



Office of the Bishop

DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN

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Dear faithful,

In December, Pope Francis proclaimed a year of Saint Joseph (December 8, 2020-December 8, 2021). Shortly thereafter, he announced that on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph (March 19, 2021) another special year will be inaugurated – the Year *Amoris Laetitia* Family. It will conclude June 26, 2022, on the X World Meeting of Families in Rome with the Holy Father. March 19, 2021 marks the five-year anniversary of the publication of the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on the beauty and joy of love in the family. “The family deserves a year of celebrations, so that it can be placed at the center of commitment and care from every pastoral and ecclesial reality.” (www.amorislaetitia.va)

In this year where families have suffered so much – loss of income, isolation, increased mental illness, uncertainty – Pope Francis sends a strong message that the family must be strengthened, preserved, and protected in order to face the challenges ahead. The Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life notes that “the pandemic experience has highlighted the central role of the family as the domestic Church and has shown the importance of community ties between families.” The surest way forward is to help build strong families that are focused on Jesus.

“The mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in light of the Father’s infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 59) The family is called to help build up a civilization of love in our society today by being an icon of the Most Holy Trinity. In our so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life. Let us not forget that the Lord is with us in our families. He shares our joys, concerns, grief, disappointments, hopes and successes. This is a time for every family to grow deeper in their love for God and one another.

While the pandemic has created significant challenges for families, it is also a time for the domestic Church to shine. Pandemic restrictions often mean families are spending more time at home, and this can be used wisely to nurture our relationships with each other and with Jesus. To that end the dicastery has created resources to help dioceses, parishes, ecclesial movements, and families by encouraging deeper reflection on *Amoris Laetitia*. Available in PDF form on our website at <https://dioceseofsaintjohn.org/amoris-laetitia-family-year>, or via the CCCB’s Office for Family and Life (<https://www.cccb.ca/faith-moral-issues/family-and-life/>) or www.amorislaetitia.va, these will help families to apply its rich teachings through:

- Leader forums for implementing *Amoris Laetitia*
- Videos of Pope Francis explaining each chapter of the apostolic exhortation
- #iamchurch video series on the faith and ecclesial involvement of persons with disabilities
- “Walking with families” – 12 concrete pastoral proposals for journeying with families
- Information on the X World Meeting of Families and Grandparents and the Elderly Day

Together with their children, parents form the domestic Church, since “the parents by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith [or the first evangelizers] with regard to their children.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11) The “Gospel of the Family”, which has been ceaselessly taught from the beginning as God’s revelation and divine plan for his people, can be a strong antidote for the individualism and indifference we are witnessing in our society. The *Lineamenta* for the Ordinary Synod on the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and contemporary world in 2014 expresses this beautifully: “The family is uniquely important to the Church and in these times, when all believers are invited to think of others rather than themselves, the family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization.” (*Lin.*, 1)

We are living in mission territory and families are called to be protagonists of the New Evangelization. The “Gospel of the Family” needs to be proclaimed clearly, truthfully, and with humility. In his address to the 4th World Meeting of Families in January 2003, Saint John Paul II encouraged families to, “proclaim joyfully to the whole world the wonderful treasure which you, as domestic churches possess! Christian couples, in your communion of life and love, in your mutual self-giving and in your generous openness to children, become, in Christ, the light of the world.”

I encourage you to dedicate yourselves fully to this year, and to give God permission to work powerfully in your families to bring about the renewal of the world. We join the Holy Father in praying: “Let us entrust this journey with the families of the whole world to the Holy Family of Nazareth, in particular to Saint Joseph, attentive spouse and father.”

United in prayer through the intercession of the Holy Family,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christian Riesbeck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Most Rev. Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John

March 15, 2021