

Love must be core of family life, Pope says ahead of World Meeting of Families by [Elise Harris](#) Vatican City, [Mar 30, 2017](#)



Pope Francis kisses a child in St. Peter's Square for the general audience, Dec. 9, 2015. Credit: Daniel Ibañez/CNA.

Pope Francis issued a message ahead of the 2018 World Meeting of Families (WMOF), saying couples and families should root their relationships in the love of God, which then propels them to joyfully share it with others.

"I wish to underline how important it is for families to ask themselves often if they live based on love, for love and in love," the Pope said in his message.

In practice, "this means giving oneself, forgiving, not losing patience, anticipating the other, respecting," as well as living and repeating daily the phrases "please," "thank you" and "I'm sorry."

Because of the daily experience we have of weakness and fragility, both families and pastors need a "renewed humility" that will allow them to learn and educate, to help, accompany, discern and educate people from all backgrounds and situations.

"I dream of an outbound Church, not a self-referential one, a Church that does not pass by far from man's wounds, a merciful Church that proclaims the heart of the revelation of God as Love, which is mercy," he said, adding that "it is this very mercy that makes us new in love."

"We know how much Christian families are a place of mercy and witnesses of mercy, and even more so after the extraordinary Jubilee," he said, adding that "the Dublin meeting will be able to offer concrete signs of this."

Published March 30 and dated March 25, the Pope's letter was addressed to Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Prefect of the mega-dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

The cardinal was present alongside Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, the diocese hosting the event, for the March 30 presentation of the letter at the Vatican's Press Office.

The World Meeting of Families will take place Aug. 22-26, 2018, in Dublin and will follow the theme "The Gospel of family, joy for the world." Given the theme, catechesis for the event will focus specifically on the content of the Pope's 2016 post-synodal apostolic exhortation "Amoris Laetitia."

In his letter, the Pope said organizers have "the task of translating in a special way the teaching of Amoris Laetitia, with which the Church wishes families always to be in step, in that inner pilgrimage that is the manifestation of authentic life."

While discussion on the document is often reduced to footnote 351 of Chapter 8 on communion for divorced and remarried couples, both Cardinal Farrell and Archbishop Martin said there's much more to the document, which they hope to convey to the families that come.

In comments to CNA, Cardinal Farrell said "we seem to focus on just one small aspect of the apostolic exhortation, however I think many times we overlook the great teaching that exists in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 of this document."

"Naturally most of our emphasis in this gathering of families will deal with family life as it is," he said, explaining that the bulk of the conversation will deal with Chapters 2, 3, and 4, which focus on the vocation of marriage and family life, and their challenges.

"It is so important when we live in a world where family comes under attack from many different sources and many different ideologies, that we explain what we believe as Catholics, as Christians, in married life," Cardinal Farrell said, explaining that many times the Church fails to teach what marriage is about.

"We fail to do that many times in the Church in our programs of preparation for married life, we fail to do that in continuing to help young couples after they've been married," he said, stressing the need to accompany couples in the path of marriage, which is dealt with in Chapters 1-7 of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Similarly, Archbishop Martin told CNA that while the family "is under attack from ideologies" pushed by modern secular society, if they were to ask families how they are being "attacked," the answers would overwhelmingly center on the day-to-day struggles of how to make ends meet and troubles they might be facing in raising their children.

"These are the challenges that parents need to be supported in so they can carry out their essential role in society and that people really give them the support and confidence to do that," he said, explaining that Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia* will likely be a key focal point for the event's catechesis.

So while the ideologies are certainly present, "it's the day-to-day realities that parents have to face with their children (and) this is where the Church has to be accompanying, not just accompanying them in problems."

Speaking to journalists, Cardinal Farrell stressed the importance of the role of the laity and local parishes in preparing for the World Meeting of Families, specifically when it comes to reaching out to those who might have abandoned the Church or no longer attend for a variety of reasons.

"We need to be a Church that goes out to the peripheries of society, to those people who don't listen to us at the present moment, to those families many times that have lost their way or don't go to church anymore," he said.

The catechesis done by individual dioceses in the lead-up to the international gathering will be especially important, he said, adding that "it's imperative" that this preparation take place in parishes since they are the ones who can better reach families that are far off.

"It's very important that this take place. It's not just a gathering of three days, this is an effort of the whole Church," he said, noting that media also play a crucial role.

Laity must also embrace this task, he said, noting that the Church is currently celebrating 50 years since the the Second Vatican Council and 30 years since the publication of St. John Paul II's 1988 apostolic exhortation "*Christifideles laici*" on the vocation of laity.

Both of these "spoke to the mission of lay people and the co-responsibility of laity in the Church," the cardinal said. "Its not just a question of a few priests or a few sisters or a few people engaged in the pastoral life of (their parish), but we need to reach out, we are the communicators."

And it's married couples themselves who, in their different parishes and communities, "should be the ones who are responsible for communicating this love that we would hope to re-instill in the lives of so many people, that they would go and communicate it to other couples."