

**Gabinete do
Arcebispo Primaz**

DISCURSO

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Amoris Laetitia

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Criteria for running the Archdiocesan Service for Reception and Support to the Family

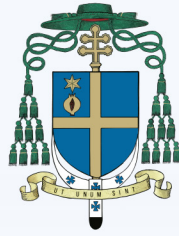
1. Prepare the bride and groom for marriage, accompany the couple in the first years of marriage and discern to help integrate the most fragile families is an urgent task of the Church at a time particularly demanding for the lives of the families. Welcoming the message of the Apostolic Exhortation, this document invites Christian, pastoral, religious and lay communities to take this mission as a priority. In such way, Pope's recommendation will be followed: "Priests have the duty to accompany [the divorced and remarried] in helping them to understand their situation according to the teaching of the Church and the guidelines of the bishop" (AL 300). Above all, let us remember that "the Christian proclamation on the family is good news indeed" (AL 1) hoping that "everyone (...) will feel called to love and cherish family life, for families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity" (AL 7) to the world! (*Building the House upon the Rock*, 38).

– *"I encourage the faithful who find themselves in complicated situations to speak confidently with their pastors or with other lay people whose lives are committed to the Lord (...). I also encourage the Church's pastors to listen to them with sensitivity and serenity, with a sincere desire to understand their plight and their point of view, in order to help them live better lives and to recognize their proper place in the Church" (AL 312).*

2. It's important being able to transmit this pastoral way to the communities. The priests, in the community, should announce the possibility of initiating processes of discernment for the people who live in so-called "irregular" situations. With this announcement, some can start this process and the community will understand that it isn't a matter of facilitation or an easy solution, but living Gospel.

The first aid to offer to catholic divorced people living in a new union is the providing of information and counseling service to inquire about the existence of any ground that could introduce the cause of matrimonial nullity in the Ecclesiastical Court. We want to speed up access to the Court by eliminating, among other things, the idea that it is a very long and expensive process.

To those who cannot obtain the declaration of nullity but want to live the Christian faith in a good relationship with God and the Church, it's proposed a "path of responsible personal and pastoral discernment" (AL 300), with the aim of greater integration (accompanying, discerning and integrating weakness).



3. We believe in the methodology's soundness proposed by Pope Francis: to accompany, discern and to integrate. This means that couples have to be ready, for example, to accept that there are no pre-conceived answers or previously defined goals. If this were not the case, there would be nothing to discern. The couple of "remarried divorcees" and the spiritual director must accept that it isn't a process to guarantee access to the sacraments, but rather a spiritual way to seek God's will.

After several steps and a course of a few months, it will ultimately be up to the couple to take the decision before God. The spiritual director is responsible for monitoring the process and ensure that it runs with complete normality. As Pope Francisco says, "we are called to form consciences, not to replace them" (AL 37).

It's not a matter of granting a general "authorization" to access the sacraments, but of a process of personal discernment, of the internal forum, accompanied by a pastor with regular meetings. This priest will help in the process of discernment in the light of the Church's teaching.

This pastoral accompaniment requires a fraternal welcome from the priest. Requires attentively listening and showing the maternal face of the Church. In this path of discernment, the priest must also stimulate or renew the couple's personal encounter with living Jesus Christ.

If it is an itinerary, the process can be long. When discernment happens (from according to the methodology described in the attachment) it is likely to culminate in access to the sacraments (reconciliation and communion), but may also be directed towards other forms of greater integration in Church's life: greater presence in the community, participation in groups of prayer or reflection, commitment in the different ecclesial services (AL 299). At the end of the discernment, the members of the couple may be considered suitable to be godparents.

In short, in this ministry of discernment, we must avoid falling into two extremes: severity and laxity.

– *"We are called to move from a pastoral of perfection to a pastoral of conversion: the goal, the doctrine, it continues the same, but it's evident the need to follow towards the goal and not sit on the goal to point the finger at who is making the way. It's the style of our communities, not the content of the message, which should show greater commitment to the Gospel"* (D. Erio Castellucci, *È il Signore che costruisce la casa*).

This itinerary of discernment, made of prayer, revision of life and openness to God's will, has a purpose: to value the importance of personal conscience in the lives of Christians and the Church. At the discernment, the pastors' task is not to "substitute people's consciences" (AL 37) or to offer "easy recipes" (AL 298), but to patiently illuminate and form their consciences, so that they can make a sincere decision before God, while doing the best they can.

† Jorge Ortiga, *Arcebispo Primaz*