, there is a Christian tradition but with much less import than other religions: Islamic countries, or once again some Asian countries with a dominant Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu or Shinto culture. Finally, it would be useful to cite the areas where a dictatorship of materialistic inspiration has made it virtually impossible for any expression of Christian faith (e.g., North Korea). In these cases, the greatest challenge for the Church is a constructive dialogue that builds bridges and opens people to the message of the Gospel.

It is difficult for us here to go into all the specific pastoral characteristics of each group mentioned, so I have merely indicated some general features, even with the risk of making simplifications and reductions that would need to be further specified and nuanced. In any case, pastors are increasingly aware of the need to rethink family pastoral in a way that offers prospective spouses or newly married couples the possibility of living their project to find a family in an authentically Christian and spiritually fruitful way. In this atmosphere, it sounds particularly loud the Pope’s invitation to assume the Church as a “great field hospital”, in which the Church is close to, samaritan, welcoming, knows how to discern the different situations and accompanies and integrates all. That is, a church which goes forth, a missionary Church.

**Some Common Challenges**

Now I would like to describe some global challenges that arise because of the cultural changes I have referred to in a general way. I believe that to a greater or lesser extent, all the cultures represented here are being affected by those changes. 

In particular, among the young there it is spreading a new way of looking at interpersonal relations, of the meaning and the exercising of the sexual faculty and of the very concept of human life. All references to natural law are abolished and discredited. Not ignoring that some “Christian” presentations of the same are stron-
gly debatable, giving rise to the so-called “naturalistic fallacy”, or to the identification of “nature” solely with the physical, that is to say with what happens “naturally”, and not with the metaphysical concept of “nature”. I do not want to go into this debate now, nor dwell for long on the characteristics of this view, something more appropriate for theological and philosophical faculties. However, it is necessary to emphasize some elements which result from these cultural changes.

The first element, a fundamental one, is undoubtedly the loss of human and Christian hope in human love. I am referring to Love with a capital L, not its substitutes, which, although they constitute a starting point for evangelizing dialogue, are not the full love of which Jesus speaks to us. This loss is expressed in the banality of the most fundamental experience of affective relationships. When two young people unite themselves, they no longer necessarily do so on the basis of a formal alliance and a life project. I am not going to insist here on the specific problems involved with youth cohabitation, that you well know. I limit myself to cases in which there is a life project. In fact, only when young people who already live together want to marry, and when they resort to an ecclesiastical instance (priest, parish, etc.). Those engaged in the pastoral service of preparation for marriage recognize how frequent it is nowadays the lack of perception of the indissoluble character of the conjugal alliance. To put it simply, this means that the young people do not distinguish the difference between a marriage that is forever, that is, until death separates them, and a marriage for the longest possible time. Without being aware, many tend to assume that they will resort to divorce. Obviously, this union for a limited time is typical of current cultural standards, dominated by utilitarianism of use and discard. To this we must add that not few couples and not few pastoral agents are not convinced that indissolubility is part of the very essence of love between a man and a woman who are united in marriage, and that it is an intrinsic quality of this love. In the history of mankind, both in countries where Roman law is in force and those in which the Common Law applies, this conviction has inspired the legislation of the great majority of the countries of the world until a few decades ago.

To put it simply, this means that the young people do not distinguish the difference between a marriage that is forever, that is, until death separates them, and a marriage for the longest possible time.
To this first element is added the difficulty that many young people do assume a responsibility towards the partner and a commitment for the whole life. In brief, whenever, for a social science survey, young people are asked about their aspirations regarding marriage and the family, we will be surprised that a high percentage, even in the most secularized countries, will respond that they wish to marry a person of the opposite sex for a whole life and procreate at least three children. However, when we confront this data with reality and with their relational skills, we will see that most of them cannot realize this aspiration or do not have the concrete capacity to do it. This situation forces us to ask seriously what two young people really want when they seek our pastoral agents to marry in the Church.

The second element deals with the openness to life inherent in the deep union that the spouses are called to live. There are two aspects that cross over here. The first refers to the exercise of sexuality, the mature expression of gestures that allow spouses to live intensely the communion of their persons in a total mutual gift and that is not favoured by the multiplication of sexual experiences before marriage. Again, this aspect is not only moral, but raises a question of great anthropological consistency. Communication through one’s own body and through the body of another in a union that is truly an authentic gift cannot be improvised. It is linked to self-respect and respect for the other, which presupposes a certain personal dignity of conduct in this area. To put it in simple terms, it needs a certain habitus that in the classical language was called chastity (personalizing integration of physical and psycho-affective dynamisms). Man and woman aspire deeply to live the mystery of love in this way; this is so true that when teenagers fall in love for the first time, they become totally entrapped by this experience.
They cannot imagine that this love could end one day. It means that, this experience involving the physical sphere, for him or for her, cannot be separated from the true gift of self.

The **third element** concerns the family project that needs to mature. It involves many aspects: the desire to have children, the conception of professional work and the relationship with families of origin, etc. In general, the family project does not belong only to the private sphere (“privacy”), but implies also a certain vision of the society in which the family nucleus is destined to be part of and grow.

The **fourth element** is related to the social role of the family and concerns both the education of the younger members of society and the recognition of the family as a social subject and as an indispensable resource for society. About the first part of this element, today we speak frequently of “educational emergency”, a kind of difficulty in passing on the wisdom and cultural and axiological tradition to the new generations, which is connected to, among other things, with the weakness of convictions, with the relative, light, fluid, way of thinking. I will not dwell on this factor, for my aim is only to point out this challenge: the challenge of educating, to which is also linked the problem of the transmission of faith. To this the Universities and the Family Institutes may help finding ways to respond. Regarding the second part of this element, the recognition of the family as a social subject and indispensable resource for society, I would like to draw attention to a question many people ask today about whether the family – such as *Amoris Laetitia*, especially in the third chapter, presents to us God’s plan for it, that is, the one based on the stable union of a man and a woman with their own children – still remains a resource for people and for society. Some argue that it would rather be an obsolete structure that slows progress, and impedes the emancipation of the individual, preserving roles that hinder the consolidation of democracy, equity, and economic development. In other words, that inhibits the advance of a more egalitarian, freer and happier society. To this we will have to add the datum that recent social research shows that, in many societies, disintegrating family tendencies are being consolidated.
In fact, we know that on the legal level the family has lost the protections it enjoyed in the past and today it is amid societies that are not very favourable or, at best, are indifferent to it. Many people now live in very different family forms, and both the media and legislation seem to strongly support and promote this diversity.

As you will have observed, until now I have limited myself to the anthropological and social elements that need the most attention. These elements are examples that better illustrate the cultural context in which many of us today develop our pastoral service. With this I did not want to neglect the essential meaning of the conjugal family pastoral, that is, the sacrament of marriage that we have the mission to administer in the best possible spiritual condition. We must recognize that today, even from a specifically Christian perspective, we find remarkable difficulties, especially in the most secularized countries.

We can briefly mention two points. The plan of marrying in the Church is often not integrated into a life of active faith; with this comes the lack of awareness of the sanctity of Christian marriage and of the vocational aspect in which Amoris Laetitia insists (see 72, 85, 88, 211). The second point is that in some areas we begin to see a lesser intention to baptize their own children. When such a situation arises, it is very difficult to introduce young people into the mystery of the sanctity of the call to be spouses and parents. That is why today it is more necessary than ever that the conjugal family pastoral requires serious and profound preparation.

**Some action pointers from Amoris Laetitia**

Before these and other challenges, better described by the Holy Father in the Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (Cf. Nos. 31-57), which present to us a panorama that could be discouraging and which justifies that image of the Pope I referred to earlier of a “field hospital”, in this part of my presentation I would like to turn to this document of the Pope, rich with pastoral provocations, and
with a special attention to concrete persons, to find some clues of the exciting work that awaits us. *Amoris Laetitia* is a roadmap for us working on behalf of families, and brings together the fruits of two years of synodal work and is placed, as usual, in a continuum with the last documents of the Magisterium of the Church on the subject, specifically, to mention just two of the most significant, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Blessed Paul VI and *Familiaris consortio* of St. John Paul II.

To start with, we could begin by asking ourselves: What is the pastoral priority we have before us? To which the Pope replies that “the pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties” (AL 211). And he indicates to us some elements that this pastoral must contain: Church’s teaching, spiritual resources, practical programmes, sound advice, proven strategies, psychological guidance (cf. Ibid.). The Pope also reminds us that “in no way must the Church desist to propose the full ideal of marriage, the project of God in all its grandeur ...” and that “today, more important than a pastoral care of failures is the pastoral effort to strengthen marriages and thus to prevent their breakdown” (AL 307). If it is necessary to heal the wounded, it is even more necessary to prevent injuries.

In the current situation, *Amoris Laetitia* sees authentic human and Christian love as the only force capable of saving marriage and the family, hence confirming how much in the recent documents since the Second Vatican Council (see GS 48-49) it had been affirmed that love should be placed at the centre of the family (cf. AL 67), as Pope Francis himself very effectively does, attaching great importance to it throughout the Apostolic Exhortation, especially in the beautiful chapters IV and V. There, starting from the Hymn to the charity of St. Paul of 1Co 13, 4-7, he enumerates some characteristics of true love, explains them and applies them to family life (see AL 90-119).

Overcoming the individualistic and emotivist culture, which exalts the transitory, Pope Francis affirms that conjugal love is authentic, if it wants the other for what they are and seeks their good (Cf. AL 127). That it is a oblative and spiritual love, which at the same time includes affection, tenderness, intimacy, passion, erotic desire, pleasure given and received (Cf. AL 120, 123), openness to procreation and the education of children (see AL 80-85). That it is a totalizing friendship (cf. AL 125); and as such prefigures and anticipates the mystical union with God and represents a particular form of sanctification, a specific vocation (cf. AL 72, 74, 142, 316).
One of the most striking features of Amoris Laetitia is the great attention given to common human experience, to existential, religious and spiritual experience. It reaffirms that the relationship is a journey that lasts a lifetime (cf. AL 325), it is a way that knows the beauty and joy of being loved and loving, but also knows the defects and sins, the difficulties and sufferings. And it must be considered with realism and confidence, as a progressive growing and developing together, step by step, with the practical, patient and persevering exercise (Cf. AL 266-267). “Love is a kind of craftsmanship” (AL 221), as is the education of children (cf. AL 16, 271, 273). All are called to be humble and to invest everything on their part to grow in perfection (cf. AL 325). This invitation is addressed not only to the so-called irregular couples whom the Pope prefers to call “situations of fragility and imperfection” (Cf. AL 296), but also to regular couples, since no couple or family is perfect. All need the grace of God, all are loved by Him and are valuable to Him, and the Church must offer everyone a pastoral accompaniment in their journey.

I believe that one of the most striking features of Amoris Laetitia is the great attention given to common human experience, to existential, religious and spiritual experience, with detailed analysis and observations, many practical advice, concrete suggestions for people and for pastoral work. It is the promotion of a realistic pastoral and directed to real people, beyond what is often called “mega-narratives.” The intention (of Amoris Laetitia), mainly pedagogical, suggests a narrative language, lively, participatory, directed to all that facilitates its reading and allows everyone to understand. That is why for us this document is so valuable. It can be used profitably by the laity for their personal formation and the pastoral agents for catechesis. I believe that this document of the Pope is a good example of pastoral accompaniment.

Regarding pastoral accompaniment, which another novelty of Amoris Laetitia, the Pope points that it is especially urgent in current family pastoral, and reminds us that it is not a question of imposing obligations in an authoritarian way, but of educating towards responsible freedom: “We have been called to form consciences, not to try to replace them “(AL 37). People are to be helped to mature in their own convictions and behaviours, to discover the truth about themselves and the moral values and norms, in which it is concretized their filial love for God and brotherly love towards others (cf. AL 264).
We all need accompaniment, but this accompaniment will have different modalities, according to the circumstances of the persons. In the case of those in situations of grave objective disorder, it will be especially patient and merciful. It is a question of helping people to walk according to their own possibilities towards the summit of the mountain, not to lower the mountain – hence the importance of proceeding by stages, that is, of the law of gradualness, of a look of mercy and full of hope.

We must develop with confidence and perseverance an organic pastoral of the family, which insists more on the indicative and always less on the imperative. Which, as the Pope does, expresses above all the beauty of God’s plan for the family, and this with concrete examples of life, rather than insisting on what ought to be and on condemnations. We must recognize that our efforts have often been more focused on condemning error than on listening to the other’s reasons and, chiefly, on patiently accompanying concrete persons. Therefore, our family pastoral should include as a priority the preparation for marriage, both long term and short term and, after marriage, the formation of spouses, especially young couples (see AL 200, 202, 207, 208, 227, 229). Personal accompaniment and family gatherings, small groups, small communities are more fruitful than organising large assemblies and crowded meetings. For this, it is more important a pastoral of processes than of events. To this end, we must increasingly promote the protagonism of the families themselves and their missionary responsibility (“families going forth”), valuing among other things the cooperation of ecclesial movements and associations. Here I would like to draw your attention to how valuable it is the contribution that “Christian Life Community” can offer to the Church as a whole. Many of the things I have pointed out here are part of the DNA of those who feed on the spirituality of Ignatius. The Church needs your commitment, you can and should...
collaborate more with the local authorities, with the other movements, “feeling with the Church” by contributing your own originality.

To evangelize today, the institutional organization of the Church is not enough, it is necessary to nourish a spirituality of communion that offers a witness of unity to the world (cf. Novo Millennio Ineunte, 43; Evangeli gaudium, 23, 99, 117, 228; 201, 314-316) “The individualism of our postmodern and globalized era favours a lifestyle which weakens the development and stability of personal relationships... Pastoral activity needs to bring out more clearly the fact that our relationship with the Father demands and encourages a communion which heals, promotes and reinforces interpersonal bonds” (Evangeli Gaudium, 67).

Such communion must be perceptible in ecclesial life. This requires the participation and communion of the different members of the Church at different levels and from their own responsibilities (synodality). Hence is born the attitude of openness, dialogue and availability needed to promote the co-responsibility and effective participation of all the faithful in the life of Christian communities (pastoral conversion). I summarize all this in one sentence: “add, not subtract”. Today, more than ever, the witness of ecclesial communion and personal sanctity is a pastoral urgency (cf. Aparecida, 368).

What I have said so far is only intended to indicate some pointers that give us some possible clues to the work that awaits us. I would now like to conclude this conversation by indicating some “cantieri aperti”, which may be perspectives for future work. For example, the theme of accompaniment: what does it mean, how is it carried out, who does it, what are the instances and the modalities to do it. Or the theme of preparation for marriage, in its different stages, with a missionary attitude that takes into consideration the times and circumstances of people, which more than a set of scholarly conferences are processes of Christian re-initiation. Here we find, for example, that often people who approach the Church are handed concepts that they are not able to understand properly because they lack the basic foundations of evangelization. There are those who maintain that today it is necessary to begin with some rudiments of Christian anthropology, without which it is impossible to understand God’s plan on marriage and the family. Along the same lines is the whole subject of sexual affective formation, where there are so many pending tasks, such as a serious discernment about the so-called “gender ideology”, which not simply condemns it, but also considers the necessary distinctions and rich variety of what would be better called “gender studies”. Obviously, there are errors and incompatibilities with the data revealed and transmitted in the Tradition about sexual duality, and the binary relationship between persons of different sexes,
but there are also important contributions that must be recovered. It is true that many behaviours and social roles depend on the influx of culture. Another field of work in this same direction is the one that refers to showing the beauty and splendour of sexual difference, beyond the roles and historical conditioning. I would also like to point out the need to develop a pastoral for the elderly, because I consider that this challenge has not yet been sufficiently addressed. In short there are many areas and perspectives before us to help our human family to rediscover and live the family, to bring Christian families to the goal of their sanctification. In any case the method the Holy Father asks us to follow in Amoris Laetitia is the dialogue, the encounter, the construction of bridges, a friendly look towards the world, that allows us to discover the meaning of the questions that afflict the men and women of our time, journeying together as travelling companions, towards the encounter with the merciful Father.

Thank you very much.

Original in Spanish, Translated by David Formosa
A Lay Ignatian Reading of Amoris Laetitia

Denis Dobbelstein - Consultor, World Executive Council and Marie-Claire Beaudelot - National ExCo, CLC Belgium Fr.

JOY
The family: A living reflection of the Triune God

July 1992, somewhere in the Austrian Alps. Our first holiday as a family. In fact, Antoine, our older son, is 10 months old. He is sleeping in a cot set up at the foot of our bed. Marie-Claire and I are awake, but we remain lying down in silence. For young parents, nothing is more beautiful than the sounds of a baby who is waking up. Suddenly a small hand appears, and then another one. Antoine pulls himself up on tip-toes, his eyes barely above the edge of his bed. Having been asleep, he had lost his sense of direction and he looks... at the wrong side. Too young to turn around, he lets himself fall down onto the mattress. We hear him crawling hurriedly to the other side and first one hand, then a second, followed by a small face, suddenly appear in front of us with a look saying “I knew you’d be there”.

There was an explosion of joy. A pure and shared joy. Nothing else but the happiness of being three. Nothing is perfect in this world. However, this moment was very close to perfection because there was no longer any difference between joy and love.

I have meditated and prayed for hundreds of hours in front of Rublev’s Trinity. But I have to admit that the moment of eternity lived with Marie-Claire and Antoine in July 1992 is my door of privileged entry into the mystery of the Trinity.
We invite you to enter into the spirit of the text, without trying to disconnect from your personal life-experience.

We invite you to enter into the spirit of the text, without trying to disconnect from your personal life-experience. It is the encounter of our personal readings during

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1 See particularly paragraphs 11, 121 and 161 of the Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (AL).
2 From paragraph 11
3 Paragraph 142
4 Paragraph 200
the three days of our meeting that can make possible – I hope – an appropriation and an apostolic invitation which would make sense for our whole community.

An impressive mea culpa

As lay people, we were very touched by the “mea culpa” of the Pope in the name of the institutional Church. I quote:

“At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological idea of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families.”

We feel that this request for forgiveness was put forward to us on a personal level: when we were preparing for our marriage, we read what the Church had to say to us. We were sometimes disconcerted by the way used to talk to us about the reality of married life. We understood, but the discourse dampened the interior impetus that we were feeling. For our wedding announcement we chose a quotation from Saint John: “May my joy be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” Amoris Laetitia.

During my first reading of Amoris Laetitia, without the benefit of already knowing the whole picture, it felt like some passages were squeezing the breath out of me, while others had a liberating effect. Paying attention to these movements during my second reading, I realised that they were directly related to the style, according to which Pope Francis was either taking up previous teaching or was expressing himself personally. The Pope’s words helped me put the whole text into a perspective of growth and mercy; this gave me profound joy.

Immersed in this joy, I thought of so many friends, believers, who in these 30 years shared with us how much they felt hurt or excluded by speech which emphasised situations, called “irregular”. I hope that it will be possible for them too to be reached by the mea culpa expressed by the Pope in the name of the Church.

A fundamental reorientation

Further from the personal impact it could have, we think that the request for forgiveness expressed in the name of the hierarchical Church is important for the whole Church because it shows the Pope’s determination in promoting a narrow articulation of doctrine and pastoral care. The pastoral approach is not an “after-sales service” of a doctrinal discourse which would be adequate on its own. I quote:

5 Paragraph 36
“There is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things.⁶ We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best as 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.⁷ Rather than offering the healing power of grace and the light of the Gospel message, some would “indoctrinate” that message, turning it into “dead stones to be hurled at others”.⁸

These are strong quotations. They herald the committed statements and reflection which are developed from chapter six onwards. We will come back to them.

LOVE
Francis’ look in Jesus’ way

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Let’s take our time to savour chapters 4 and 5, which the Pope himself defines as central. After having adopted an appropriate tone, brought up without deference the reality and challenges of families (to keep one’s feet firmly on the ground), and then recalled certain fundamental elements of the teaching of the Church, the Pope shares with us an eschatological vision, looking at 21st century families with Jesus’ way of looking:

“I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way.”⁹

Francis looks at the people with love, a look which invites and encourages with very concrete propositions, connected with the day-to-day reality. The Pope has evidently met many families and persons in many different situations: he even had the perspicacity to write a paragraph about the relationship with the mother-in-law ;-)

The development of St. Paul’s hymn to love is a universal invitation to go deeper into one’s way of loving one’s neighbour. This invitation is addressed to each and every one of us, regardless of whether we are single, consecrated persons, priests or married. With St. Paul’s help, Pope Francis wants to remind us of certain attitudes which are central to love, with very concrete implications.

⁶ Paragraph 35.
⁷ Paragraph 37.
⁸ Paragraph 49
⁹ Paragraph 57.
How do I love in the daily life, how do I love better those who are close to me: my spouse, my children, my colleagues, the members of my community? Loving in the normal, day-to-day activities: it is our main concern when sharing about our life in CLC. I suppose that, like me, each one of you has heard this hymn with his/her strengths and weaknesses. And an application has perhaps marked you, invited you. For example:

“Love is not rude or impolite; it is not harsh. Its actions, words and gestures are pleasing and not abrasive or rigid.”

Some think that they are important because they are more knowledgeable than others; they want to lord it over them... Our Lord especially appreciates those who find joy in the happiness of others.”

Familiar words

If we feel at ease reading *Amoris Laetitia*, it is undoubtedly also because the words and the ways are often familiar to us... as lay Ignatians...

- Marriage is presented to us as a vocation, to be chosen by Election, with indifference, as it is an equal to consecrated life.

The Pope invites young people to make a free choice, to discern their future state of life according to their most profound desire. He promises them the positive and fruitful effects of a true Election: engagement, stability, reordering according to the essential, clarification of the mission. In this context, the institution of marriage will not compromise their love, but on the contrary, affirm it and enable its maturity and deployment.

- To build and nourish the couple, certain proposed means should have particularly resonated with you:
  - Dialogue: learning to listen without interrupting, not always giving advice,

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10 Paragraph 99.
11 Paragraph 97.
12 Paragraph 110.
13 Paragraph 72.
14 Paragraph 159.
staying with the proposition of the other person, cultivating the favourable presupposition.\textsuperscript{16}

- Emotions and movements: learning to listen, to savour. Welcoming our emotions as a source of richness, leaving them in their right place, distinguishing between them and the movements.\textsuperscript{17}

- The daily examen (prayer of alliance) experienced with the closest to us. Cultivating the “please”, “thank you” and “sorry”.\textsuperscript{18}

- Supporting other couples and families.\textsuperscript{19}

- A call for ongoing practice of discernment. Spiritual battles never cease for couples and families: the temptation of individualism, the temptation of isolation to escape from a “bad” world, consumeristic pressures, addictive use of digital communication, the idyllic vision of the family – far from reality – imposed by the media…\textsuperscript{20}

### The Spiritual Exercises as watermarks

The path of the Spiritual Exercises is implied throughout the exhortation:

- Forgiveness and awareness of self: “\textit{We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves, in order to have this same attitude towards others.}”\textsuperscript{21}

- Receiving Jesus as a companion along the road, at the heart of the sacrament: “\textit{The sacrament is not a ‘thing’ or a ‘power’, for in it Christ himself ‘now encounters Chri-}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Paragraph 131.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Paragraph 136-8.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Paragraph 143-6.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Paragraph 133.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Paragraph 225, 229.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Paragraph 135.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Paragraph 107. See also paragraphs 101 and 108.
\end{itemize}
Christian spouses through the sacrament of matrimony.’ (Gaudium et spes 48).”

• “In the darkest hours of a family’s life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup.”

• “Moreover, moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection.”

FOR THE MISSION
A Pastoral approach for growth

As Ignatians, we have some advantages, and therefore a responsibility, regarding the Pope’s exhortation. Reviewing one’s life to search God in it is more than a way of moving forward in life; it is believing both that God is present and acting in the world and that our life is valuable to Him. Sharing the most important of the review and being welcomed without being judged is simultaneously an experience of learning to respect reality in its complexity and of unconditional love.

To discern is to believe that one can transcend the tensions existing between the condition of the sinner and the call to holiness, in order to choose life with all one’s being. Trying to incarnate our deepest desire permits us to offer ourselves without reserve, daily, all the time believing that the best is yet to come.

As lay people, we are also very aware of the importance that the apostolic exhortation gives to the humanistic sciences. Their contribution is indispensable for a holistic pastoral approach.

22 Paragraph 73.
23 Paragraph 317.
24 Ibid.
25 See particularly paragraphs 204 and 273.
Chapter 6, dedicated to pastoral care, will definitely keep our attention during this meeting. Your expertise largely exceeds ours. I will content myself with underlining the interesting position of this chapter, inserted between the chapter entitled “Love Made Fruitful” and the one dedicated to the education of children. Moreover, I would like to draw from chapter 7 some simple indications which are perfectly coherent with the Pope’s attention to promote a pastoral attitude towards helping growth:

• Fostering a natural inclination to goodness; moving from what is imperfect to that which is better; adopting an inductive approach instead of proclaiming unquestionable truths. 26

• Indicating clearly the good that can come out of giving up something and letting the good that the intellect grasps, take root in us. 27

• Educating for freedom. 28

• Taking care not to inhibit desire, but to let it be a stimulus for further progress. 29

• “By demanding too much, we gain nothing.” 30

An Invitation to live the tensions well

This last quotation brings me to a subject which the exhortation treats with a great attention to nuances. I mean the way in which to reconcile the call to sainthood and the imperfect offerings of our life, the articulation of the rules with the discernment, the relationship between universality and inculturation.

We were sometimes surprised by the haste of certain commentators to plunge into chapter eight, as if the interest of the exhortation was reduced to knowing whether the Pope intended to change some questions of doctrine or moral theology. Now, Pope Francis refuses to give easy answers.

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26 Extracts from paragraph 264.
27 Paragraph 265.
28 Paragraph 267.
29 Paragraph 270.
30 Paragraph 271.
While stressing on the necessity of the unity of teaching and practice in the Church, the Pope admits that “this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. Jn 16: 13).” While doing so, the Pope does not weaken the calling of the Church. On the contrary, he reinforces its credibility, because truth precedes us; this means that it gives us life while we are discovering it. I borrow from our General Principles words of wisdom which the Pope would probably not deny, in line with familial doctrine:

“These principles are to be interpreted not so much by the letter of this text but rather by the spirit of the Gospel and the interior law of love. This law, which the Spirit inscribes in our hearts, expresses itself anew in each situation of daily life.”

Now, I want to believe that while all patterns are undermined, the Spirit does not keep quiet, but He continues to inspire us.

The Pope exhorts us to fully respect both our calling and our human condition. It is not about removing tensions, either by focusing on the ideal or by only considering the limited reality, but rather living in these tensions to unify our lives.

“Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God.”

Before being a recommendation to the pastors that we try to be, it is an act of faith proposed to God’s children that we are.

**Mercy and reinstatement**

In chapter 8, recognizing that “there are two ways of thinking which recur throughout the Church’s history: casting off and reinstating […]”, the Pope invites us not to lose our way: “The Church’s way, from the time of the Council of Jerusalem, has always been the way of Jesus, the way of mercy and reinstatement […].” Pope Francis goes back, in very clear terms, to the concept of “law of graduality” developed by Saint John Paul II:

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31 Paragraph 3.
32 CLC GP2.
33 Paragraph 37. The English version refers to “complex situations“, whereas the Spanish and French versions say “when all patterns are undermined/broken”.
34 Paragraph 305.
“For the law is itself a gift of God which points out the way, a gift for everyone without exception; it can be followed with the help of grace, even though each human being ‘advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God and the demands of God’s definitive and absolute love in his or her entire personal and social life.’”

By reminding us that:

“a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order, but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties”

Pope Francis does not weaken the appeal of Christ but invites all the believers to keep walking, without trying to impose a limit to our growth or to God’s mercy. We were ourselves witnesses to families in situations called “irregular” maturing from the challenges faced, having radical evangelical behavior, having an abundance of love. I note that it is the Pope himself who puts the word “irregular” between inverted commas.

We were really touched by this sentence appearing in chapter six:

“Illumined by the gaze of Jesus Christ, ‘she turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives [...].’”

Intellectual honesty leads us to clarify that in this part of the text, the Pope alludes to those who have experienced the break-up of the matrimonial link. However, I say this strongly: this sentence was written for us. Denis and I participate in the life of the Church in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works in our lives.

Each one of us is “touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy”. It is good to hear it again and again. To dare offer a pastoral word or gesture, it is vital to believe this.

Original in French Translated into English by Manrico Bugeja

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35 Paragraph 296.
36 Paragraph 295.
37 Paragraph 305 which refers to paragraph 44 of the apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium.
38 Paragraph 291.
39 Paragraph 297.
Witnessing

The Gap between
Angela Chen and Anthonio Huang
CLC Taiwan

At the Service of Family Life
Witness of Commitment in the Ignatian Family in France

Véronique
CLC France
The Gap Between

Angela Chen and Anthonio Huang - CLC Taiwan

Anthonio: My name is Anthonio and my wife is Angela who is sitting right beside me. Today we would like to share our particular experience in the context of Amoris Laetitia on the issue of family ministry, and how our CLC experiences benefit us in our own marriage, our mission, and family issues.

Angela: First, the description of the reality of family life in Amoris Laetitia is very clear. I consider Amoris Laetitia as the most practical document for lay people in everyday life. It mentions the phrase “domestic church” 11 times, including in the closing prayer to the Holy Family. That reminds us of the role of parents as well as the extended family, which is to provide an ecclesial experience of communion among persons.

Anthonio: In addition, Pope Francis raised several important pastoral questions regarding the moral formation of our young people. These include issues of the young generation that make up the substantial difference between the experience of our children and their neighbors. The pastoral care of engaged and married couples has to be reinforced and centered on the love and friendship, which unifies all aspects of marital life and helps family members to grow constantly. We admit these are the better strategies to rebuild our domestic church.

Angela: The marriage we long for is not a gap or simply a choice between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies.” We want a real marriage, a healthy and sustainable growth in both man and woman, lasting through decades. Our lives can truly flourish when many young Catholics see themselves getting married and having a family.
Who are we?

Anthonio: I would like to share my original family background, which affected my perspective on marriage.

I was born in Indonesia and my family moved to Macau; I lived with my grandparents when I was seven years old. I went to Taiwan for studies when I was twenty. My parents did not have a happy marriage. Since we moved to Macau they were never together, except for a short time before my father died. My mother worked in Hong Kong and my father stayed in Indonesia after he went bankrupt, while he waited for another business opportunity. Of course, there were a lot of issues in their marriage. That they did not live together was the main issue. One week before my father died in December 1999, they met again at last.

In my mind, I made a decision: I would never follow the style of their marriage/family in the future. For this reason, after I married, I rejected all the job opportunities, which required me to leave Taiwan. Today many couples do not live together because of their career. In addition, I need to cultivate my marriage, as there is no “FREE lunch in the world”. I need to be careful, sensitive, and responsible.

Angela: My name is Chen io yee; I was baptized with the Christian name Angela. I am from Hong Kong; a beautiful and very cosmopolitan city in the southern part of China, which was a British colony until 1997. There I spent the first 21 years of my life with my parents and maternal grandparents. My mother sent me to a Catholic school, and then I joined Catholic society and retreats though I was not a Catholic. In 1982, I went to Taiwan to finish my undergrad studies in psychology. Before that I had an important experience with summer jobs working with refugees from Vietnam and China. These experiences help me to advocate continued vigilance in juvenile education.

If someone asks me what my blessings are in becoming a school counselor and teacher of SEN (special education needs), I would say

The marriage we long for is not a gap or simply a choice between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies”. We want a real marriage.
It was quite a burden for a woman like me to juggle motherhood with two children and career simultaneously. I spent my quality time mainly in two churches. Both were established by a Jesuit in the 1960s. Actually, I majored in religious formation in Christian Life Community. Thus, Sr Ma of the Hijas de Jesus congregation, my spiritual guide, requested me to consider my calling for consecrated life. Each vocation is a call to follow Christ closely, but I preferred marriage because there might be more freedom in living with one man than in living with many sisters.

Until now I’m staying in Taiwan, married to Anthonio. We have three great children: a lady aged 26, a young man aged 24, and my little angel aged 12, who is here with us.

**Anthonio:** Like Angela, I studied at a Catholic high school in Macau but I was also baptized in Taiwan when I was a sophomore. I joined the CLC student Group of National Taiwan University in the same year, 1983. I was accompanied in CLC and I attended various camps to have a better understanding of Community, God’s Love and His plan.

In 1987, two years after I graduated from the University, Angela and I joined another CLC group for adults. We have remained with this group until now.

These are three pillars which are the main concepts to which I committed myself as a CLC member: **Community, Spirituality and Mission.** In order to have suitable topics to meet the needs of married couples, we had struggles. While our main group met every week, we found it better to have a small group, and we named it Maria (GP4 – “the welfare of the family”). This small group of couples began in 1991 and then became our support group in CLC.

In the 1990s we were supposed to be professionals who, being employed, were worn-out and drained by the demands of full-time employment - working overtime and on weekends, sacrificing our time with children and friends, just to keep the job or advance in our careers, or simply to be able to earn the mortgage payment every month. We felt overwhelmed but never had enough time to build up our courage to talk to our spiritual director. Surely, we got lost in our daily lives and lost our friendship in our marriage too. In 1996 after seven years of marriage, we were invited to attend the Marriage Encounter Weekend. We had a good experience from that weekend.
**Angela:** After seven years of misery, I considered it a good idea to find an opportunity to be alone with my spouse. Obviously, it was quite a burden for a woman like me to juggle motherhood with two children and career simultaneously. We were tied together without a domestic helper or babysitter at home. I could not yell at my students but I did at my children especially when Anthonio flew to his monthly business trips elsewhere in the 1990s. I felt exhausted working through several roles and being on 24-hour-standby. There were just so many things for me to contact, to resolve, to compromise— but no time to rest.

The same held true with our dialogue with God. Once in the back pew of a chapel, I stared at the cross and burst into tears, then quickly went out with sorrow, knowing that I had lost track of Him. But God graciously heard my prayer. Worldwide Marriage Encounter led us to explore the feminine worldview of one’s feelings. The weekend was given over to discuss, analyze and describe precisely how our daily life made us feel towards our spouses. With the help of dialogue, we were able to tell each other our deepest fear or feelings. This dialogue skill does a really good job of helping couples reconnect and rekindle their love. Even though I am a counselor, I am also a woman who had so much I needed to say. We started our lifelong studies in marriage together.

**Anthonio:** We accompanied each other, shared experiences and learned from various teachings, especially about dialogue (AL 136) as a communication technique that enabled us to share about our deepest feelings (AL 139), relationship to oneself, spouse and God. To recognize the priority of spousal relationship is my decision of Love.

Gradually we came to admire the mission of WWME: “Renewal in the Church and change in the world by assisting couples and priests to live fully intimate and responsible relationships”. The WWME was neither facilitated by professional counselors nor
We learned to admit that the call to marriage is a full commitment that God has designed for us. was it a group therapy seminar for problematic couples. That is a common misunderstanding. We are ordinary couples and priests who are strong enough to be weak enough to love.

Angela: We became the sharing couple and the core team with Fr Matthias Christian, SVD. From 1997 to 2007 we were one of the active couples helping Fr Bernard Chu, SJ to develop ME in Hong Kong and Macau. Attending the Asian ME conference in Indonesia with Fr. James Huang SVD, we aimed to apply as a formal member of WWME. In the meantime, I also became a founder of a Christian Family counseling service center that was co-operated by Fr Robert Fabing SJ.

Above all the deeds were tremendous coups that brought us to a level of foreseeing that the family issues in Asia are more or less the same. Christians are living in multi-religious societies and confronting a rapid threat of social collapse.

Anthonio: At the same time, we are core team and CLC members. We gathered together to share our life before we discussed our program of invitations or recruitment and so on. The development of trust and intimacy impelled us continuously to pursue our dreams and desires. Angela could share her dream of studying abroad for one year. I felt positive but hesitated… After five years of discernment, she started her masteral studies in London at the age of 40. The whole core team assisted me in seeking God’s grace when we faced the challenges to nurture our family life and enrich one another by our lives as “domestic church”. Through the experiences of encouragement and sharing in these years, we learned to admit that the call to marriage is a full commitment that God has designed for us. By cultivating this relationship with the CLC couples for a long time, we have become more than a community, making every effort as a family, to reflect on His words as one unit together.

We promote our Christian beliefs by sharing our own struggles in the Marriage Encounter weekends. We encourage young couples to open themselves to grace and we try to show them the benefit of living out our values and beliefs. “What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them”. (AL 35)
**Angela:** Though my studies abroad ended up with a great disaster brought about by the SARS outbreak in 2003, I was grateful to Anthonio for his trust and bravery.

We were one of the pioneer couples who strived to live married life according to the instructions in “books”, and in our team we were all young couples. There was only one couple who have been married for 15 years. They were also high school teachers who used catechesis in renewal courses. Then in 1997 Fr. Bernard Chu returned to Taiwan from the United States equipped with great proficiency in marriage counseling. He brought us human resources and substantial funding to run the ME week-end in a Chinese society. He was brilliant and energetic, and was determined to invite his former trained couples from the US to assist us in using all the new procedures in the ME weekend. It was a complete surprise to work with him. He taught me marriage counseling and helped us to set well-defined goals.

**Anthonio:** But it is a pity he could not live out a couple’s life for us to imitate. In dealing with the Sacrament of Matrimony, we are bothered by the outlines that do not include the sacrament of parenthood, but there is promise to place marriage as first priority.

**Angela:** In most East Asian cultures, parenting is implicitly the main responsibility of the mother. Women are told to prioritize the happiness of children; their mother will balk at no sacrifice of even that of her life. I am less conventional but I was in doubt what to do to my spouse who often went against my opinions on our children. “I do believe; help my unbelief” was the substance of my inner prayer.

As a mother-teacher-counselor, I always keep my eyes on the development of my children, to whom I consider it my duty to be a custodian. Ne-
vertheless, I have my limits and I can hit bottom. I desperately needed Anthonio to play the role of an independent father. However, his role was not always present in our marriage. I often gave advice on their schoolwork until grade 6 then set them free to manage by themselves. I always made myself available as a mother taking care of their physical health and soul. Hence, I started their music and physical education lessons when they were five years old. I believe that music could pave the path for the expression of their emotions and that physical education would build up their self-confidence.

**Anthonio:** It was tough to find energy after a long day or a weeklong trip to ask about the children and spend time with them. I wanted to find quiet and to relax at home. Angela wanted me to accompany them to activities that I did not experience when I was young. I thought children have their innate talents and did not need to be implanted with these. I thought that these were just Angela’s way of compensating for things she had not achieved.

**Angela:** He maddened me every time he voiced his perspectives on their extracurricular lessons. He also pointed out the extra expenses that were irrelevant to regular studies. I had to insist and continue in a determined way, despite the fact that we were having a problem.

**Anthonio:** In 2002 Angela went to London for studies, I took care of our son who was then in grade 6. That was a strange but precious experience for both of us. I had to pay complete attention to a teenager, no matter how critical that time was for my business in fiber optics. 2003 was the year of the dot-com crisis.

In the end of 2004 I quit my job and started my business at home. I had to decide on which was the FIRST PRIORITY in my life – family or career. I knew that Angela needed me. I saw that after childbirth, she was too weak to take care of Maria, our third child, who was born in 2005. No one but me had to take the responsibility to learn “fatherhood” again.

**Angela:** There was an amazing change in our family, when we were separated for one year and understood the importance of co-parenting. We noticed that our children responded in a different way when we switched our roles. Before, Anthonio did much more domestic housework while I paid more attention to their studies. On my return from London, I preferred to cook our meals while Anthonio tried to deal with their teenage mood swings. Of course, it was not easy for us, but a patient father won their hearts. To be a father who is always present. (AL
After the birth of our third child, we began to practice co-parenting and that changed Antonio’s point of view. Nowadays he is the one who reminds my girl of her piano lessons. This is an encouraging improvement amidst otherwise unimpressive results.

**Anthonio:** Today, my eldest daughter is mature and self-confident in dealing with various situations in her electronic engineering worksite. She always talks to her colleagues about her father. My son who confirmed his identity, developed into a responsible fiancé of his classmate.

**Angela:** In 2009, I fell seriously ill and went on sick leave for one year. That incident led us to determine which one was our most important mission as a couple. We realized it was time to say no to all the activities, workshops and programs we had come across. As a couple, we were alone before God. I felt lost and desperately in need of help from my spouse. Even though we had some divine experiences before that gave us a spiritual intimacy as a couple, we thought that it might have been a kind of coincidence that we could not get hold of.

**Anthonio:** Afterwards, we recovered from our hard times and found out that we lacked the spirituality for couples and families. In the practice of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercise, we are always called to strengthen our internal spiritual life, individually but not as a couple.

**Angela:** I started to surf the net for relevant resources. I found that in Hong Kong there was a spiritual program for Chinese couples which began in 2010. When I accompanied my mom to her cancer treatment in Hong Kong, I came to introduce myself to them in person. They invited us to the Cana session in Hong Kong in August 2014. Those six days and nights we lived with 30 couples sharing laughter and tears was like heaven on earth. Not only did their heartfelt witnessing really touch us. The various practical exercises on couple prayer moved us as well. We intensely felt the power of praying together. We plunged into that wonderful experience of praying together as fish takes to water. We couldn’t wait to share it with our team.

**Anthonio:** In the past we had always prayed at night as a family

**Relishing our mission in these years, we have come to view marriage as a vessel, constantly sailing sometimes on a stormy sea.**
only on special occasions. The prayers, thanksgiving and requests were recited - rarely changing at all. Sometimes we were not even concentrating on what we were saying. Now, we’ve found the last piece in our picture puzzle of a Christian couple’s life. We practice our prayers, even if the late hour leads us to recite only a short memorized prayer or to just trace the sign of the cross on each other’s foreheads. We really notice the difference that this has made.

What we learnt from the Cana session was not totally new for us because they originated from Ignatian tools, but would be fresh for most Christians. As we realized that our marriage is filled with His unconditional love, we turned our focus on “trinity” as core space in our marriage. “Trialogue” means allowing God to sit in on our prayers. “In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells.” (AL 315) In this way, a new horizon opens in front of us in the discernment to act as a couple. We then cultivate a humble and constant trust in the Lord.

In our biological families, we both were the first members who received baptism. The rituals of Christian life were brand new to us after we got married. Nevertheless, our experience was a revelation in the light of which we accepted the invitations to unfamiliar courses and the acquisition of skills and attitudes in marriage from which we ourselves benefited the most.

**Angela:** Both WWME and the Cana Session are integrated with Ignatian Spirituality which is familiar to us. From then we devoted our time not only in “examination” but in contemplation together. Relishing our mission in these years, we have come to view marriage as a vessel, constantly sailing sometimes on a stormy sea. I recall what Henry Ford said: “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” Sometimes I felt like the movie protagonist Pi. His feeling on his lifeboat might have been identical with mine, because on our vessel there was a Bengal tiger, too.

My idea of a lifetime career planning was derived from the developmental career theory which implies that roles change in life. Throughout the annual retreats, I usually ask myself what was the most cherished moment in the past year. The images would be surrounded by my kids. Yes, the compliments from my professors and colleagues encouraged me to do magis, but the temptations of advancement in profession sometimes made me drift away. Nevertheless, my instinct of eagerness to be reunited with the children after a whole day’s work kept me grounded. For the most part, I was the one who kept close contact with the children on my own, and I made the effort to be with the children on
their special occasions. I spent my day really enjoying what I have done in my teaching, my studies and my counselling. However, career aspiration and achievement cannot be the only fulfillment of my life. To my mind, a healthy and happy family is a testimony of being a well-developed psychologist.

Where are we? Challenges

**Anthonio:** It is a greater blessing to give than to receive as we endeavor to uphold the beliefs which have become associated with our CLC lifestyle. Gradually we will be able to cherish every moment of marital life, even amid sorrow. It involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tension and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship.

We brought these ideas back to our families and it bore fruit, as in the Gospel passage: “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly father” (Matthew 5:16). I always thank you Lord for listening to our prayers. My mother-in-law received baptism three months before her death in 2011. My sister became a devout Catholic although she had gotten divorced from her born-again husband. My brother was touched by saying the rosary when his son was deeply in debt. Angela’s father just received baptism this Easter in Hong Kong. However, as St. Paul writes: “Therefore neither the one who plants nor who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow.” (1 Corinthians 3, 7)

We thank the Lord who leads me and my family. Both our families (my parents and siblings and that of Angela’s) noticed that we are acquainted with the Church and its values. They were surprised by our attitudes towards the family issues and always respected our advices. “From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society”. (AL194)
Angela: We are sent to Cana’s banquet to celebrate our identities. The intimacy in marriage and the joy of sex in marriage are unique gifts of God. It is a real action of self-gift in both body and mind. That is where we can develop authentic and mature purity of heart with our spouse. In fact, it has often been called the “litmus test” of marriage. As physical appearance alters, the loving attraction does not lessen but changes, as sexual desire can be transformed over time into the desire for togetherness and mutuality: “There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life” (AL 163). From our experiences in sharing about the related topics, we can say that affective and sexual formation is a project that all couples can treasure. It was found, rather, that couples with positive attitudes towards sexual relation benefited more than those not positively inclined. This is the good news that we are going to spread to all.

Anthonio: In order to enhance our family togetherness, we were dedicated to loving and raising our children in the Catholic faith in our CLC. Both of us joined the same CLC and have been members for almost 30 years. We schedule events with other CLC families every year such as annual vacations, annual retreats, and Lunar New Year Festivals. All children have built up strong bonds with each other in the same faith. Last but not least, we practice our faith by praying with our children before meals and at bedtime. It is essential to ensure our family traditions in our multicultural societies. We celebrate our special days by attending Mass to enhance our togetherness in God.

During weekends, I insist on spending my spare time to listen to their hearts while being sensitive to their viewpoints and personal circumstances. There are challenges stemming from their having fiancés who are not Catholic. We will not resolve this situation by abandoning our love and ignoring the increase in mixed marriages. Our extended family is composed of people of different beliefs. There we have difficulties to propose the doctrines of divorce or contraception. For this reason, a pastor cannot feel that it is enough, simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if these laws were stones to throw at people’s lives (AL 305). Mission is about people. Helping our children to compare, contrast, and learn about other viewpoints without making judgments about them requires an attitude of acceptance and respect. Intimacy allows our family members to share emotions and mutual sympathy with us as a relief.

Angela: Professionals in many aspects need to undertake development courses regularly to maintain their registration. Let’s take a similar approach to a couple’s marriage! Actually most of these “on the job training programs” like Choice weekends, Pre-marriage weekends, Marriage Encounter weekends and Cana Sessions were introduced to Taiwan through CLC communities. As this
Papal Exhortation has often noted, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. . . (AL 325)

**Anthonio:** With the dreams of rebooting the marriage culture in the parish, we are eager to fill the gap in exploring the true meaning of marriage as our mission and supporting people in living it. Thus, we observe the gap itself as the break between thoughts that retain silence and wisdom. We indeed hunger for silence, to stay close to His whisper. I cannot convince all to believe that it is enjoyable to pray and work as a couple. We have been down and I thought of quitting, but by spending time on the discernment of spirits, we were able to resolve to take up our lives again.

**Angela:** The Papal Exhortation enlightened us about some achievable changes or practices. Pope Francis pointed out that God’s Mercy and Joy are there. As a couple we are inspired to face much more challenging situations to live our vows every day. As a mother, I would greatly appreciate it if the church adopted the proactive mindset that marriage education and sex education need to be firmly rooted by all means. As Catholics, our call is to continue in the truth and to preach it to all who are willing to listen.

Seated L-R: Joy Bautista (Philippines), Wuri Soedjatmiko (Indonesia) and Mia Kim (Korea)
Back row L-R: Winnie Wong (Hong Kong), Anthonio Wong (Taiwan), Billie Lau (Hong Kong), Heran Choi (Korea), Angela Chen (Taiwan) and Jeraldine Wu (Philippines)
At the Service of Family Life
Witness of commitment in the Ignatian family in France

Véronique - CLC France

Witness of my commitment working with families...

It is without a doubt the most common vocation in the world, every one of us has / had a family life, has family ties. Sure, they may be more or less numerous, more or less present, but they are there, and this, whatever the reality of our family or life status.

First of all, what is “the” family? Our family? I invite you to do a short exercise: take some seconds to ask yourself who you would consider as part of your family. Who would come to mind spontaneously? Your parents and offspring? Your grand-parents? Nephews, nieces, brothers and sisters? Uncles and aunts? Godchildren? Cousins? Maybe for some it is a beautiful family? Maybe the further one goes, the more one chooses: “this great-uncle, yes, that cousin, no”. Now let’s do the sums, roughly.

Two observations come up.

First of all, the idea of the family, what makes up the family, is not necessarily common to all. This is obviously partly cultural, but it is also the product of our personal history.

What is “the” family?

Our family? ... take some seconds to ask yourself who you would consider as part of your family. Who would come to mind spontaneously?

This also means that our responsibility to be living witnesses, in our family, in our circles, already includes many people. If you think about the community of about a hundred which was gathered for the encounter in Madrid, it would mean that in a way we are responsible for some two- or three thousand between us. Maybe more. It is considerable.
In our work in France, these two observations were important factors leading to the creation of pastoral propositions: on one hand, family ties are numerous and deserve to be taken care of in all their diversity, and on the other hand, we are called to both work in, and benefit from, pastoral work with families. In other words, people are not divided in those who give and those who benefit, in the same way that there are no “good” and “irregular” families. There is, first of all, the relationship, the encounter, which precedes everything else and which is at the core of the pastoral proposals which I will be trying to describe.

Who am I and how did I get here?

I am French, I live in Paris, I am married and a mother to 4 adolescents / young adults aged between 14 and 22. My husband does not form part of the Christian Life Community and does not share my faith. I will come back to this because this situation of following very different spiritual paths marked our family. And in a way, for me, like for many of us, the “frontier” is already my own family.

My biggest commitment linked to family life dates back to 3 years ago, when I took the decision to leave my job – I worked for around 20 years in the industry, particularly 10 of which on issues of ethics and social responsibility, to commit myself radically to these family issues. When I took this decision, it was without really knowing where I was going, but with a direction which was already marked: Ignatian spirituality, the Ignatian family. And the necessity to support this, by starting studying again: by training on family issues (parenting, in particular), while also doing theological studies at the Centre Sèvres (a Jesuit college in Paris).

This decision, thoroughly discerned, was an answer to several calls.

I started by assessing the fact that the family is the primary place where one lives with people which s/he did not choose. It is a place of big joys but also, often, of big hurts, often the primary place where the uncalled for, forgiveness, are experienced. I was also profoundly touched by complex and changing family situations around me which gradually, or suddenly, deteriorated, with persons and families who were neither able to summon up the resources from within nor find the necessary help or accompaniment around them. Too few invitations of long-term accompaniment in the family life, apart from – and, naturally, very important – proposals for couples, developed in France and in the Ignatian sphere in parti-
cular. Not really a lot of witness of this “reaching-out Church”, of these “field hospitals” which Pope Francis talks about, but only emergency services, the SAMU (Service d’Aide Médicale Urgente/ Emergency medical service in France), when it is often already too late...

Another determining factor for my commitment is the family synod. I was very touched, moved, by this process which really brought together in such a manner God’s people. I was also evidently touched by the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, by the way in which the Pope invites us to journey, together. With an end which is not to say that a particular practice or situation would be better, but going towards that which is most life-giving. He also invites us to be open, to let ourselves experience and be touched by other family experiences, and to let ourselves be penetrated by the mercy which was shown to us, a mercy “unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous”.

All of this produced in me a great desire to commit myself to these issues, and to try to do it looking for new paths.

**To the service of family life... in my own family**

**My “family vocation”**
This decision to commit myself to these issues also led me to give another look at my own family path. I thought about what “the family vocation” meant for me. And I found it a bit difficult to answer this. I realised that I had never really “discerned” the call to family life, and that, nonetheless, my family life had
become a “vocation”, a shared path, towards – and with – God.

It was in retrospect, through its effects, that I realised this invitation to go beyond myself in my family: a deep joy, a guiding breath, accompanies me, pushes me towards my neighbours, towards the other. This is how I identify my “family vocation”. I started off from the beginning with my husband, just trying to find our way around really, but with big confidence and, especially for me, thanksgiving.

I realise that “serving in my family” became gradually “trying to do what I have to do” without wanting to be “the perfect spouse or mother”, without too much “fretting” or “worrying”. Letting go, experiencing the Spirit work in me. I have to accept that I do not always understand. Educating – I was late to understand and I still learn it – is not to pass on who I am, but trying to free. How much trying to find my way in the dark, sometimes in misguided ways, has punctuated my life as a mother...

My family vocation also became more and more living the present moment fully with my family, simply trying to make the time spent together, good. Contemplation, wonder, in the most simple, daily things...

My family vocation also became more and more living the present moment fully with my family, simply trying to make the time spent together, good. Contemplation, wonder, in the most simple, daily things, became the core of my family commitment. The more my children grow, the more sources of wonder taking place outside of me. Their ability to commit themselves, for example, one in his professional life as an artisan, a craft which we know nothing about, and the other by choosing to get married, at a very young age.

And finally my family vocation, it is opening wide our home to others. Not fencing in my family. For me, the family is above all a link to the world, an opening to the unpredictable, to what is different. To let oneself meet and be influenced by other people, other family experiences. It is also the path of my pastoral commitment: doing my small part so that through family life, in all its different forms and ways, sometimes the most battered, the love of God could be spread around.
For me, this also happens through constantly looking for new paths, trying to be creative, together, especially when faced with difficulties.

To give an example, I will give you three “new ways” for us, which we incorporated into our family life: the “family council”, the “skeptic group” and an experience of family service in CLC.

Focus: the “family council”

Finding time to talk on a personal level with everyone, but also finding time to all talk together, helping each other find one’s place. Not easy in the daily life...

Since some ten years ago, we gradually formed and built time, held regularly and somewhat formalised, for “family councils”. This enabled us to live together, paying attention to the others, listening, in an original way, creating sharing space conducive to goodwill, to kindness, and where necessary to take decisions which affect our family life. This can also be a place of sending forth, of support and of “review”.

As time went by, the format, duration and frequency changed according to situations, to the make-up of the family, young adults who leave home, for example. On a practical level, friendly family-time always precedes the meeting – Sunday morning brunch, a snack of crêpes, etc. The place, date and time are agreed on in advance, giving enough time to everyone to prepare him/herself and to think of subjects which s/he would like to discuss.

Many things are inspired by the Ignatian way, but we do not pray because as I have already said, my husband does not share my faith. In a way similar to what we do in the local CLC communities, we have a first round, one or more successive rounds and a kind of review at the end.
We start with some time of silence, becoming present in the here and now. This is followed by a first round which enables everyone to express how s/he is and what’s on his/her mind. Sometimes it helps us discover that someone has a difficulty or is going through a particular moment which would have remained hidden from the rest in the busyness of daily life. This helps us to have a better idea of the others as well as the general mood. In this round we also have the chance to mention the subjects which we would like to discuss. This could range from light topics (such as energy-saving in the house) to more important topics (a family project, a problem of a particular member of the family, someone else’s place...). After this first round, the guide (one of the parents at first, but the children more often as they grew older) proposes some of the mentioned topics according to the amount of time which the family had planned and the present priorities. The other topics, ideally agreed by everyone, are postponed or treated at some other time, if they don’t concern everybody for example.

Then the topics are taken up one after the other. Everyone is free to say what s/he wishes. We try to use some silence first (I choose what I am going to say), then, to avoid reacting prematurely to what is being said we do not “discuss” straightaway, we start by “listening”. This doesn’t look like much, but it changes everything. Then we discuss more freely, and when necessary we take decisions or decide on future checkpoints.

We usually end with some time of silence and then everyone gives thanks for something or says something which s/he will keep from this meeting.

These “family councils”, full of Ignatian tools, have become a pillar of our family-life. What a difference when, gradually, - and it’s never for granted – we find time in our family to better listen to each other, to help each other in expressing ourselves, to progress together, to take certain decisions differently.

“Looking back” is also “connecting”: with the passage of time some things are seen clearer, people became closer and the family bond stronger and deeper. Becoming aware of self, of others and acknowledging with gratitude, we have experienced that in the family there can also be one and the same movement.

Focus: The “Skeptics group”

Having a different spiritual path from my husband is not neutral, it is sometimes difficult and could even be a source of conflict (like for the children’s religious practice for example). At the same time it is a wonderful chance to go deeper.
Having a different spiritual path from my husband is not neutral, it is sometimes difficult and could even be a source of conflict... At the same time it is a wonderful chance to go deeper.

We have tried to feel our way around in the dark (still do...), we had to find new ways of doing.

One of these ways, for about twenty years now, has been participating as a couple in a reflection and sharing group which comprises of six couples where the partners do not share the same beliefs: Christians, believers of other religions, atheists, agnostics... Once a month the group meets to discuss a topic, to read and share from supporting texts as well as from the personal experience of those present. Discussed topics have varied significantly: life as a family or as a couple, existential or societal questions, sometimes even guided reading of particular texts.

Focus: Family serving in the community

The family sessions in Penboc’h (see below) were a beautiful opportunity to concretise a big desire which I had: having an experience of serving as a family, with our two older kids, my god-daughter and our daughter’s fiancé.

Before any of us engaged ourselves in this, we took time to reflect together and to define the place of service where each one of us would feel in his/her place: for me it’s guiding “parents” and co-ordinating the project; guiding children aged between 3 and 7 (about fifteen) for my two elder children who wanted to live this experience together; guiding those between 8 and 12 years of age for my god-daughter; guiding a group of adolescents (including one of our other children) for the fiancé of our daughter. The service offered also included leading festive soirées and a part of the spiritual time.

The benefits are numerous: being more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the family, believing more in ourselves and each other, increasing a sense of teamwork between us and supporting each other, (for me) respecting their own space, and praying with them, which is quite a rare occurrence. But most of all, simply finding time to be together, to really listen to each other. An experience of service which already makes us think of others...
My personal commitment to the service of families

In the momentum created by Pope Francis, I was called to develop and coordinate two Ignatian initiatives which have to come up with new ways to enrich and accompany family life in the diversity of its realities: the workshop “realities of the family” of CLC France since September 2017 and Familles & Co (Familles & Co), an initiative of the Saint Ignatius church (the Jesuit church in Paris) since 2015.

The choice to serve in the Ignatian family is not a coincidence. I am convinced that for these issues the Ignatian spirituality, the Ignatian way of doing, has a lot to give to family-life. It is a deep, spiritual way, at the same time anchored in action, open to the world, starting from concrete experience, looking with hope at what is being lived, inviting to listen, to evaluating life, to discernment and so many other things.

Sometimes this necessitates a real shift in the way one looks at things, something which we try to do in the pastoral propositions. Take a step back, accept to stray away from what we thought beforehand, meet the other. Then invite the other, invite on a personal level, in a “communication of communion”.

I also became aware of the importance of witness in the pastoral proposals. Seeing families, persons, who get going, including in difficult and complex situations, makes you desire to get going in your family as well. As Pope Francis reminds us, the Gospel of joy is spread by propagation not by proselytism. This is why it is very important for families to support each other. All families go through crises, difficulties, and it is the quality of the links which they have with others which help them go through these trying times. This helps construct bridges, particularly between persons and families in the frontiers and with very different paths of life.

The “Family Realities Workshop” of CLC France

CLC France’s Assembly in 2012 asked the community to be attentive and listen to “family realities, both happy and suffering”, among other resolutions. For the occa-
ession of the family synod, CLC France also wrote a document highlighting areas where Ignatian spirituality could help families in whichever reality they were living. This work saw several propositions. Sessions or intergenerational proposals: “En famille, vivre à la manière de CVX” (“In your family, live the CLC way”) sessions for parents with children (see Focus below), a session called “Vacances spirituelles” (“Spiritual holidays”) for all CLC members, whether coming alone or as a family, who would like some time of spiritual revitilisation, proposals started by some regional communities. There are also proposals targeting specific family realities: for re-married divorcees, for persons concerned with homosexuality, a day of reflection with the centre Sèvres in Paris about the situation, sometimes painful, of single persons who didn’t choose celibacy.

In the coming months, we have to take stock of the proposals constructed by the regional communities with the aim of common evaluation, a better sharing of fruitful experiences and building innovative propositions. Another objective this year is that of building a team, a network in the regional communities to tackle these issues, particularly as for that matter family-life is a special doorway into other important areas for CLC France such as ecology, social justice and youth.

**Familles & Co (Families & Co), at Saint Ignatius Church in Paris**

Familles & Co is an ensemble of propositions, a small laboratory of ideas and practices whose purpose has been defined as: “Helping families to identify and implement that which would help them, so that everyone finds his/her own place, so that families accompany each other, so that through them the goodness of God could be spread”. It is also a team of about fifteen people engaged on one proposition or another, and who are passionate about experiencing something together and to make it work in their own family.
Can the Ignatian touch be seen here? As one can imagine, this project is less about bringing teachings and solutions to the table than to walk with people, starting from their concrete experience, so that they may find what “helps them”. The style and way are inspired from Ignatian Spirituality: open wide the eyes, the ears, the heart, look with goodwill at what one is living, naming the challenges, have meaningful conversations, grow together in a fun or serious way, encourage each other, this is the general style of the propositions.

There are multiple propositions: a spiritual journey for the parents, consisting of monthly meetings and personal accompaniment. There are also the intergenerational Sundays, fun and deep, where the main relationship link is formed, the “la famille dans tous ses états” (the family in all its states) workshops to tackle together difficult aspects of the family-life, this also through listening to others, starting with witness or short talks. Weekends or sessions on the outside in conjunction with spiritual centres: a “families” session about issues of integral ecology, a weekend for persons who have homosexual loved-ones, a weekend “one believes, the other doesn’t: walking the path together” for couples with different beliefs.

The first two years were definitely good, and promising. We hope that it will be “a fire which kindles others”.

Focus: CLC sessions for families, the experience of France

Four-day seminars “Living in the family the CLC way” took place in summer in the magnificent Penboc’h in Bretagne, France. The attending families, who were very diverse (CLC or not, Christian or not, having different family circumstances), are invited to live a moment of rejuvenation and conviviality. Between parents, between children in age groups, individual time and in couples, time for family members or different families to stay together: the ocean wind blew...
For those, of all ages, leading the sessions, the fundamental thing is not to give to the families particular information or miracle recipes to “succeed” in family-life, but rather to meet each of the families in their present situation, permitting them to find themselves (in the family) and to meet each other (inter-families) with goodwill.

We help families, persons, to feel accepted in their uniqueness, being able to just be and act together, including in the most simple of things, even when relationships in the family are sometimes blocked. Essentially, it is a matter of taking care of the families and inviting them to look after each other. Beautiful community experience!

Penboc’h was the chance for many to rediscover the treasures of their family, and to discover or go deeper in the treasures of CLC, particularly real listening, DSSE or the review of life. The youngsters, like their parents left with a desire: to live more and better their family-life. As if a fresh breath of air, went into their spirits, individually and collectively, and gave them a taste for a kind of family
requirement: the need to listen, to forgive, to discern and to take decisions together. Fruit which will ripen in the coming months.

**To conclude,** I would like to share some elements of review on these commitments.
First of all, it seems important to me that my commitment evolved from a personal commitment inspired by Ignatian spirituality as a response to a double call: from the French CLC on one hand, and from the Jesuit Society. Of course, there is strength in numbers, but this means real results from collective reflection, from communal discernment and this changes everything.

For these family issues in particular, we are invited to go to the frontiers of the Church, and to do it not to evangelise first, but to listen, to welcome, for mutual enrichment, to help, to accompany. We are invited to adapt ourselves with a new attitude, starting from a real attention to the demands in the concrete situations of the world. This implies that pastoral propositions should look at things in a hopeful way, to base everything on what is good in people’s life, and to start from their desire. It is, essentially, trying to build and integrate people with their family-life and outside. And trying to do it creatively!

This also implies the need to always be on the lookout for the best way to address people, to be inviting, particularly with those who are at the “frontiers”. It is a challenge. This asks for sensitivity. This asks for harmonious communication, where everyone feels responsible to share propositions with those close to him/her. And here, there is big scope for improvement.

**And to conclude, two short quotations:** The first, received from a friend during the IFE meeting in Madrid: “Family life is a wonderful adventure, unique and disconcerting at the same time, where love doesn’t fix everything, and whose only valid model is the one invented by oneself.”

The second quotation, from Pope Francis in Amoris Laetitia, was a big inspiration to our pastoral work: “Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.” (Amoris Laetitia, par. 325)

*Original in French, Translated by Manrico Bugeja*
Ignatian tools on Family Pastoral

El Reloj - The Family Clock

Carmen Oliveros
CLC Spain

An Exciting Model
Supporting the Marriage Vocation through a sense of Community

María Loreto Quijada and Cristián Rodríguez
Marriage Guide, Marriage Preparation Team
CLC Chile

Families Turning
Transforming Relationships, Strengthening Families

Nancy Wood
CLC USA
The Family Clock is a method of eight steps to improve the capacity of the family as well as their strengthening in the daily life. It is a practical method that mainly consists of dynamic exercises which are done by each family unit. The Family Clock is a process in which we create a series of experiences about feelings and essential aspects around life and the project of a family: gratitude, liberty, making decisions, failure, and forgiveness and moving along. They are not conferences nor lectures but practical exercises. It is not a therapeutic process but an opportunity to be able to dialogue and to set up a family. It does not invade the intimacy of each couple even though it gives place for us to be able to share the essential. Many families have already done the experience of the Family Clock and the assessments are extremely positive. They confirm us that many times changes are done when we are able to look at ourselves with new eyes and dedicate time to be able to create together one more time.

When we bring the expression “The Family Clock”, in many the image of a clock in their house immediately comes to the mind: in the living room, in the kitchen, on the night tables, or in their mobile phones. Many times the clock of each one in the house goes to a different rhythm: some are advanced and others are slow, there might even be one that has stopped or even others with arrows moving counterclockwise. Obviously a family knows how to combine people with different vital rhythms. Frequently there are members in different phases of their lives and each phase has its own rhythm. But one way or another we are family if we are synchronized: if one of us happens to be in the moment of pain or with
a sense of unease, the rest of the family knows how to accompany each other. If the time of happiness arrives, all the family is together. When a family lives desynchronized, what must happen for all is to stop and put all of our clocks in the same time.

The Family Clock also at home can be a metaphor of the family’s heart. It synchronizes all to live in harmony, to do things together, live together at the same rhythm. Like our grandparents, we have to wind the clock everyday with gestures, thoughts and kindness so its mechanism continues going around daily and once again love. The sound of the clock in a home symbolizes the beating of the heart in the family. The Family Clock proposes to us that we put a finger in the arrow of the watch dial and that we give it a complete turn to the basic hours that point out all the familiar hours which are important. We are still in time to do it once again. For one who has lost the rhythm in respect to the other, then it is time for us to start the clock once more. The Family Clock invites all the family members to put the clock of their heart in time to be able to live synchronized.

Even though all of us take family for granted and it seems to be something that works in a natural manner, we know well that a familial happy project requires attention and being looked after. The Family Clock is first of all a tool which gives capacities to the family. It makes the family strengthen their bonds, train their abilities, share their vision, practice gratitude. It offers a chance for reconciliation and to prepare themselves to be able to decide each thing better and as a family. Discover and rediscover ourselves are two words that correctly summarize what happens in the experience of the Clock. During the process we give above all priority so that the participants are the creators of their own progress through the re-uniting and reflection. We have experimented that the couples and the families have much more internal resources than what they believe. They simply have to go back and believe in themselves and give themselves an opportunity to faith. There is no situation that can be given up as shut or closed; for loving there is always hope. The Family Clock insists that we are still on time if we give ourselves a time to talk and rethink ourselves.

We have been able to prove that frequently the problems of the couples or of the families come from not finding the adequate opportunity to be able to talk about the real things. The occupations, being always in a hurry and being tired leave
us without time for what is essential. Even though it might seem simple, it is not
easy to make space for what really is the most important. One does not find the
right moment or does not know how to speak of things which are so complex.
Frequently they are very deep feelings but a bit vague or a disturbing feeling that
is very difficult to explain. It is much easier like this so we let what we are lacking
pass. Little by little we start piling up a sediment of small things that start to wear
out in our heart. Some light show of misunderstandings that maybe are nonsense
but that end up covering our feelings and we disconnect from the other person.
It can also happen that the advice of a friend or a relative might comfort or enli-
ghten us. But the tendency is more likely to swallow the problems and concerns
until we are not able to continue. Without a doubt serious problems exist in fami-
lies, but the normal thing is that we lose strength under a fine rain of trifles. That
is why every once in a while we need to renew our project. It is something that
can be done in a spontaneous and natural manner. Maybe a series of important
conversations during a summer vacation or in a long trip where we find the time
to talk about everything. But it would be good if practical tools existed that could
help us. And it would be very enriching to be able to share our experiences with
other couples and families since we can help each other in a mutual way in things
that, most of the time, are very common.

The Family Clock can be practiced with any person that lives in family. It can be
done for family groups, of two and two and even by people who are alone that
would like to review their family life. It can be done by couples, a father or mo-
ther with other relatives such as their children or grandparents. Around the world,
the Family Clock has been done by all type of couples, married and of all ages.
It has also been done by people that used to be in a relationship but have split; even though they do not live together anymore, they still have a lot in common – especially if they have children- and it is good for them to share the project. Even though they do not consider themselves as a couple they continue being a family.

The Family Clock is a very simple tool: It looks at eight central issues in the reality of each couple or family. Each family goes through their past, present and future by means of eight hours or steps. These are the notes that compose the music in the family: availability, gratitude, project, liberties, and decisions, knowledge of failure, reconciliations and reformulation. The Family Clock invites us to go around the family project going through that period of eight steps.

1. **Availability.** The first step is for people to start looking for a great availability in the process; it introduces the method so that the participants get a general idea of what is going to take place, and it describes the context in which the family moves, because it exerts great influence on the situation. This description is made among all the assistants to generate the sense of group, and begin with the participation attitude and in that way serve to help show what each family sees. The point is to create in the people, couples, families and the rest of the group the availability needed to start with encouragement and conscience of the Period of the Clock.

2. **Gratitude.** We learn through experience that all the good things start or restart through gratitude. It identifies the healthier nucleus from which the people can strengthen themselves to become better persons. It connects them with life, discovers the still water of hope, it makes them contemplate the beauty that exists in the family and it makes the best feelings appear. Each family unit goes through its own story, reading it in a key aspect of gratitude.

3. **Family Project.** Each unit describes what has been until this moment the familiar Project that has worked. To formulate the method they propose a technique that takes as an image a house and in it a group of questions that have to be answered. Then you do a synthesis until you find the formula which just by looking at it with one glimpse only, shows the essence of the project.

4. **Liberties.** You look over the development of each member inside the family, how this helps each development and how that liberty contributed to the family unit.
Each family builds a path, thinks of the future, plans, and leaves a legacy to the following generations.

5. Decisions. This time is used to do a long reflection as how the family discerns things, how they find the reasons of the heart, how they deliberate when they have to decide or know what is going on. Besides making you think about it, it proposes rules to be able to discover the traps and together take the right path.

6. Knowledge of failure. We know that many times we fail, but our approach does not only want us to take conscience of the wounds that we caused the other person, but that they become an opportunity to learn from.

7. Reconciliation. To forgive is the first step towards reconciliation, something that we must learn to do constantly in a personal manner, as a couple and as a family. It requires a sense of intense determination towards the other person so that it will transcend the daily miseries and the interior pride.

8. Reformulation. The original family Project has been checked in the light of the liberties, with the enrichment of the form of deciding, the learning through the failures and the return of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is time that is always based in gratitude, we do a reformulation of the project and we celebrate it. That celebration gives an end to the period of the Family Clock.

Each family has a Project. Each family builds a path, thinks of the future, plans, and leaves a legacy to the following generations and it positions itself by action or omission in front of the facts of their history. A family projects itself in time following a pattern that continues from generation to generation. It could be that the project was never mentioned, never was thought about comprehensively, but it always exists. To make it explicit allows us to go where the project is when the crisis looms. Maybe we do not feel the same heat as before. Maybe we do not tell each other the same words. Maybe we have lost our common places if we find ourselves in the center of a forest. But at least we know how to return one time and another to the same story that established us. To go back to the original project is not magic, but it gives us a place of words and light.

Operation ability, identity and relation with the world are included in the Family Project. Every now and then it has to be renewed and the task is much simpler if we have explained it. Family is not a static thing but it is something that grows,
and it encounters challenges and opportunities, it suffers trials and problems which one has to be able to overcome, it experiments conditions each moment of its vital period to which it has to answer, re adjust and grow. When one family begins their path or a new phase, it is difficult for them to know what they will have in front of them. That is why it is important to update the project.

The context and structure of the method is a reflection of the aforementioned process of creation. The Christian Life Community (CLC) of Spain noticed that their members felt that the Ignatian spirituality has helped a lot in their life as a couple or a family. Couldn’t the Ignatian tradition help other couples and their families as well as relatives and friends of ours, believers or not? The Family Clock is knitting the experience of hundreds of families which have been creating and practicing it in diverse countries worldwide. First a hundred families thought what was it that helped their Ignatian spirituality to their life as a couple or as a family. Afterwards a model team in collaboration with the University Institute of the Family of the Comillas Pontificial University was formed. Later on in the year 2013 a pilot experience was done and after that more than 50 experiences in Spain and other countries have made contributions to improve the method.

The Family Clock is a very realistic methodology based on listening to each other. As has been practiced by hundreds of families, we have been improving it so that it responds to what is really lived by all of us. At the moment, the Family Clock is being done in Portugal, Uruguay, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Chile and Ecuador

At the workshop THE CLOCK OF THE FAMILY, Saturday April 22th 2017 Santiago, Chile
and shortly we will have materials translated for English and French speaking countries that have shown interest in the method.

The method is inspired by Christian values but can be practiced by any person, and we have experienced that it can be shared by believers and non-believers. The Clock is designed in such a way that it can be used as a pastoral Christian tool or can be adapted to diverse groups according to their religious beliefs. This allows mix couples (believer and non-believer) and people of different faiths to take part. Couples that are non-believers, become in this way a very valuable element since it allows us to surpass the conventional frontiers of the familiar pastoral.

Recently Pope Francis reminded us that our love in family is a “love that is manifested and grows”, giving us valuable clues for this path of growth. “Give yourself time, quality time... listen with patience and attention... be able to make interior silence to be able to hear the noises of the heart... Get rid of all hurry... and make space” (Amoris Laetitia 137). We try to follow this advice: to make room, stop the time, so that each family discovers the beauty of its history, remember the melody that cheers up its steps and finds the way back to their home.

Original in Spanish, Translated by Jennifer Fox
Many couples currently apply to Chile’s CLC to be enrolled in the Programme for Engaged Couples preparing for a Religious Marriage. Every month the places available are fully booked, and one needs to register at least three months in advance. The course team consists of a priest and forty-nine marriage guides.

Twenty-three years ago, the Christian Life Community in Chile took up the challenge of accompanying couples in their preparation for a religious marriage. The aim was to accentuate the experiential, rather than the doctrinal, and to imbue the course with the values and ways of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Until then, in the Chilean Catholic Church, most of these courses were conducted by priests or marriage guides, in the parish halls or in the guides’ own houses and each meeting was attended by a number of engaged couples.

Although doctrinal issues were not always the focus of the meetings, they often determined the qualification for the courses. There were cases of married couples or single mothers who, in some parishes, were excluded from religious marriage, due to their personal circumstances.

The idea, then, was to generate a space for a personal, open, deep, realistic and inclusive dialogue between fiancés and married couples with several years of marriage, on key issues in the life of all couples and families. The aim was to shine a light on the life and dreams of the new spouses through the experience of faith and life of those who had already been on this journey for some time.
The course was always considered open to all couples (not only to CLC members) who wanted to consecrate their love before God and let the sacred enter their relationship. Also, it aimed to give witness to a welcoming and available Church, that is deeply happy when two young people accept the invitation of the Lord to live a true, faithful, fruitful, responsible and committed love for each other forever.

Content and structure

A model for preparation for marriage emerged as a response to these concerns and, so far, with good results. Over the last five weeks the course has developed contents identified previously and which were considered fundamental for the future of the couple.

Specifically, in a weekly and successive manner, the following topics are covered: The Sacrament of Marriage, Family, Work, Sexuality, and Together for Life. The first one is developed by the Ecclesiastical Assistant of CLC during a group meeting attended by all the couples enrolled for the current course. The other themes are led by different married couples that welcome into their homes one engaged couple for one month. This means that for each couple, there are four different guiding married couples that accompany them on this itinerary and address with them each of the topics mentioned above.

The meeting on “The Sacrament of Marriage” addresses the meaning and importance of sacrament, the role of the couple and the commitments they undertake when contracting it. Moreover, they are invited to prepare for the liturgical celebration and to understand the meaning behind its various aspects.

In the session dedicated to “Family” the engaged are asked to reflect on each of their own families, where they were brought up, distinguishing that family’s characteristics and selecting what they want to enrich in their own marriage. In addition, they are invited to talk and formulate their Family Life Project (what they
dream of, how it will look fifteen years later, their expectations, fundamental pil-
lars, their children (their upbringing and education), faith and service, etc.).

In the meeting on “Work”, the couple are asked to understand the Christian mea-
ning of work and to share the importance they attribute to it. Also addressed are:
the balance between family and work, the spaces for individual talent and per-
sonal development; the roles within the home; the care of the children; financial
management; the value assigned to money; lifestyles; making decisions; the han-
dling of work and economic crises.

For its part, the session on “Sexuality” is developed both from a larger context of
intimacy and communication between the couple as well as from its practical
aspects: expectations; sexual relations in the different stages of married life; fidelity,
respect and mutual knowledge; importance of the couple’s own spaces; opening to
life; birth control; infertility and concept of fertility in marriage.

Finally, the meeting “Together for Life” is intended to close the process of pre-
paration as experienced by the engaged couple, with the help of the experience
of a married couple with thirty-five or more years of marriage. The main em-
phasis is to convey to young couples the message: “Yes, you can live together
forever.” It develops the importance of the identity of the couple (you, me and
us) and of working day by day at the relationship. In addition it addresses issues
such as doing things together to stay together, the challenges of when the children
are leaving home, the arrival of grandchildren, difficult times and ill health, old
age and death. However, the most powerful part of this meeting is the life testi-
mony of the guiding couple.

Although the various meetings differ, they maintain a common structure: the
welcome and introduction of both the engaged couple and of the guiding married
couple; the opening prayer asking for the presence of the Lord in that encounter;
the development of an activity to motivate the topic and encourage conversation;
the dialogue and, finally, the closing prayer.

Valuable community experience

The reason behind the progressive increase in the number of participants in these
courses is the interest expressed by the young people. Initially, two or three en-
gaged couples were prepared each month. Today eleven are enrolled and on spe-
cial occasions the number increases. This means that there is a need for a large
team, consisting of one priest and forty-four permanent guiding married couples,
plus some additional support. The guides form groups around the various topics
and coordinate their activities and meetings to operate throughout the entire accom-
paniment process.

The large number of marriage guides that this model of preparation requires is
another positive factor because it allows many families to get involved in this
service and enables the creation of a sense of “community” through which they
desire to grow in the Church. Ignatian Spirituality teaches that people do not
walk alone in life, they go with others who experience in some ways the same
difficulties, joys and hopes and, above all, can find support. On the other hand,
the commitment assumed by the married couples to receive just one couple each
month, is more compatible with the practical time demands on their families.

The engaged couple

According to the evaluations given by the engaged couples at the end of
the preparation course, the aspects that they value most are: the variety of couples that wel-
come them, their knowledge on the topics discussed, their great openness and capacity for
welcome. Moreover, they appreciate the opportunity to discuss topics of
importance for the life of
the couple and their family, vastly enriched with the experience of the guides.

“We believe that the sharing structure for each topic, with different married cou-
ples, is beneficial for gaining different views. We liked that they were individuals
to us as they were more ‘personalized’ and made sharing easier.” Constanza and
Juan José.

“It’s a very good format and it opened an opportunity of knowledge that we would
not have had otherwise. The stage of our courtship was greatly enriched.” Ma-
carena and Javier

“We think the process was very good for us. The guides generated an environ-
ment of trust, where we could suggest topics to reflect on together, relying on
their experience while considering our individuality as a couple.” Camila and Rodrigo

“Excellent opportunity for openness to address the issues and can do it with different married couples, enriching our experiences and learning.” Javiera and Felix

“You can see the great care taken in the preparation of the topics. The meeting and the testimonies are a great experience of community and support.” Danitza and Joaquin

“The preparation process exceeded our expectations, and brought us closer as a couple. It left us thinking about our plans, strengths and shortcomings. Very comprehensive! We loved the talks, we deeply appreciate that couples take the time to join us.” Bruna and Gonzalo

Challenges

The main challenges of this model of preparation for marriage, based on the experience of several married couples and the personal encounter between them and the guiding couples, are the ability of the guides to offer listening and openness of heart and the need to constantly refresh the course contents.

To be able to shed light, through their own experience, on the path of those just beginning their own journey it is vital for the guiding couples to listen, with great attention, to the engaged couple’s intimate stories and desires. This is done so that they can identify the precise place where the engaged couple’s certainties, searching, doubts and contradictions lie and, from there, to build a dialogue. It is also important to be open to understand their realities, respect the differences and individualities of each fiancé and of the married couple, because it is not about imposing some particular vision but showing what has proved most useful to them to receive, with joy and hope, this adventure of living together forever, from the hand of the Lord.

It is essential to permanently update the contents of the meetings to respond, in the best possible way, to the realities of couples and families at a given time. Both the path of life and the path of marriage are marked by the very challenges
of their time and, therefore, rigid and static formulas do not serve to advance them.

For example, in these twenty-three years of service, the profile of the couple has changed significantly. From couples with ages close to 26 years old, who left their parents’ houses to get married after finishing their higher education and being newly inserted in the working world, today’s couples coming to CLC are over 30 years of age. They live on their own or frequently together and have been working for several years. Obviously, all this means looking at the topics from different perspectives and adjusting to the couples’ current concerns.

In any case, it is not about just updating of contents, but applying the fruits of the personal and joint discernment of all those who work with the engaged couple, so that they are always led towards the realization of true love in the world that touches them.

For their part, the engaged couple appreciate profoundly this constant attitude of openness and these encounters that let them bring together faith with their life:

“We really liked the approach, very friendly. We felt comfortable with our guides. There was an open approach to listen to different points of view without judging.” Josefina and Sebastián

“The preparation process is very good because there is an intimate space; people can talk about life, they [the guides] do not impose anything, and they listen to you.” Daniela and Nicolás

“We really liked the lofty aims with which the sessions are approached, grounding the spirituality in the reality of the here and now.” Vilma and Andrés

“The guidance of the married couples was excellent, because they brought us closer and gave witness to a human and practical Church.” Francisca and Andrés
Fruits of the meetings

Throughout these years of service, the pastoral of engaged couples has been blessed with several and profound fruits, which have enabled us to confirm the chosen path:

First, through the experience of the “unique and unrepeatable” encounter between each engaged couple and the guiding couple, just as God has with us. Sure enough, no encounter is like another, because each marriage has something different to share from its own experience and way of being, as for the engaged couple with marriage. On the other hand, even though all the meetings relating to a given topic have a common design or structure, the contents are addressed with different emphases based on the interests, expectations, needs and concerns that the engaged couple themselves bring to the meetings and which always drive and challenge the meeting in new directions.

Secondly, through the mutual enrichment between the guide and the engaged couples. Since these meetings are based on dialogue, the meetings allow each one to contribute what is really his. So, the married couples do it with their testimony and experience of life while the engaged couple with their dreams, longings, vitality, etc. Often it is the engaged couple themselves who take back married couple guides to the early dreams or promises forgotten over time, giving them the opportunity to question, renew and continue to grow as a couple.

Thirdly, through the possibility of making palpable and visible the “Church in the Home”, –that small church that each Catholic family commits to be when it decides to contract a religious marriage and that in particular involves transformation-little by little and with the help of the Spirit- into “the first school of Christian life” and “a school for human enrichment. Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.”

By opening the doors of their homes, the guiding couples, in a very special way, open their privacy and are willing to share with them their successes and failures, their lights and shadows in their marriage, in order to bear witness to the reality that it is not perfection that holds them together but the deep love that they have and that - through the help of divine grace- impels them to walk together in the different stages and circumstances of life, with a grateful heart and always willing to give their life for the other.

Original in Spanish, translated by David Formosa

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1657.
Hey Nance, What does the Families Turning Organization do and want to share with others? RELATIONSHIP TRANSFORMATION!

We all have three Relationships that need to be nourished like living growing things. We have our relationship with the Triune God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with self. Families Turning knows that living growing relationships are messy and we are here to help strengthen and support all three of these relationships.

Families are messy. We love our families but are not always sure how to live within them. As adults we often want better relationships and are forced to work through the needs imposed by various life events with our parents, siblings and children. But, right when we need to be able to communicate and support one another most, we fall into old patterns that get in the way. When we want to work on family relationships we often turn to just improving our communication skills. What we really need is to take a step back and look at our family members from a new angle and to consider our family life with a fresh and positive perspective. The goal of Families Turning is to provide practical and accessible skills and ideas to work on this project.

We live in a broken world and have from the beginning. You cannot turn the first page of the Bible without seeing a broken family and upon turning the second page there is another. But we cannot live out Christ’s mission without being committed to working through our differences and working to live in a harmonious and fulfilling community; this includes our families. For some family relationships
this can feel almost impossible; this I know from professional and personal experience. My husband and I have all types of family: step-, full-, half- and adopted siblings, divorced, step-parents and all while being brought up to live and prioritize inter-generational family life. Easy? No way! Fulfilling? Absolutely!

Families Turning starts with working on relationship with self, because it is necessary to strengthen and understand the self before strengthening the other relationships and this ever important self-relationship is the one that often gets overlooked. In other words, we begin with strengthening our ME, so we can be strong for our WE. Families Turning does this with an initial eight hour workshop that is done in multiple parts; then we follow up with weekly support groups because Families Turning is about Transformation not just information.

The worldly culture is like a rip tide at the beach; no matter what your past or upbringing, it can pull you under and we can easily become lost. We must journey together to keep growing through ‘real life learning’. What has happened to our grace, empathy, happiness, forgiveness and hope in the world? We have all found ourselves impatient and with a loss of empathy at one time or another, so we have to be willing to continue the work. There is a combination that we need to unlock inside ourselves, which are the three Relational Elements: Happiness; Forgiveness; and Hope (with plenty of empathy). Families Turning has practical ways to help an individual who is willing to work, get these three Relational Elements turning inside of themselves and their relationships.

So what would it take for families to thrive instead of just survive? The Families Turning mission is to empower adults, one individual at a time, to be the positive Change Agents within their families. In order to strengthen the family relationships and become that positive force, we need to take some time and give some energy to this project of change. This change will require us to do some internal work to understand our actions and reactions, find the capacity for gratitude in what we have, to overcome some of the expectations that we have placed onto our relationships, and see that we can live into a new course for the future.

In our experience at Families Turning we have seen a great thirst, willingness and enthusiasm on the part of individuals, and groups; especially groups that
have embraced the ‘inside job’ like CLC groups, 12 Step recovery groups, current and post-incarcerated individuals and others. They are ready for something better within their family relationships. In addition to the initial workshop and support groups, we are clearly seeing the next two dimensions for this program. We will complete a thorough written explanation of the foundational key ideas for this apostolate, then prepare helping professionals who can communicate and disseminate the initial workshop program. This is a grace we feel that can grow in CLC given the other initiatives that are already focusing on family life.

This deepening desire and movement is in alignment with CLC’s emphasis on family as one of its four frontiers of focus. We know strong families are the building blocks for strong communities and strong communities are the core of strong cities and nations leading to a stronger God focused world. But, strength does not begin with individualism or self-reliance, rather it begins with an awareness and understanding of how each of us and each other fits together in the fabric of family and community life. Through this relational awareness we become free to be strong individuals in support of the common good. And so it all starts with the family and while each member of the family plays a role, any one of us acting as the Change Agent can make a difference toward strengthening our family. The Families Turning programs are developed to provide skills to strengthen and transform relationships, because when your family is stronger, then you are stronger and we can all play our part in transforming our world – one person at a time.

Remember in this externally driven world, it is common for parents, adult children and adult siblings not to develop or maintain harmonious or fulfilling relationships. When the time comes where they are forced back into interaction due to circumstances or want to have a stronger relationship, they face obstacles and can benefit from the Families Turning program. This program provides access to complex family and relationship theory and therapeutic principles through usable and accessible concepts and skills.
The program components build a sound foundation of personal strength through the three Relational Elements of Happiness, Forgiveness and Hope, which are the essence of relationship with God. Our premise is that this foundation in combination with access to the usable and accessible concepts and skills can provide a systematic approach to strengthening relationships – Relationship Transformation.

We all develop a personal narrative of how we fit into our relationships that can act as a barrier to strengthening a given relationship. At some point the participant comes to the realization that they cannot control the other person’s behavior or change the past and they must make the decision to move forward in their own strength if they want a changed relationship; again, strengthening our ME in order to build our WE.

This process of changing our way of seeing one another from a new angle, learning to understand our own reactions, and living in a generous and genuine attitude in our relationships is meant to be a lifetime of practice and effort; it is always in formation and growth. There is no easy way or quick fix but it is work worth doing; it is the work of Jesus and Saint Ignatius, the work that all of us in CLC are committed to do, and we journey together being the hands and feet of Jesus, however he calls us.
The International Family Encounter (IFE) was a historical moment for the CLC, putting in practice an innovative and effective model for the CLC mission to carry out its functions. Seventy-three people from twenty-eight different countries met in Madrid to hold a discussion forum; we felt our meeting was imbued with a real spirit of world community. This feeling was nurtured not only by the Holy Spirit, but also by the particular methodology that we followed during the process. The following article presents two documents illustrating that methodology and showing the final consensus that was achieved.

1. Context

Firstly, it’s important to define the context. The genesis of IFE can be found in the World Assembly of 2013 in Beirut. The far-reaching apostolic focus of that assembly was the family. The executive committee (EXCO) asked us to define a plan of action for a mission that supported and strengthened family life. There was major interest in this subject, and, outside of the programme there was a presentation of some pastoral tools for the family as already implemented by CLC. Of those tools, the family clock method was of great interest. In the four years which have since passed, up to the most recent IFE in 2017, there has been a series of encounters in Latin America to apply this method. The method has been published (Editorial Mensajero 2016), a web page has been set up (www.relojdelafamilia.org) and an informal network has also been created.

After the Beirut Assembly, the World EXCO created an apostolic commission to promote the family mission. This coincided with a call for a profound renovation of the family pastoral by Pope Francis. The movement culminated in the publication of the apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia. This exhortation has been labelled by the Patriarchs as a radical turn for the family pastoral, much closer in message and ways to the New Testament.

One of the main proposals that emerged from the EXCO apostolic commission was for an international encounter centered on the family mission (IFE). Even
though the World Assembly in Buenos Aires was only a year away, the EXCO went ahead to set up the encounter. We felt that this decision was precipitated by the church’s prioritization of the family pastoral. Another contributing factor was the recognition in *Amoris Laetitia* of the importance of discussion and collaboration. This gave the Ignatian community’s spiritual input a central role. The IFE did not emerge from nowhere, however. A number of apostolic movements were already underway in this area and were galvanised by the proceedings of Beirut 2013.

Of note; the IFE was organised as part of collaboration between the worldwide CLC and a Jesuit university (the Institute of the Family, part of the Comillas Pontifical University). The IFE took place near the Monastery of the Escorial Castle in Madrid in July 2017.

Another matter of note is that during the whole IFE we were joined by the representative from the Vatican, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. His presence greatly boosted our efforts and intensified our feeling of communion with the church.

**Two key questions for the mission:**

The IFE followed a methodology of Ignatian inspiration that gently and effectively guided us towards seeking God’s plans for the world’s families. The methodology led us to consider two key questions:

- What is the most valuable and specific contribution that the CLC can make to families?
- What road map should the CLC use to best deliver this to the families of the world?

After arduous individual and group spiritual work we had an assembly, and in order to harvest all the fruits of our discussion, we utilised visual thinking tools. In the poster that we developed it is not just the words which convey the message, but also the shapes and forms that the words make up; its entirety reflects how the Holy Spirit moved amongst us.

**2 The Tree of the CLC: the most valuable contribution of the CLC for the family pastoral**

After a couple of days of examining and discussing the voice of the church and the reality of the CLC, we started to see fruits. It was relatively straightforward
to achieve a common voice because of the peaceful group dynamics achieved through our spiritual unity. We started to articulate what kind of contribution the CLC could make to the families of the world. We began by listing all our ideas on a poster. Later the facilitating group of IFE reflected on these ideas and came up with a design to increase the impact of the visual thinking exercise. This resulted in the picture that can be seen in Figure 1. Unfortunately the drawing is not a perfect reproduction of the original mural which was drawn in color and on a much larger scale.

Figure 1. The Garden of the Families.

The Garden of the Families is the space in which the CLC tends to its worldwide group of families through its apostolic and community action. In the picture, we have represented those families as standing on the soil of the garden with their arms extending upwards, as if trying to reach the branches of the CLC tree. To the left of the tree we wrote the word ‘periphery’ - the CLC acts, and wishes to act more, on the social and existential periphery of these families.

a. The beneficiaries

Looking at the details of the drawing, we can see the families are represented as figures made up of a single word. These words convey the characteristics of today’s families. If we read from left to right, we can appreciate the life conditions of many families; they have pain and suffering, they are imperfect, they cannot be idealised. On the other side of the tree, we can see a family which expresses the word ‘diversity.’ It is important to realise that families are now more globalised. We also have to take into account that there is an entire life cycle to a family, both developmentally and age-wise. Finally, our calling sometimes takes us to work with families that are unsafe. We might not always have the adequate safety nets to work with these families.
b. The roots that nourish our mission

Once the beneficiaries have been observed, we can focus on the tree. There are three clearly discernable parts: the roots, trunk and canopy. The roots include all the founding principles of the CLC, as required for the family mission. The principle root at the centre is completely vertical to the ground: love and compassion. Next to it there are two more roots from which the rest emanate: gratitude and hope. Looking gratefully at God and seeing how he works inside families is key. At the same time, maintaining hope within families that God’s love will never fail them conducts us to a positive family pastoral, as we have been told by the Amoris Laetitia.

From the main love/compassion root sprouts a large root named MAGIS. There are no random elements in this diagram, everything has a meaning. The MAGIS is a direct fruit of love and, at the same time, love takes us immediately to MAGIS. MAGIS is also fed by the root of hope.

Also sprouting from the main love/compassion root, towards the left, is another root called “To Listen and Look with Open Eyes” which in turn opens out into “Empathy and Understanding.” These are the basic qualities of the Ignatian spirituality: to look compassionately at reality.

To the right of the tree, from the Hope root, grows the “Outgoing/Frontiers” root, or the impulse to exit the apostolic borders. This root is supported by two other roots: “Take Risks” and “To Throw Nets”. “Throw Nets” means to offer our Ignatian tools to all those persons working at the frontiers.

To the left we can see more roots associated with gratitude. These are highly related ideas that we want to associate with the family pastoral. From top to bottom they are: Empathy, no judgement, humility, hospitality, inclusion, fragility, tolerance, and acceptance.
Applied to all the roots there are two arrows which point downwards and out. These arrows remind us that we need to keep growing and encouraging these roots within the CLC so their reach can be extended further. The deeper they go, the more intensely their words can be lived.

c. The trunk of the CLC mission

While the canopy of the tree represents the fruits and actions of the CLC, the trunk conveys all the sap and nourishment to the branches. It is a conduit for those Ignatian tools that characterise our spirituality. You can see at the bottom of the trunk, the words Ignatian Spirituality. The best thing that we can offer families (suffering, diverse, in any lifecycle stage) is this Ignatian Spirituality. The trunk of the tree therefore contains the vascular tissue through which travels the nutrients of Ignatian wisdom. These are: Lay vocation, Ignatian tools, Family Discussions, (DSSE) - above all an acknowledgement of universality (Love and service to all), freedom and flexibility, missionary creativity, universality, community experience, profundity, audacity and bravery.

d. Branches and Fruit

If we could see the original colours of the drawing we could better distinguish the heart in the centre of the canopy. This is a red heart and inside it, also in red,
is written the words “Show the Love of God.” This is accompanied by two more phrases: “God watches the family lovingly” and “The Beauty of Love.” The group at the Escorial felt that the most important thing we can teach a family is that God’s Loving Gaze is upon them. We can offer capabilities and enable experiences that allow all families to look at each other in the same way God looks at them; this is why the concept is inside a heart. It is the heart of the whole tree. From this heart grows many branches from which many fruits hang. The most prominent branch has the word “Healing” and “Practical Help”. Then we see tools of help, integration, belonging and hospitality. On the left there are other branches and fruits: Spiritual direction, show the beauty of family, innovation, build experiences and happy memories, take the Bible into life, and create spaces (of belonging, integration and hospitality), to develop apostolic ministries for the families, in the spirit of companionship.

e. Under God’s Sun

The beneficiaries reach their arms up towards CLC, but beyond that they reach up to the Sun of God. We can see the sun drawn with the rays of light in the Ignatian manner, and in the centre we have written Love of God, surrounded by the word communion (indicating communion with the church). The whole garden of the families and the CLC tree is illuminated and sustained by the Sun of God’s love, and is in maternal union with the church.

In conclusion, this picture of the CLC Tree for families helped us to pull together all the ideas that had been discussed over those first few days of the encounter. It also helped to define a precise and intuitive vision to face the next question: what can we do, what do we have to do, what do we want to do, on behalf of Christ for families?

3. An Ignatian Road Map for Amoris Laetitia

The mural representing the Ignatian Road Map of CLC for the Family Pastoral is not so much a static figure but a flow of propositions and actions. For better
8 Portfolio of Tools

7 International Handbook of Ignatian Spirituality & Family

9 Family Clock, Duopolis, Vivir de a2, Marriage Courses, PADIS, Family Transits, Chantier des Realites Familiales, Families & CO, Conseil de Famille, Le Parcours Parents, Separated & Remarried...

10 Globalizing the Portfolio

Modelizing Best Practices, Divulgation by Books & Websites, Formation by MOOCs

16 CLC for more People & New Generations

15 Family Global Apostolic Network

Brandung, Image, Communications
Global Team
Modern Website
OnLine Formation Courses
Visibility

14 World CLC Governance

13 Cooperation with
Jesuits
Other Ignatian congregations

Escorial (Madrid, Spain) July 2017
clarity, we have numbered the steps and attempt to explain them sequentially in this order.

1. The great inroads that the church has made towards the family pastoral since the midst of the 2010s has touched our hearts. We heed the call of *Amoris Laetitia* to join the renovation of the family pastoral as driven by the church. During the IFE we have particularly felt a need to unite (despite a divisive environment), to not feel fear at the frontier, to take risks, to offer our services to the diocese and to cooperate with others. The call to communion is felt deeply. Due to this call from the church we plan to participate more intensely as the CLC in any upcoming World Assembly on Family, such as the one which commences in Dublin in 2018. This call from the church is at the top of the mural and it is a starting point. It lifts our gaze and prompts us to give of ourselves with complete generosity.

2. Our response to the call from the church is to delve deeply into our spirituality and to respond from this place. That is why the arrow takes us from the beginning of the mural towards the bottom depths of the mural. There, we find the Contemplation of the Birth which we can use for meditation in our spiritual exercises. Our conduct within the family pastoral follows the teachings of Saint Ignatius; he advises us to be modest and attentive servants, maintaining a deep regard for the reality of the family that gave birth in a stable. God can be found in every family. The Spirit is always working there. We perceive the family reality as a sacred ground for our admiration and service. In this spirit we take our steps forward

3. “*Go CLC!*” expresses the enthusiasm we need to activate, mobilise, and initiate the impetus for us to serve with efficiency and promptness. It is a profound phrase that acts as a springboard to propel us into transforming the world.

4. This movement starts with a conversation in our hearts. As *Amoris Laetitia* says, it is not possible to start a pastoral renovation without firstly transforming our hearts. Some of the main obstacles to spiritual action nest inside us, in our passivity, impotence, comforts and...
conservatism etc. This conversation is valid at a personal level, at a family level, and even at a worldwide family level throughout the CLC.

5. As can be seen in the Garden of the Families mural, our first response as CLC to the family pastoral is to offer them our Ignatian Spirituality, lifting each person and each family to know they have God’s Love. In consequence the engine of the whole Road Map is for a meaningful implementation of the Ignatian Spirituality within the family dimension. This implementation has not been fully developed yet, but we as Ignatian lay people and family members are aware that we must strive to promote it.

6. The meaning of Ignatian Spirituality for the family consists of two elements; the first one is a body of knowledge (wisdom) and the second is the apostolic body (as a facilitator of the action). In the CLC we need to strengthen and develop both bodies. Firstly, the body of knowledge: we need to explain the reach that this Ignatian Spirituality has into family dynamics. This includes an understanding of the foundations, rules of dialogue, basic Ignatian tools, good practices and other innovations of Ignatian design. We need references; families that have Ignatian spirituality in their DNA could be used as an inspiration to others. How many enlightening examples can we find in the 450 years of CLC?

7. A practical way to create the body of knowledge is to publish a manual or handbook (a type of concise reference) about Ignatian Spirituality and the fa-
family. This can be carried out in cooperation with Jesuit universities, spiritual centres and other Ignatian Orders. It may be necessary to commission a team to do this task, and allow them two years to complete it.

8. This body of knowledge has a practical aim; it must efficiently serve the mission. This is why it should include a portfolio of Ignatian tools for the family. Alongside the handbook, we should record all the good practices developed in this area.

9. The IFE made us aware of the existence of several innovative tools for the family which have sprung from Ignatian roots. We need to collect all these and make them available. Obviously we include the classic tools of our spirituality which are the fundamental ones; spiritual exercises, examen, community dialogue etc.

10. It is imperative to make this port-folio of tools globally accessible. It is necessary to standardise each tool; describe its foundations and functions in a way that can be replicated in every part of the world. Tools should be disseminated using books and internet, following the example of the family clock. At the same time we need to create a training course to ensure the correct application of these tools, maybe taking advantage of the free online formats offered on the MOOC. Ideally, this could be done in collaboration with universities.

11. If we go back, to the two necessary bodies -which in reality is a single body of knowing and doing-, we find that in addition to endowing ourselves with a "knowledge", it is essential to strengthen ourselves as an apostolic body. That is to say, that as a global community subject we are much more dynamic. That brings us to the next step.

12. It is urgent that the CLC is renovated with the spirit of Francis Xavier. Xavier’s spirit is characterised by its missionary creativity, great entrepreneurship and proactive leadership. The CLC needs to integrate this Xavierian drive into our DNA. We cannot understand Ignatius of Loyola’s learning without the action, entrepreneurship and apostolic imagination of Francis Xavier. We cannot understand the CLC without such a spirit.

13. A key characteristic of Xavier’s spirit is the cooperation with others. In our case, there is a strong call to promote our initiatives alongside the Jesuits and the Lay community of other Ignatian groups. In the past, a very positive characteristic of the CLC - then known as the Marian Congregations - was its union with other lay Ignatian Congregations from different orders and different religious groups, especially the feminine orders. Maybe it is time to return to this practice, and regain this positive quality? Or at the very least, we should
work to strengthen our present collaborative relationships, as is being done by the Ignatian Youth initiative of the MAGIS.

14. The Xavier Spirit drives us to transform the governance of the global CLC. If we need to intensify the global apostolic body we need to adopt global models of governance.

15. Our main proposal is to establish a global apostolic network for the family mission: the Ignatian Family Network (IFN). It is essential to set up a mobilisation team, including a modern website that expresses our innovation and currency. Of special importance, the brand image must be guarded and any communication be protected. This network should facilitate capacity building. We especially highlight that CLC use more resources to make itself more visible, both within the church and in the public sphere.

16. Finally, in strengthening both the body of knowledge and the body of apostolic action, we must focus not only on developing our set of tools but also on offering the CLC as a place of belonging. One of the main gifts that we can give to families is this invitation to join CLC. We particularly feel the urgency for a new generation of youth to become part of the CLC so we can work more intensely with young families.

*Original in Spanish, translated by Sarah Walker*
Amoris Laetitia is a source of hope for all families, reawakening in us awareness that through them we feel the joy of love of a merciful and compassionate Father. Inspired by Amoris Laetitia, there has emerged through this International Formation Encounter, a prophetic inspiration to construct an ambitious project to serve the Kingdom. This is embedded in Ignatian Spirituality and in harmony with the vision of Pope Francis, reflecting the current movement within the Church, in the light of the “Triune God (who) is a communion of love, and the family its living reflection” (AL, extracts from number 11).

This International Family Encounter is one further step in the long process of discerning a response to the apostolic field of the Christian Life Community (CLC) family frontier. The process needs to be sustained through continuous personal and community discernment (DSSE) in order to be contemplative in action and spread an ongoing response.

CLC family mission is for today. We are responsible for planting the seeds of the Ignatian charism within families worldwide, inspired by contemplations on the Holy Family. As we have abundantly received, now it is time to give. We are urged to go where others fear to tread, but where God is calling us to be. We need to become creative missionaries, serving God’s people, responding to the call of the Church.

To undertake this mission within the apostolic family field, a common platform needs to be developed to integrate Ignatian tools for the pas-
toral care of the family, some of which are already in use. An international CLC team should be created to coordinate the cross-sharing of tools, documents, branding logo and other initiatives that may arise. This should be a global movement implemented at local level.

We have identified the specific call to reach out, boldly yet with great sensitivity and compassion, to families in diverse and special circumstances, who will be accompanied and encouraged to take part in the full life of the Christian community.

We have also identified the need to focus on youth, who will form the families of the future.

CLC needs to follow the example of St. Francis Xavier. The frontiers today are really close, and the need is pressing. Although the task is difficult we undertake it gladly, reflecting The Virgin Mary’s unconditional YES.
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Véronique
CLC France

Dr Fernando Vidal
Director, Family Institute
Comillas Pontifical University
Madrid, Spain

Carmen Oliveros
CLC Spain (El Reloj, Family Clock)

Maria Loreto Quijada and Maria Alejandra Vacarro
CLC Chile (A good model)

Nancy Wood
CLC USA (Families Turning)
Organising Team and Staff

Edel Churu, Vice-President, World ExCo
Denis Dobbstein, Consultor, World ExCo
Rojean Macalalad, World Co-Executive Secretary
Herminio Rico SJ, Vice Ecclesiastical Assistant, World CLC
Dr Fernando Vidal, CLC Spain and Director of Family Institute, Comillas Pontifical University

Antonio (Tucho) Brum, CLC Spain Executive Secretary
Marisol Ortiz, CLC Spain
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Gema Fraile, CLC Spain
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