

The Synod of Bishops, Rome October 2015.

Reports from English the language 'Small Groups'

(Source: Vatican *Bollettino* linked [HERE](#))

Relatio – Circulus Anglicus "A"

Moderator: Card. PELL George

Relator: S.E. Mons. KURTZ Joseph Edward

Flowing from the tenderness of God is the mission of the family, a primary announcer of the Good News both within the family and beyond.

Guided by the Word of God, the Magisterium and the ongoing promptings of the Holy Spirit and sustained by the Sacrament of Matrimony, families are helped to be missionary disciples of God's love and mercy wherever they are. The mission of the family embraces spousal love, education of children, faithfully living out the sacrament, the preparation of other couples for marriage, the accompaniment in friendship and dialogue of those couples or families facing difficulties, and participation in the communal life of the Church. Opening themselves to needs near and far, families know how to incarnate these words of Pope Francis: "Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others...and enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 270)."

While the gift of faith is received into the lives of a family through the culture of that family, that faith also helps to shape culture. Every family has roots in culture and the Christian family has a responsibility to inform culture with the Good News. To this end, the Church rightly exhorts all governments to promote religious freedom, which includes not only the right to worship, but also the right to express matters of conscience, to participate in civic affairs, and to serve others in a manner consistent with our faith and mission.

Powerful in the lives of those who wed and those who witness is the gift of the Wedding Liturgy. We examined the power of the Wedding Ceremonies in which both rite and homily can have valuable impact as well as the lifelong witness of Christian families.

Truly important is the preparation of couples for marriage as well as its ongoing formation and support. This formation needs to be grounded in biblical theology, Christian anthropology and Church teachings. Of special note was our discussion on proper sex education based on an authentically Christian understanding of sexuality. Programs of sex education should emphasize conscience formation, the sense of responsibility, the value of self-control, modesty and the virtue of chastity. In addition, it was agreed that the role of parents in the sex education of their children must be emphasized. They are the first and primary teachers of their children and they should be supported in their efforts by sound programs of sex education in schools and parishes.

In all cases of pastoral accompaniment of families by the Church, it is essential that our efforts to walk with people witness with clarity to the teaching of the Church. Most important is a clarity and attractiveness of language, making the Church's teaching more comprehensible and accessible.

We reflected on the way in which the Church walks with those who struggle. In all cases, pastoral care must be marked by charity and patience, especially with those who do not live or are not yet prepared to live in full accord with the Church's teachings. They are to be welcomed with love and respect by the pastors of the Church, who should be generous in accompanying them and in fostering their desire to participate more fully into the life of the Church.

Among the important pastoral considerations, we discussed the challenges that mixed marriages pose. We affirm that for such marriages to succeed, it is important that the couples be well-prepared in the Church's teaching before the marriage and accompanied by their faith communities.

We also took up certain proposals for accompanying those who are divorced and civilly remarried. We supported the recent efforts to streamline the process of nullity to make it more accessible without changing the Church's teaching. The majority without full consensus affirmed the current teaching and practice of the Church regarding the participation in the Eucharist of those who are divorced and civilly remarried. We acknowledged that this pathway may be difficult, and pastors should accompany them with understanding, always ready to extend God's mercy to them anew when they stand in need of it.

A majority without full consensus also affirmed that pastoral practice concerning reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist by those divorced and civilly remarried ought not to be left to individual episcopal conferences. To do so would risk harm to the unity of the Catholic Church, the understanding of her sacramental order, and the visible witness of the life of the faithful.

We spoke of the importance of pastoral attention to persons with homosexual tendencies, with special attention to families in which a person with same sex attraction is a member. The Church as the spouse of Christ patterns her behavior after the Lord Jesus whose all-embracing love is offered to every person without exception. Parents and siblings of family members with homosexual tendencies are called to love and accept these members of their family with an undivided and understanding heart. We call on the synod to affirm and propose anew the entirety of Church teaching on love and chastity. We encourage parents and family members to have confidence in it as they love and accompany one another in responding to the Gospel's call to chaste living.

Finally, we addressed the procreation and upbringing of children, affirming the rich teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, especially its affirmation that the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marital act are inseparable. Authentic pastoral accompaniment of couples proclaims this truth and also helps couples see that a well-formed conscience embraces the moral law not as an external restraint but, in grace, as a way of freedom. A pastoral approach is required that seeks to help spouses accept the full truth about marital love in ways that are comprehensible and inviting.

Our discussion on certain issues surfaced strong feelings and sentiments. The participants of the group hope that the final document will unify and not divide, giving expression that we are bishops *cum and sub Petro*.

With joy, we affirm the mission of the family – a mission to one another, to the Church, and to the world.

[01785-EN.01] [Original text: English]

Relatio – Circulus Anglicus "B"

Moderator: Card. NICHOLS Vincent Gerard

Relator: S.E. Mons. MARTIN Diarmuid

The group asked that the final document be entitled: "The *Final Relatio* of the Synod of Bishops on the Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World presented to His Holiness Pope Francis."

The group stressed that the family is not just the object of evangelization but an active subject, agent, and source of evangelization. The family carries out the work of evangelization within the family cell itself, through the self-giving love of the spouses, through the education to unselfish affectivity of children, and being a transforming leaven in society. The actual living out of family communion is a form of missionary proclamation. The mission and witness of evangelization finds its roots in the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

The group stressed the role of families in associations, family movements, small Christian communities, and in the parish.

Within this internal family communion the group wished to add a new paragraph on "Marriage, an Expression of the Goodness of the Gift of Sexuality". In sexual loving the married couples experience God's tenderness. The Church's teaching on sexuality – including the meaning of chastity – must stress the beauty, joy, and richness of human sexuality and the place of sexual love in a committed, exclusive, and permanent relationship. The rich Christian vision of sexuality is in many places being undermined by a narrower and impoverished understanding.

The group stressed the importance of marriage preparation not just in the period before the marriage ceremony. It was suggested that the traditional distinctions *remote*, *proximate*, and *immediate* be recovered in reflection on all forms of vocation.

Families themselves are the first heralds of the Gospel. In the family spouses exercise the common priesthood of all believers. The formation in faith of children from the youngest age is remote preparation for mature adult discipleship.

Youth ministry, parish and school catechesis, retreats, and small Christian communities should focus on young adults and reflect on how God is calling them whether within marriage, single life, priesthood, or consecrated life. Such a long-term catechesis would stress marriage as an itinerary of faith.

The immediate preparation of the couple for the celebration of marriage should include catechesis on marriage as sacrament and a vocation, on prayer, and on an invitation to those who have been lax in their faith to return. In some areas it was noted that most couples who present themselves for marriage preparation may have been living together for

long periods. In other areas traditions and cultures include longer, structural preparation with the active involvement of both families.

The group affirmed the essential role of priests, as apostles to the family, in preparing couples for the sacrament of marriage and in continuing to accompany couples and families to live out their vocations. The group proposed a new paragraph on the formation of priests for this ministry.

The group looked in detail at the challenge of the pastoral accompaniment of families in difficult marital situations. Pastoral accompaniment today must always be marked by the Divine Pedagogy and mercy. Care should be taken to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth. Attention should be given, for example, to find those aspects of relationships established by civil marriage, traditional marriage, and with obvious differences co-habitation, which might then lead to growth towards a full celebration of sacramental marriage with the completion it brings.

On the pastoral care of the divorced and remarried, the group looked at what an appropriate pastoral accompaniment of such couples should be. Such accompaniment must examine the situation of their marital condition, and also explore what it means to say that they are not excluded from the life of the Church.

The group proposed a pathway of discernment or 'reverential listening', attentive to the story of those who seek understanding and support. The first purpose of this attentive accompaniment would be to foster deeper discipleship with Christ based on the enduring bond of baptism, rather than addressing the question of admission to the sacraments of penance and Holy Communion.

This process of reverential listening would require an agreed framework with some clear elements. These elements might include:

1. attending to the story of the first marriage, to its possible invalidity, seeing either if there is any reason for deeper investigation in the external forum, or if there are reasons for further examination in the internal forum, with recourse to a delegate of the bishop where one is established for this purpose
2. attending to the wounds caused by the divorce, in the individuals, in their children, families and communities, including the community of the Church and the ways in which the responsibilities of the first marriage are being honored;
3. attending to an account of the second marriage, its stability, fruitfulness and the responsibilities which flow from it;
4. a focus on spiritual formation and spiritual growth, with an exploration of the impact of these events on the relationship with Christ; on the sense of repentance expressed for hurt and sin; on the current relationship with Christ, and with the parish community; on the continuing formation of conscience and the development of a more mature judgement of conscience on the present situation.

On the theme of spiritual communion, the group noted it is possible that persons, whose objective state of life – an irregular union – puts them in contradiction with the full meaning of the Eucharist, may not be subjectively culpable of any continuing state of sin. They may thereby rightly have a loving desire for Eucharistic union with Christ. While their objective state may prevent them from receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, they may properly develop the practice of Spiritual Communion, and thereby become more open to the saving grace of Jesus Christ and union in the Church.

On the subject of the admission of divorced and remarried to the sacraments, the group would request that the Holy Father, taking into account the rich material which has emerged during this synodal process, consider establishing during the Jubilee Year of Mercy a Special Commission to study in depth the ways in which the disciplines of the Church which flow from the indissolubility of marriage apply to the situation of people in irregular unions, including situations arising from the practice of polygamy.

[01786-EN.01] [Original text: English]

Relatio – Circulus Anglicus "C"

Moderator: S.E. Mons. MARTIN Eamon

Relator: S.E. Mons. COLERIDGE Mark Benedict

With a mixture of good tactics and tenacity, the group has made its way through Part III of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Again it was clear how our very different cultural backgrounds shaped much of what we had to say. That was part of the challenge and richness of our work.

One thing that struck us in Part III was that so much attention is paid to families in trouble that there is not enough focus on the need to support all families. This seemed to us especially true of Chapter 3 on "The Family and Accompaniment by the Church" where little is said of walking with families who persevere in the ups and downs of everyday life, especially perhaps those in the early years of marriage. We felt there may be a need to provide a new chapter speaking of this, or at least to split Chapter 3 into two parts, the first stressing the need to accompany all families and the second focusing on the particular needs of families in difficulty. Our sense was that the final document should stress that all families, troubled or not, need to be accompanied in an ongoing way. It also needed to make the point that families should minister to families, especially to those in difficulty. We were conscious that families ministering to families is at the heart of the mission of the family.

Paragraph 106 speaks of "the urgent need to embark on a new pastoral course"; and we were keen to identify - and have the Synod identify - concrete elements of such a new pastoral course, always keeping in mind the primacy of God's grace. We spent considerable time in sharing experiences from our own countries, and then moved to consider the question of what new we might do in the future. This is a challenge to our pastoral imagination. One clear element is a new dialogue with the new discernment this implies. Such a dialogue needs to be an evangelising exchange, even a call to conversion; but it has to begin with an attentive listening, in the attempt to identify and work from shared values. It is important to find common ground so that we can journey on together.

This presumes the language of journey which is a striking feature of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Such language recognises the cultural shift from static to dynamic language in thinking and speaking of marriage and the family. The *Instrumentum Laboris* recognises this, and the final document might consider the practical implications of this recognition.

We discussed the question of marriage preparation, which we agreed needs to be more comprehensive and concerted, especially in cultural contexts where there is a kind of counter-preparation for Christian marriage. Married couples again need to take the lead in this, and to see it as a genuine process of discernment rather than last-minute input on practical matters.

On the question of responsible parenthood, the discussion focused on the need for a pastoral approach which both promotes the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* and deals with the reality of people's lives, providing ongoing formation of conscience which looks to a harmony between Church doctrine and personal decision

We considered the special needs of families in irregular or difficult situations. We agreed that those cohabiting are in a quite different situation from those who are divorced and civilly remarried. We also agreed that cohabitation, though very widespread in many cultures now, could not be considered a good in itself. We were prepared to recognise that there may be good in the relationship of those cohabiting rather than in cohabitation in some quasi-institutional sense.

With regard to those divorced and civilly remarried, we agreed that relationships of many kinds come under this heading. There was general agreement that we needed to provide more effective pastoral accompaniment for these couples, and especially perhaps for their children who also have rights. There was, however, little enthusiasm for what the *Instrumentum Laboris* calls "a penitential path". On the question of whether there should be further study of the question to see if the Church could move in this direction, the vote was evenly divided. In the end we voted to replace paragraphs 122-125 with an affirmation of the Church's current discipline and recommended the forms of participation mentioned in *Familiaris Consortio*, 84.

The group was also divided on the question of support for families with homosexual members and for homosexual people themselves. Some wanted to delete any reference to homosexuality, but this won little support in the group. We opted for a briefer treatment, but also asked that the final document include at an appropriate point a clear statement of Church teaching that same-sex unions are in no way equivalent to marriage. We were clear, however, that in this Synod we were not addressing homosexuality in general but within the context of the family. We were equally insistent that we address this issue as pastors, seeking to understand the reality of people's lives rather than issues in some more abstract sense.

Another important point in our discussion concerned mixed marriages and disparity of cult. We thought that because these are so different and require such different approaches it would be better if they were dealt with in two separate paragraphs. Some were keen to stress that mixed marriages, while they present challenges, also present great opportunities; and in general we felt that there was need to speak more positively about both mixed marriages and disparity of cult. Disparity of cult can present great challenges in some situations - more so with some religions than others - but such marriages can also be a prime locus of an interreligious dialogue which has its feet on the ground. That is a value in itself. We proposed that the Synod recommend that a special rite for the celebration of interreligious marriages be devised.

It was also pointed out by some in the group is that, though the poor had been much mentioned in Parts I and II of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, they virtually disappear from Part III. Yet a key element in the mission of the family in the world of today is surely the mission to the poor, whose marital and family life is often seriously undermined by the economic and political factors which create the poverty of which they are victim. The Church as a whole and Catholic families in particular need to have a special concern for the families most stricken by injustice.

Our work on Part III has been slow enough - in part because, under the heading of "The Mission of the Family", there are many themes of such weight and complexity. In addressing the theme of the family, we have in fact addressed a range of the most pressing and perplexing issues facing the Church and the world today. In two and a half weeks, we have come a long way, but in the few days that remain to us there is still a long way to go.
Procedamus in pace.

[01787-EN.01] [Original text: English]

Relatio – Circulus Anglicus "D"

Moderator: Card. COLLINS Thomas Christopher

Relator: S.E. Mons. CHAPUT, O.F.M. Cap. Charles Joseph

Members of English circle D again stressed the need to support the many families that already live the Catholic understanding of marriage and family life joyfully.

Members of our group revisited the importance of the Church acknowledging the role of women and mothers and men and fathers. Our ecumenical representative felt the document should address the whole Christian community and not simply the Catholic Church. Much discussion took place about the importance of funerals in the lives of families. Members felt this matter deserves far more attention, along with the role of the family in situations of illness and death.

Members felt that when the document talks about the Word of God, it needs to more fully convey the meaning of that term in the tradition of the Church. The Word of God refers to Jesus personally, to the written word of Scriptures, but also to the word proclaimed in the community.

Bishops said that the text paid inadequate attention to chastity formation. This work should begin very early in life and should not be delayed until marriage preparation. The danger of government authorities doing sex education caused great concern for many group members.

Regarding the formation of future priests, mention was made that the text lacks any focus on the Eastern tradition of married clergy. Reflections on that should also be included.

On the formation of Christians in the virtue of chastity, members noted a natural sequence:

First, formation in chastity within the family provides a needed foundation for later life;

Next, formation in chastity for those preparing for marriage builds on that earlier foundation,

Finally, formation in chastity for married men and women continues couples' growth in the Christian life and sets the stage for the next generation.

In addition:

Formation in chastity for those preparing to be priests is key to their own vocation, and vital to their ability to help those they serve.

Group members insisted that the main educators of the laity in terms of marriage preparation should be married couples themselves because of their experience and credibility. Priests obviously have a key role as well, but married couples and families should take the lead.

Members discussed the place of priests in marriage counseling. Some strongly supported priests doing what they can to heal troubled marriages because the priest is often the most trusted and educated person available, and people are unable to afford professional counselors. The Church needs to be prudent, but not so prudent that she avoids helping people in great need.

The group had a long exchange on pastoral approaches to divorced people who had not remarried, and also divorced people who have married again without an annulment. Members voiced significant concern that whatever is done should not lead to greater confusion among our people. One bishop said that the issue of admitting divorced and remarried persons without an annulment to Communion was such a vital matter of doctrinal substance that it could only be handled at an ecumenical council and not at a synod.

One of the synod fathers stressed the importance of using appropriate language. Instead of referring to people in difficult situations as being "excluded" from the Eucharist, we should say that they "abstain" from the Eucharist. That word is more accurate and not as negative. One father mentioned that bishops cannot be more merciful than Jesus's words. The Lord is not bound by Church rules, but the Church is very much bound by the words of Jesus.

Some thought that the current text lacks an understanding of the Eucharistic foundation of Christian marriage, which says we cannot reduce marriage to a sexual relationship. Likewise, we can't reduce life in the Church to receiving Communion. In the history of the Church huge segments of the faithful did not receive Holy Communion and yet were clearly considered members of the Church, beginning with the Catechumens. For those who are on a penitential path, they are not excluded from the Church even though they abstain from Communion. Other fathers thought that the number of people who are divorced or remarried without an annulment has grown in such a big way that we need to deal with this question in a new and different manner.

Members spent quite a bit of time talking about the beauty and comprehensiveness of No. 84 of *Familiaris Consortio*. Some suggested that FC 84 ought to be put directly into the text. One father spoke about the power of the keys and the Holy Father's ability to change things. He said that the Pope can, in effect, twist the hands of God. Others responded that the power of the keys does not give the Church the ability to change Revelation and the faith of the Church.

One member of the group felt that the Church has forgotten Jesus in all this discussion and that the bishops and many laypeople may be perceived as Pharisees. There was a call for a commission to study the issue of Communion for the divorced and remarried over a longer period of time with greater theological precision.

There was a suggestion that the Church ought to study the notion of spiritual communion more thoroughly. Just as Protestant communities participate in the reality of the Church, those who don't receive Holy Communion can take part in the reality of the Eucharist.

Members spent some time talking about mixed marriages and marriages of disparate cult. The practice of the Orthodox Church also featured in the discussion. Some saw this as a

good pastoral path for the Roman Church. Others felt there was little clarity in the Orthodox approach because several different practices among the Orthodox actually exist.

The section on the pastoral care of persons with homosexual tendencies sparked much discussion. Some members thought that this issue should be removed from discussion in the Synod on the Family. They felt that it's important enough to have a specific synodal meeting on the topic itself. Some suggested that the wording of the Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 2357-2359 should be used. Others saw that option as possibly damaging the credibility of the Church in Western Europe and North America.

In the section on the transmission of life and the challenges of a declining birthrate, members offered both positive and negative comments. Most members felt that No. 137 should be removed from the text or completely rewritten, because the way one forms one's conscience is handled poorly in the current document.

In the section on adoption, some discussion ensued about the right of a child to have both a mother and a father. Members noted the difficulty of some Churches in the western world continuing to offer adoption services in the face of government pressure to support adoption by same-sex couples.

Members said the text doesn't speak clearly enough about palliative care, and the responsibility of the Church to help families in times of illness and when dealing with the confusion around modern medical/moral problems.

Considerable discussion took place about what is missing from the text in general. Among the items mentioned were:

- 1. The place of Catholic schools.*
- 2. Mary, the mother of Jesus, should have greater mention and more significance.*
- 3. Nothing in the text expresses gratitude to consecrated women who care for the sick and the elderly.*
- 5. Not enough attention is paid to the role of single parents and ways to support them.*
- 6. Not enough positive discussion takes place about the value of the extended family.*
- 7. No mention is made of the role of godparents.*
- 8. No clarity is offered on the roles of mother and father.*
- 9. Many thousands of people help parents educate their children, but religious teachers aren't mentioned, and even babysitters should get at least some brief attention because they can be very helpful to parents who need to work outside the home.*
- 10. The text avoids dealing with the issue of sexual abuse and incest within families.*
- 11. No significant emphasis is placed on the importance of family prayer, meditation and popular religiosity.*

12. Something positive should be said about migrants who leave their home countries in order to send back money to support their families.

13. Finally, some members felt that something in the document should be said about the importance of praying for our deceased family members and the significance of those family members praying for us in the Communion of Saints.

[01788-EN.01] [Original text: English]