

Go, you are sent... to your own peripheries

“Welcome one another, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

ROMANS 15:7

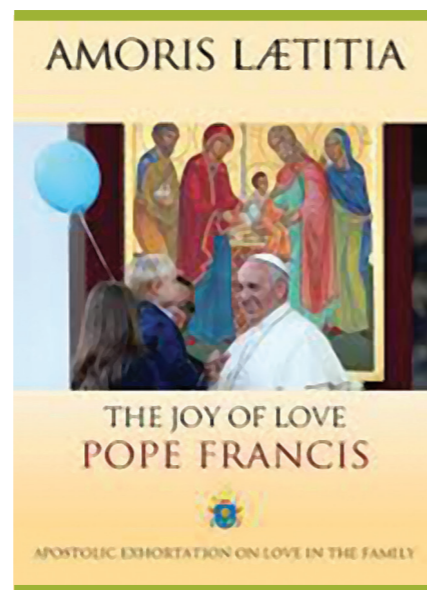
There are members of our own Church communities who are in difficult personal and family situations. Our attitude towards the divorced, the divorced and remarried, single parents, young people who are living together, and LGBT Catholics needs examination, as does the support and acceptance they are offered in our parishes and communities.

An emphasis on “rules” and conformity can push people in difficult situations to the periphery of the Catholic community, or even out of it.

Saint John Paul II proposed the “law of gradualness” in the knowledge that the human being “knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth” (*Amoris Laetitia* 323). Each of us advances step by step in our spiritual life towards greater perfection as the gradual nature of the healing work of grace enables us to grow in virtue. The “law of gradualness” is simply the recognition that the conversion to which all the members of the Church are called is not a magic, one-time transformation, but an ongoing process of healing, growth and change. The Christian community is made up of people at many stages on this path. “No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. (*Amoris Laetitia* 325).

Some may believe their situation excludes them from the Catholic community. Others may have experienced judgmental attitudes or subtle forms of exclusion. There is a strong pattern in the Gospel of Jesus accepting and welcoming those who had been judged and excluded from the community. Acceptance and accompaniment of one another as pilgrims on a journey is at the heart of the Christian response.

1. Who is missing from our communities?
2. What implications does the law of gradualness have for our understanding of community, and for pastoral care?



“In accompanying frailties and treating wounds, the principle of gradualness in pastoral care reflects divine teaching: how God cares for all His children, beginning with the weakest and furthest away, so ‘the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner’, because they all have to be integrated into the life of the ecclesial community.”

CARDINAL LORENZO BALDISSERI, PRESENTATION OF AMORIS LAETITIA

“Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return.”

POPE FRANCIS, INTERVIEW WITH FR A SPADARO SJ SEP 2013

“Christian communities must not abandon divorced parents who have entered a new union, but should include and support them in their efforts to bring up their children. How can we encourage those parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and practical faith, if we keep them at arm’s length from the life of the community, as if they were somehow excommunicated? We must keep from acting in a way that adds even more to the burdens that children in these situations already have to bear!”

AMORIS LAETITIA 246

“Whatever the cause, single parents must receive encouragement and support from other families in the Christian community, and from the parish’s pastoral outreach. Often these families endure other hardships, such as economic difficulties, uncertain employment prospects, problems with child support and lack of housing.”

AMORIS LAETITIA 252

“A person once asked me, in a provocative manner, if I approved of homosexuality. I replied with another question: ‘Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?’ We must always consider the person.”

POPE FRANCIS, INTERVIEW WITH FR A SPADARO SJ SEP 2013