

The Vatican Summary of the Final Document of the Synod

Final Relatio of the Synod: truth and mercy

Vatican City, 24 October 2015 (VIS) – The Synod Fathers approved by 177 votes out of 265, a two-thirds majority, the final Relatio of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on the Family, made up of 94 paragraphs, each one of which was voted on individually. The director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., gave a briefing on the document, which was authorised for publication in Italian by Pope Francis.

Fr. Lombardi remarked that the text takes into account the many difficulties faced by the family, but also its great capacity for facing and reacting to them. The conclusive document of the Synod includes many of the amendments to the Instrumentum Laboris presented by the Synod Fathers and therefore reflects the voice of the Assembly.

With reference to the two paragraphs dedicated to complex family situations, which were approved by a very slender majority of 178 and 180 votes, Fr. Lombardi noted that they regard the pastoral approach to wounded families or those that are irregular from a canonical point of view and in terms of the discipline of the Church: in particular, cohabitation, civil marriage, divorced and remarried persons and the way of pastorally addressing these situations.

Fr. Lombardi underlined that the tone of the document is positive and welcoming, and that it has greatly enriched the Instrumentum Laboris. Similarly, the Pope's Motu Proprio on the reform of marriage annulment procedures made an effective and decisive contribution to the theme of the Synod.

The final Relatio reaffirms the doctrine of the indissolubility of sacramental marriage, which is not a yoke but rather a gift from God, a truth based in Christ and in His relationship with the Church. At the same time, it underlines that truth and mercy converge in Christ, which leads to welcome to wounded families. Without expressly mentioning access to the Eucharist for remarried divorcees, the Synod document recalls that they are not excommunicated and refers the analysis of complex family situations to the discernment of pastors. This discernment, the text underlines, must be applied in accordance with the teaching of the Church, with trust in God's mercy that is denied to no-one. With regard to cohabiting couples, the text reiterates that this situation should be faced constructively, seeking to transform it into an opportunity for a path to conversion towards the fullness of marriage and family, in the light of the Gospel.

Other salient points of the document refer to homosexuality. There must be no discrimination against people with homosexual tendencies, but at the same time the text states that the Church is contrary to same-sex unions and external pressure on the Church in relation to this matter is not accepted. There are special paragraphs dedicated to immigrants, refugees and persecuted families who are often divided and whose members can become victims of

trafficking. A welcoming approach was invoked for them too, recalling their rights and also their duties in their host countries.

There are specific paragraphs on women, men and children, the mainstays of family life: the text emphasises the need for the protection and the recognition of the value of their respective roles. It is hoped that a more prominent role will be identified for women in the formation of ordained ministers, while in relation to children mention was made of the beauty of adoption and fostering, practices which reconstruct ruptured family bonds. The Synod does not forget widows and widowers, the disabled, the elderly and grandparents, who enable the transmission of faith in the family and must be protected from the throwaway culture. Unmarried people must also be acknowledged for their commitment to the Church and society.

Among the “shadows” that are frequently cast on the family, the Synod notes the presence of political and religious fanaticism hostile to Christianity, growing individualism, gender ideology, conflicts, persecution, poverty, precarious employment, corruption, economic difficulties that can exclude families from education and culture, the globalisation of indifference in which humanity's place at the centre of society is usurped by money, pornography, and the declining birth rate.

The Relation therefore gathers together suggestions for strengthening preparation for marriage, especially for the young who appear intimidated by it. They are in need, says the Synod, of an adequate emotional formation, following the virtues of chastity and self-giving. In this regard, mention was made of the bond between the sexual act and procreation between spouses, of which children are the most precious fruit, since they bear the memory and hope of an act of love. Another bond is that between the vocation of the family and the vocation to consecrated life. Education in sexuality and corporeality and the promotion of responsible parenting would also be central, in accordance with the teachings of Paul VI's encyclical “*Humanae Vitae*” and the primary role of parents in the education of their children in faith.

An appeal is launched to institutions to promote an support policies in favour of the family, and Catholics engaged in politics are exhorted to protect the family and life, as a society that neglects them loses its openness to the future. In this respect, the Synod reaffirms the sacredness of life from conception to natural death, and warns against the grave threats posed to the family by abortion and euthanasia. Further paragraphs are dedicated to mixed marriages, whose positive aspects in relation to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are underlined, while confirming the need to protect religious freedom and the right to conscientious objection in society.

The text includes extensive reflection on the need to modify the language of the Church, making it more meaningful so that the proclamation of the Gospel of the family may truly respond to the deepest human aspirations. This means not only presenting a series of regulations but rather announcing the grace that gives the capacity to live well the good of the family.

Finally, the Relatio emphasises the beauty of the family: as a domestic church based on marriage between a man and a woman, the fundamental cell of the society whose growth it

contributes, a safe entry to the deepest sentiments, the sole point of connection in a fragmented age, and an integral part of human ecology, it must be protected, supported and encouraged, also by the authorities.

The document concludes by a plea to the Synod Fathers by the Pope, regarding the possibility of producing a document on the family. As Fr. Lombardi explains, "The Synod Fathers do not say that all is complete, but affirm that they offer the Relatio to the Holy Father to enable him to evaluate whether to continue on this route with a document, on the basis of the Synod text, to further examine the theme of the family from the perspective he wishes to offer. 'We continue on our path'".