

Questions Aimed at a Response to and an In-Depth Examination of the *Relatio Synodi*

Preliminary Question Applicable to All Sections of the Relatio Synodi

Does the description of the various familial situations in the Relatio Synodi correspond to what exists in the Church and society today? What missing aspects should be included?

Part I

Listening: The Context and Challenges of the Family

As indicated in the Introduction (ns. 1 - 4), the Extraordinary Synod was intended to address all the families of the world in a desire to share their joys, struggles and hopes. At the same time, considering the many Christian families who faithfully live their vocation, the Synod expressed to them a sense of gratitude and encouraged them to become involved more decisively, as the Church strives to “go out of herself”, and to rediscover the family’s vital character in the work of evangelization, primarily in nourishing for themselves and for families in difficulty the “desire to form a family”, which endures and underlies the conviction that an effective proclamation of the core message of the Gospel must necessarily “begin with the family”.

The path of renewal delineated by the Extraordinary Synod is set within the wider ecclesial context indicated by Pope Francis in his Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, namely, starting from “life’s periphery” and engaging in pastoral activity that is characterized by a “culture of encounter” and capable of recognizing the Lord’s gratuitous work, even outside customary models, and of confidently adopting the idea of a “field hospital”, which is very beneficial in proclaiming God’s mercy. The numbers in the first part of the *Relatio Synodi* are a response to these challenges and provide a framework for reflecting on the real situation of families.

The proposed questions which follow and the reference numbers to the paragraphs in the *Relatio Synodi* are intended to assist the bishops’ conferences in their reflection and to avoid, in their responses, a formulation of pastoral care based simply on an application of doctrine, which would not respect the conclusions of the Extraordinary Synodal Assembly and would lead their reflection far from the path already indicated.

The Socio-Cultural Context (ns. 5 - 8)

1. *What initiatives are taking place and what are those planned in relation to the challenges these cultural changes pose to the family (cf. ns. 6 - 7): which initiatives are geared to reawaken an awareness of God's presence in family life; to teaching and establishing sound interpersonal relationships; to fostering social and economic policies useful to the family; to alleviating difficulties associated with attention given to children, the elderly and family members who are ill; and to addressing more specific cultural factors present in the local Church?*

2. *What analytical tools are currently being used in these times of anthropological and cultural changes; what are the more significant positive or negative results? (cf. n. 5)*

3. *Beyond proclaiming God's Word and pointing out extreme situations, how does the Church choose to be present "as Church" and to draw near families in extreme situations? (cf. n. 8). How does the Church seek to prevent these situations? What can be done to support and strengthen families of believers and those faithful to the bonds of marriage?*

4. *How does the Church respond, in her pastoral activity, to the diffusion of cultural relativism in secularized society and to the consequent rejection, on the part of many, of the model of family formed by a man and woman united in the marriage and open to life?*

The Importance of Affectivity in Life (ns. 9 - 10)

5. *How do Christian families bear witness, for succeeding generations, to the development and growth of a life of sentiment? (cf. ns. 9 - 10). In this regard, how might the formation of ordained ministers be improved? What qualified persons are urgently needed in this pastoral activity?*

Pastoral Challenges (n. 11)

6. *To what extent and by what means is the ordinary pastoral care of families addressed to those on the periphery? (cf. n. 11). What are the operational guidelines available to foster and appreciate the "desire to form a family" planted by the Creator in the heart of every person, especially among young people, including those in family situations which do not correspond to the Christian vision? How do they respond to the Church's efforts in her mission to them? How prevalent is natural marriage among the non-baptized, also in relation to the desire to form a family among the young?*

Part II

Looking at Christ: The Gospel of the Family

The Gospel of the Family, faithfully preserved by the Church from the time of Christ's Revelation, both written and transmitted through the ages, needs to be proclaimed in today's world with renewed joy and hope, continuing all-the-while to look at Jesus Christ. The vocation and mission of the family is fully configured to the order of creation which develops into that of redemption, as summarized by the desire of the Council, "let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by his dying and his rising to life again" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52; cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1533-1535). From this vantage point, the questions arising from the *Relatio Synodi* are devised to prompt a faithful and bold response from the Pastors and the People of God in a renewed proclamation of the Gospel of the Family.

Looking at Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the History of Salvation (ns. 12 - 14)

Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, the Church looks to Christ in his enduring truth and inexhaustible newness, which also sheds light on the family. "Christ is the 'eternal Gospel' (*Rev* 14:6); he 'is the same yesterday and today and forever' (*Heb* 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is for ever young and a constant source of newness" (*Gaudium Evangelii*, 11).

7. *A fixed gaze on Christ opens up new possibilities. "Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up" (n. 12). How is the teaching from Sacred Scripture utilized in pastoral activity on behalf of families. To what extent does "fixing our gaze on Christ" nourish a pastoral care of the family which is courageous and faithful?*

8. *What marriage and family values can be seen to be realized in the life of young people and married couples? What form do they take? Are there values which can be highlighted? (cf. n. 13) What sinful aspects are to be avoided and overcome?*

9. *What human pedagogy needs to be taken into account — in keeping with divine pedagogy — so as better to understand what is required in the Church's pastoral activity in light of the maturation of a couple's life together which would lead to marriage in the future? (cf. n. 13)*

10. *What is being done to demonstrate the greatness and beauty of the gift of indissolubility so as to prompt a desire to live it and strengthen it more*

and more? (cf. n. 14)

11. *How can people be helped to understand that a relationship with God can assist couples in overcoming the inherent weaknesses in marital relations? (cf. n. 14) How do people bear witness to the fact that divine blessings accompany every true marriage? How do people manifest that the grace of the Sacrament sustains married couples throughout their life together?*

The Family in God's Savific Plan (ns. 15 - 16)

In creation, the vocation of the love between a man and woman draws its full realization from the Paschal Mystery of Christ the Lord, who, in his total gift of self, makes the Church his Mystical Body. Christian marriage, in drawing on the grace of Christ, thus becomes, for those who are called, the path leading to the perfection of love, which is holiness.

12. *How can people be made to understand that Christian marriage corresponds to the original plan of God and, thus, one of fulfillment and not confinement? (cf. n. 13)*

13. *How can the Church be conceived as a “domestic Church” (Lumen Gentium, 11), agent and object of the work of evangelization in service to the Kingdom of God?*

14. *How can an awareness of this missionary task of the family be fostered?*

The Family in the Church's Documents (ns. 17 - 20)

The Church's Magisterium in all its richness needs to be better known by the People of God. Marital spirituality is nourished by the constant teaching of the Pastors, who care for the flock, and grow through their continual attentiveness to the Word of God and to the sacraments of faith and charity.

15. *The Lord looks with love at the Christian family and through him the family grows as a true community of life and love. How can a familial spirituality be developed and how can families become places of new life in Christ? (cf. n. 21)*

16. *What initiatives in catechesis can be developed and fostered to make known and offer assistance to persons in living the Church's teaching on the family, above all in surmounting any possible discrepancy between what is lived and what is professed and in leading to a process of conversion?*

The Indissolubility of Marriage and the Joy of Sharing Life Together

(ns. 21 - 22)

“Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may effectively lead the spouses to God and may aid and strengthen them in the sublime mission of being father and mother. For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48).

17. *What initiatives can lead people to understand the value of an indissoluble and fruitful marriage as the path to complete personal fulfilment? (cf. n. 21)*

18. *What can be done to show that the family has many unique aspects for experiencing the joys of human existence?*

19. *The Second Vatican Council, returning to an ancient ecclesial tradition, expressed an appreciation for natural marriage. To what extent does diocesan pastoral activity acknowledge the value of this popular wisdom as fundamental in culture and society? (cf. n. 22)*

The Truth and Beauty of the Family and Mercy Towards Wounded and Fragile Families (ns. 23 - 28)

After having considered the beauty of successful marriages and strong families and shown appreciation for the generous witness of those who remain faithful to the bonds of marriage, even when abandoned by their spouses, the Pastors at the Synod asked themselves — in an open and courageous manner but not without concern and caution — how the Church is to regard Catholics who are united in a civil bond, those who simply live together and those who, after a valid marriage, are divorced and remarried civilly.

Aware of the obvious limitations and imperfections present in many different situations, the synod fathers assumed the positive outlook indicated by Pope Francis, according to which “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, they need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively occur.”(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 44).

20. *How can people be helped to understand that no one is beyond the mercy of God? How can this truth be expressed in the Church's pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile?*

(cf. n. 28)

21. *In the case of those who have not yet arrived at a full understanding of the gift of Christ's love, how can the faithful express a friendly attitude and offer trustworthy guidance without failing to proclaim the demands of the Gospel? (cf. n. 24)*

22. *What can be done so that persons in the various forms of union between a man and a woman — in which human values can be present — might experience a sense of respect, trust and encouragement to grow in the Church's good will and be helped to arrive at the fulness of Christian marriage? (cf. n. 25)*

Part III

Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives

In examining Part III of the *Relatio Synodi*, it is important to be guided by the pastoral approach initiated at the Extraordinary Synod which is grounded in Vatican II and the Magisterium of Pope Francis. The episcopal conferences have the responsibility to continue to examine this part thoroughly and seek the involvement, in the most opportune manner possible, all levels of the local Church, thus providing concrete instances from their specific situations. Every effort should be made not to begin anew, but to continue on the path undertaken in the Extraordinary Synod as a point of departure.

Proclaiming the Gospel of the Family Today in Various Contexts (ns. 29 - 38)

Because of the needs of the family and, at the same time, the many complex challenges that are present in the world today, the Synod emphasized making a renewed commitment to proclaiming the Gospel of the Family in a bold and more insistent manner.

23. *How is the family emphasized in the formation of priests and other pastoral workers? How are families themselves involved?*

24. *Are people aware that the rapid evolution in society requires a constant attention to language in pastoral communication. How can an effective testimony be given to the priority of grace in a way that family life is conceived and lived as welcoming the Holy Spirit?*

25. *In proclaiming the Gospel of the Family, how can the conditions be created so that each family might actually be as God wills and that society might acknowledge the family's dignity and mission? What "pastoral conversion" and what further steps towards an in-depth examination are being done to achieve this?*

26. *Are people aware of the importance of the collaboration of social and civil institutions on behalf of the family? How is this actually done? What criteria are used to inspire it? In this regard, what role can be played by family associations? How can this collaboration be sustained even in a bold repudiation of the cultural, economic and political processes which threaten the family?*

27. *How can relations between family, society and civil life be fostered for the benefit of the family? How can the support of the State and the international community be fostered on behalf of the family?*

Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage (ns. 39 - 40)

The Synod recognized the steps taken in recent years to facilitate an effective preparation of young people for marriage, stressing, however, a need for a greater commitment of the entire Christian community in not only the preparation but also the initial years of family life.

28. *How is marriage preparation proposed in order to highlight the vocation and mission of the family according to faith in Jesus Christ? Is it proposed as an authentic ecclesial experience? How can it be renewed and improved?*

29. *How does the catechesis of Christian initiation present an openness to the vocation and mission of the family? What practices are seen as most urgent? How is the relation among Baptism, Eucharist and marriage proposed? What emphasis is given to the character of the catechumenate and mystagogy which is often a part of marriage preparation? How can the community be involved in this preparation?*

Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage (n. 40)

30. *Does marriage preparation and accompanying couples in the initial years of married life adequately value the important contribution of the witness and sustenance which can be given by families, associations and family movements? What positive experiences can be reported in this regard?*

31. *The pastoral accompaniment of couples in the initial years of family life — as observed in synodal discussion — needs further development. What are the most significant initiatives already being undertaken? What elements need further development in parishes, dioceses or associations and movements?*

Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married or Living Together (ns. 41 - 43)

The Synod discussed diverse situations resulting from a multiplicity of cultural and economic factors, practices grounded in tradition, and the difficulty of young people to make lifetime commitments.

32. *What criteria in a proper pastoral discernment of individual situations are being considered in light the Church's teaching in which the primary elements of marriage are unity, indissolubility and openness to life?*

33. *Is the Christian community able to be pastorally involved in these situations? How can it assist in discerning the positive and negative elements in the life of persons united in a civil marriage so as to guide and sustain them on a path of growth and conversion towards the Sacrament of Matrimony? How can those living together be assisted to decide to marry?*

34. *In a particular way, what response is to be given to problems arising from the continuity of traditional forms of marriage in stages or those between families?*

Caring for Wounded Families (Separated, Divorced and Not Remarried, Divorced and Remarried, Single-Parent Families) (ns. 44 - 54)

Synod discussion highlighted the need for a pastoral based on *the art of accompaniment*, “the pace of [which] must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 169).

35. *Is the Christian community in a position to undertake the care of all wounded families so that they can experience the Father's mercy? How does the Christian community engage in removing the social and economic factors which often determine this situation? What steps have been taken and what can be done to increase this activity and the sense of mission which sustains it?*

36. *How can the identification of shared pastoral guidelines be fostered at the level of the particular Church? In this regard, how can a dialogue be developed among the various particular Churches cum Petro and sub Petro?*

37. *How can the procedure to determine cases of nullity be made more accessible, streamlined and possibly without expense?*

38. *With regard to the divorced and remarried, pastoral practice concerning the sacraments needs to be further studied, including assessment of the Orthodox practice and taking into account “the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances” (n. 52). What are the prospects in such a case? What is possible? What suggestions can be offered to resolve forms of undue or unnecessary impediments?*

39. *Does current legislation provide a valid response to the challenges*

resulting from mixed marriages or interreligious marriages? Should other elements be taken into account?

Pastoral Attention towards Persons with Homosexual Tendencies (ns. 55 - 56)

The pastoral care of persons with homosexual tendencies poses new challenges today, due to the manner in which their rights are proposed in society.

40. How can the Christian community give pastoral attention to families with persons with homosexual tendencies? What are the responses that, in light of cultural sensitivities, are considered to be most appropriate? While avoiding any unjust discrimination, how can such persons receive pastoral care in these situations in light of the Gospel? How can God's will be proposed to them in their situation?

The Transmission of Life and the Challenge of a Declining Birthrate (ns. 57 - 59)

The transmission of life is a fundamental element in the vocation and mission of the family: "They should know they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love in the task of transmitting human life and to raising children; this has to be considered their proper mission" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50).

*41. What are the most significant steps that have been taken to announce and effectively promote the beauty and dignity of becoming a mother or father, in light, for example, of *Humanae Vitae* of Blessed Pope Paul VI? How can dialogue be promoted with the sciences and biomedical technologies in a way that respects the human ecology of reproduction?*

42. A generous maternity / paternity needs structures and tools. Does the Christian community exercise an effective solidarity and support? How? Is it courageous in proposing valid solutions even at a socio-political level? How can adoption and foster-parenting be encouraged as a powerful sign of fruitful generosity? How can the care and respect of children be promoted?

43. The Christian lives maternity / paternity as a response to a vocation. Is this vocation sufficiently emphasized in catechesis? What formation is offered so that it might effectively guide the consciences of married couples? Are people aware of the grave consequences of demographic change?

44. How does the Church combat the scourge of abortion and foster an effective culture of life?

Upbringing and the Role of the Family in Evangelization (ns. 60 - 61)

45. Fulfilling their educational mission is not always easy for parents. Do

they find solidarity and support from the Christian community? What suggestions might be offered in formation? What steps can be taken to acknowledge the role of parents in raising children, even at the socio-political level?

46. How can parents and the Christian family be made aware that the duty of transmitting the faith is an intrinsic aspect of being a Christian?