

## **Strong marriages and loving families are at the heart of God’s plan**

*A statement from Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS, regarding Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation*

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* “The Joy of Love,” Pope Francis again proves he is a pastor at heart. He knows there are many difficult situations that people face, and the pope is calling the Church to approach these complexities in a pastoral way.

It is particularly important to study ways of engaging those for whom the lived experience of family life is far from ideal, and as a result, feel estranged from the Church.

The Holy Father has sent a powerful, positive message during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. It is about accompanying Catholics and integrating them and letting them know they are not alone.

Pope Francis is realistic about the challenges facing society, but he is confident in God’s grace and guidance.

There is not any Church doctrine that is changed, but the pope is calling bishops and priests to renew their approach to people in the pews and how we pastorally deal with wounded people, especially those who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.

Pope Francis wants all to be welcomed into the Body of Christ and to be shown a pastoral heart, regardless of their situations that might be contrary to church teachings. In the Gospels Jesus never dismissed anyone, no matter what sin they had committed. He engaged everyone.

This compassionate approach asks the Church to walk with families, to help them navigate the many challenges they face in the world today with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the truth of Catholic teaching. Our priests, deacons and laity are accompanying these people, staying close to them and reaching out to them. While the journey toward ideal situations might seem slow in coming, God is working in their lives, and we should appreciate that fact.

*Amoris Laetitia*, released on April 8, is a joyful invitation to families to live the works of mercy and to receive the gift of God’s healing where there is sin and brokenness.

The pope has asked us to read his reflections slowly and carefully to discern God’s plan. This is a 254-page document that demands study and prayer from Catholics everywhere. It is my fervent desire that we will read *Amoris Laetitia* patiently, so as to benefit from the richness of its teaching in order to articulate properly its implementation. This will lead all of us to contribute to the healing of our families and society.

I look forward to applying this apostolic exhortation to the Church’s evangelizing ministry to families in the weeks and years ahead.