



Domestic abuse and violence in *Amoris Laetitia* & implications for addressing DV in sacrament prep and catechesis

By Lauri Przybysz, D.Min. and Bethany Meola, MTS

Introductions

- Lauri
 - Education Director, Catholics For Family Peace Research Initiative
 - President-elect, National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers
- Bethany
 - Assistant director, USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth
 - MTS from Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family

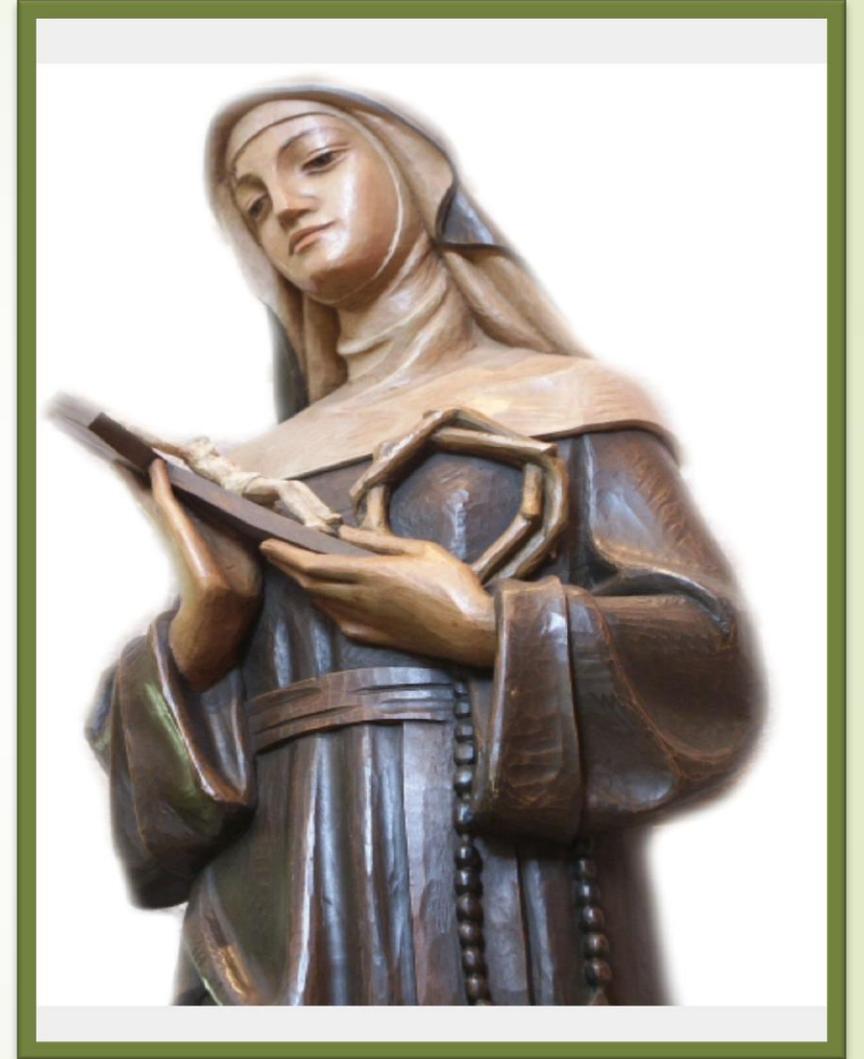
Overview of talk

- ▶ Part 1: Main points in *Amoris Laetitia* re: domestic violence and abuse
- ▶ Part 2: Addressing domestic violence in sacramental prep and catechesis
- ▶ Q&A: Thoughts on *Amoris Laetitia*, experiences in addressing DV

St. Rita, Pray for us.

Inspire us to reach out to those who suffer physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.

Pray for us, that we may discover ways to help restore the spiritual well-being of our families, our friends and our community.



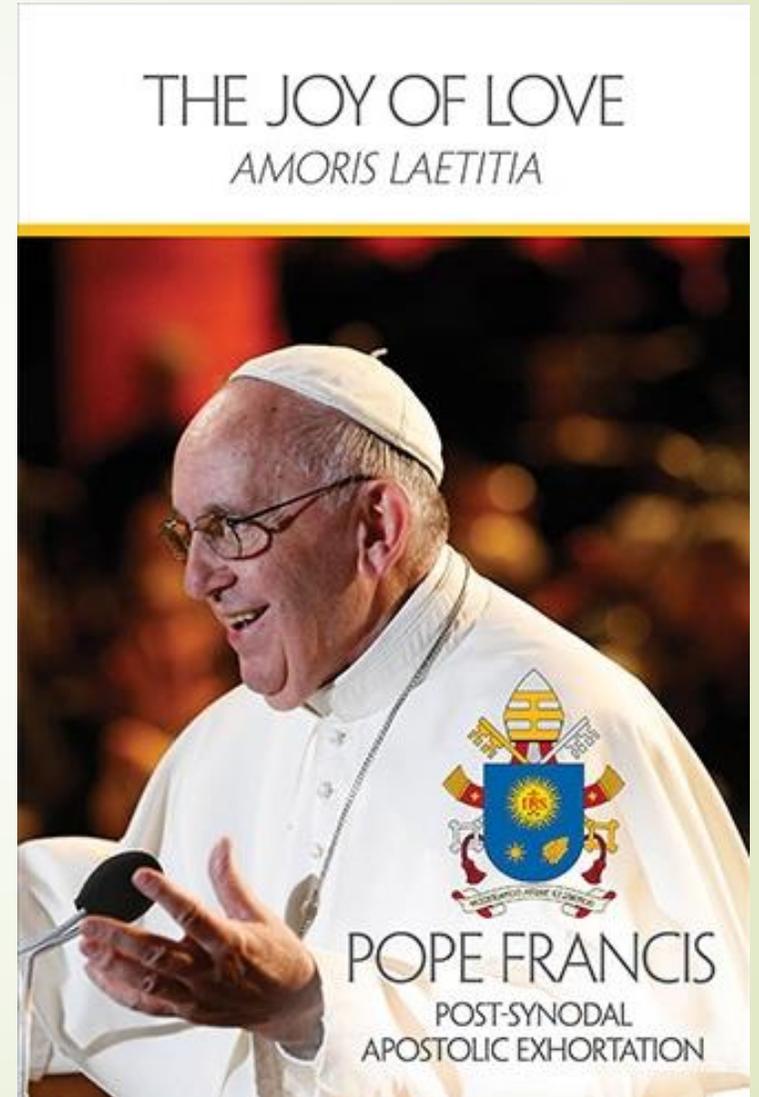
Amoris Laetitia: Background

- October 2013: Pope Francis calls for synod process on the family
- October 2014: Extraordinary Synod
 - “Pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization”
- October 2015: Ordinary Synod
 - “The vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world”
- Consultation → Working Document → Synod → Final Report



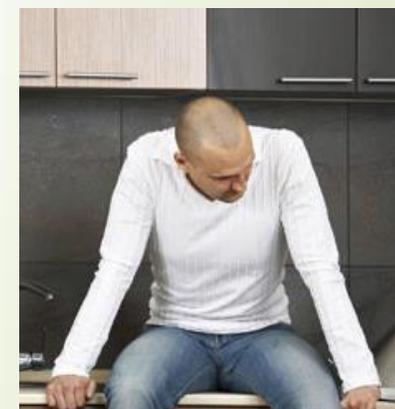
Amoris Laetitia: Background

- ▶ April 8, 2016: Release of *Amoris Laetitia*, “The Joy of Love”
- ▶ Communicates the mind of the pope and exhorts the faithful
- ▶ Pope Francis’s “love letter to families” (Abp. Kurtz)
- ▶ Many topics; 325 sections; 180 pages
- ▶ Meant to be read “patiently and carefully” (no. 7)



5 Main Points in *Amoris Laetitia* re: DV

- 1. Violence in families exists
- 2. There are various forms of violence
- 3. Insights into why violence happens
- 4. The effects of violence on the family and society
- 5. How the Church and people can help



1) Violence in families exists

- ▶ Must be attentive to “the actual situation of families” (no. 6)
- ▶ “Lights and shadows,” avoiding stereotypes (nos. 32, 57)
- ▶ Domestic violence is a serious challenge facing families, including families in our Church community

“Unacceptable customs still need to be eliminated. I think particularly of the shameful ill-treatment to which women are sometimes subjected, domestic violence and various forms of enslavement...” (no. 54).

#2) There are various forms of violence

- “When I Call”: physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, economic
- *Amoris Laetitia*: “verbal, physical, sexual” (no. 54), emotional/control, abuse of children

“Within marriage itself, sex can become a source of suffering and manipulation.” (no. 154)

“The sexual abuse of children is all the more scandalous when it occurs in places where they ought to be the most safe, particularly in families...” (no. 45)

#3) Insights into causes of violence

- Throwaway culture
 - “Everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away...” (no. 39)
- Domination
 - “The relationship of love and purity between man and woman turns into domination.” (no. 19)
- The inability to control anger
 - “It is one thing to sense a sudden surge of hostility and another to give into it, letting it take root in our hearts...” (no. 104)
- A warped understanding of sexuality
 - “In our own day, sexuality risks being poisoned by the mentality of ‘use and discard’.” (no. 153)

#4) The effects of violence on family and society

- ▶ Domestic violence can lead to separation, which in some cases is “morally necessary” for safety (no. 241)
 - ▶ Empathy for people forced to leave their common life because of abuse
- ▶ Single parents who left maltreatment face economic hardship, etc.
- ▶ Violence in the home has an effect on violence in society

“Violence within families...is a breeding-ground of resentment and hatred.” (no. 51)

#5) Ways the Church and people can help

- Lay leaders need good training
- Parishes, schools, movements and other Church institutions need to be able to provide services for families experiencing domestic violence
- Parish offices need to deal sensitively with needs and refer when necessary

“Good pastoral training [for lay leaders] is important especially in light of particular emergency situations arising from cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse.” (no. 204)

The Joy of Love means healthy relationships

- ▶ Beginning at an early age to prevent domestic violence – through catechesis
- ▶ The Gospel message is a powerful preventative lesson.
- ▶ Begin early to gradually change mindsets and cultural beliefs.

- ▶ Children will learn about relationships from someone.
- ▶ With their parents, let's be their teachers.

Youth Formation for Virtue Shapes Adults who are not abusive

- Education for authentic love
- Respect for human dignity in oneself and in others
- Skills for resolving conflict peacefully
- The practice of modesty in behavior, dress, and speech
- Respect for one's own body and for others as temples of the Holy Spirit
- Assistance in acquiring self-mastery and self-control
 - Catechetical Formation for Chaste Living, p. 8

Faith Themes to Reinforce in Every Grade ... and into Adulthood

- ▶ We are created in God's image to love and be loved.
- ▶ Jesus affirms human life by becoming human.
- ▶ We are members of the body of Christ
- ▶ We are responsible to one another
- ▶ All are called to holiness and wholeness

What direction does the Church give Catechists on this Topic?

- ▶ Catechetical Formation for Chaste Living gives curriculum guidelines.
 - ▶ Provide education about violence and abuse within the context of a holistic catechesis in Christian living.
 - ▶ Including the dignity of the human person, the equality of male and female, the virtues, the role of grace, the meaning of sin.

An Integral and Required Part of Children's Catechesis

- 2011 Charter for Protection of Children requires safety lessons.
 - Not a one-time safety lecture.
 - Offered over a significant period of time.
 - Integrated into the faith themes of the religion curriculum.

Catechists share the Good News of Human and Divine Love

- Present skills and virtues for Catholic family living.
- Place sexuality and relationships between men and women within the context of Catholic family moral living.
- Help families address the complex issues of contemporary life.
- Offer safety education for children and their parents or guardians.
- Hopefully, children will carry with this knowledge into adulthood.

Parents need community support

- Many parents are reluctant to speak with their children and teens about domestic violence prevention and healthy sexual relationships
- They feel they do not know where to begin, or what to say first.
- Church or school can help parents communicate with more confidence.

Goals for Catechesis for Healthy Relationships

- Moral catechesis
- Skills and knowledge for family life
- Understanding of their personal development
- Respect for life - self and others
- A positive, Catholic understanding of marriage and sexuality
- Skills to relate to others in society

How Teachers, Catechists can make a difference

- Give witness to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.
- Make a commitment to express Church teachings clearly and accurately.
- Respect parents' role and be willing to assist them in fulfilling this role.
- Know their students well and be sensitive to home situations.
- Help students to understand the blessing found in all families.
- Model and teach values and attitudes regarding sexuality and boundaries in their every day work with children.

Teach Gospel messages that lead to healthy relationships

- Believe that the body is a gift from God
- Encourage young boys to be nurturing and young girls to be strong.
- Welcome children's and teen's questions responsibly.
- Encourage them to talk with their parent.
- Identify and report concerns about possible abuse.
- Catechists and teachers are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect.

Provide Moral Catechesis about How to Treat Others

- ▶ teaches young people to express their feelings appropriately
- ▶ reduces guilt feelings among children
- ▶ encourages them to speak freely and frequently with their parents and other trusted adults.

Safety messages for all grades will include:

- Respect for the body
- Privacy -- Each person has the right to refuse unwanted touches.
- Expressing Feelings appropriately.
- Asking for Help
- Identifying Trustworthy Adults
- Reducing shame and self-blame

We must be clear when we teach about

- ▶ Forgiveness
- ▶ Obedience
- ▶ Keeping Promises

Abusers often misuse Church teaching for their own ends.

Adults will listen to Catechesis in times of transition and emotion

- Marriage Preparation
- Becoming a Catholic
- Parenting milestones
 - Baptism
 - First Communion and First Confession
 - Confirmation / the Teen Years

Catechists for Adults need to

- ▶ Be well informed about what the Church teaches about domestic violence and family life.
- ▶ Clearly teach that the Church opposes
 - ▶ domination of others
 - ▶ disrespectful language
 - ▶ shaming or blaming victims.

Be aware that survivors and abusers are in the room

- ▶ Survivors often grapple with spiritual issues related to
 - ▶ the abuse
 - ▶ their role in the relationship
 - ▶ the importance of forgiveness
 - ▶ the meaning of suffering
 - ▶ their relationship with God.
- ▶ Abusers may respond in positive or negative ways.
 - ▶ The love of God must be communicated to them also
 - ▶ Provide resources for help for abusers

Parishes must provide signals about how to get help

- ▶ Pamphlet racks
- ▶ Restroom signs
- ▶ Prayers for family peace and for victims of abuse at Mass and meetings
- ▶ Educate all parishioners – they are often first responders.

Marriage Preparation – a golden opportunity for catechesis for peace

- Emphasize human dignity of men and women
- Mutual respect between spouses
- Explain the difference between normal conflict and domestic violence
- Teach skills for peaceful communication
- Include information on how to get help

While teaching the meaning of Christian Marriage, also teach that...

- Marriage is a partnership of equals, not a license to abuse.
- No one is morally obligated to endure domestic violence.
- The Church encourages separation in violent or otherwise unsafe situations.
- We urge counseling and prayer, but put safety first.

When teaching Communication skills for marriage...

- ▶ discourage the use of disparaging humor about men or women
- ▶ Speak plainly about the harmfulness of negative jokes and “playful” comments, pushing and hitting
- ▶ Use a discussion inventory, like FOCCUS or PREPARE ENRICH
- ▶ Encourage setting aside judgment, criticism, or any harshness

Key topics for Spiritual Growth for Adults, not just for marriage prep

- Understanding the families from which we came
- Exploring how I will use my gifts for good
- How to be a friend
- Identifying where I need to change and grow
- Communicating clearly and effectively

Attitudes for Successful Marriages...and all relationships

- Caring and appreciation of the other
- Being able to see the other person's point of view
- Treating others with respect even when he or she is seemingly unlovable
- This is the way God treats us.

Questions, Answers, Discussion

- What did you think about what Pope Francis said re: domestic violence in *Amoris Laetitia*?
- What are your experiences in talking about domestic violence and related issues in catechesis and sacramental preparation classes?

Conclusion



“Holy Family of Nazareth, may families never again experience violence, rejection and division; may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing.” – Pope Francis

