

**“GUARDING THE DEPOSIT OF FAITH:  
A HERMENEUTIC OF CONTINUITY IN DEFENSE OF THE FAMILY”  
EVANGELIZATION LEADERSHIP SUMMIT  
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***Introduction***

I am very pleased to join you today as we begin this Evangelization Leadership Summit. Just 2 ½ years ago, I was ordained as a Bishop. At an ordination, the first two questions the Bishop-Elect is asked are:

1. Do you resolve to proclaim the Gospel of Christ faithfully and unfailingly?
2. Do you resolve to guard the deposit of faith pure and entire according to the tradition preserved always and everywhere in the Church from the time of the Apostles?

The Gospel of Christ includes the Good News about Marriage and Family Life, and the Church’s perennial teach about the family is certainly included in the Deposit of Faith. As a Bishop I am called to guard and defend the deposit of faith, and so this morning, I would like to address you on the theme of “Guarding the Deposit of Faith: The Hermeneutic of Continuity in the Defense of the Family”, focusing principally on the teaching of the last three Popes.

As Catholics, we belong to a living Tradition of faith – a faith that is handed down from one generation to the next. In ancient times, whether in Greece or Rome, legal codes stipulated the obligations of those receiving objects or sums of money deposited by another. Administrators of religious sanctuaries were guardians of deposits. Those who left sums as inheritance for others were said to have “deposited” wealth for others.

So too, in Israel’s faith simple laws of deposit were part of the Mosaic ordinances of the Sinai covenant (Ex 22:6-12). Saint Paul, especially in the Pastoral Epistles, entrusts his teaching as a (*Para theke*) or deposit to Timothy – to be guarded against falsification, and he charges Timothy (2 Tim 2:2) to entrust what he has received to trustworthy persons who will, in turn, be able to hand on to others what they received.

Regardless of what scholars say about the authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, the idea of a “deposit of faith” is clear enough. Pastors are “depositaries” who protect the patrimony of the apostles by faithfully announcing the Gospel; by giving sound instruction; by teaching the inspired Scriptures; by regulating the life of prayer; and, by carefully selecting other ministers, while resisting heterodox doctrines. Paul certainly entrusts his teachings to others, such as the elders of the Church at Ephesus. This guarding of the deposit of faith, by Pastors (and their collaborators) occurs with the help of the Holy Spirit, who is dwelling within us.” (2 Tim 1:14; 6-7)

The deposit of faith includes not only the Scriptures but also the authentic teaching and preaching of the Apostles. Already in the second century, Saint Irenaeus defended the Apostolic faith against the Gnostics, speaking of the “rule of truth” which had been received from the Apostles. This “rule of truth” finds right expression in the churches’ catechesis, creedal statements, and even in the sacred liturgy of the Church. Irenaeus did not limit himself to the Apostles or Bishops alone; rather, he spoke of the great gain accruing to believers due to the legacy of the apostles, who “as a rich depository left in the church most copiously all that pertains to the truth, so that all who wish, may draw upon this source and drink the water of life” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.4.1).

Irenaeus adds: “The faith received from the Church we do guard and protect, but it acts continually, by the Spirit of God, like a valuable deposit in a precious vessel, to rejuvenate both itself and the very vessel that contains it.”

Others developed this idea, including St. Vincent of Lerins and St. John Henry Newman. Time does not allow me to delve into Vincent of Lerins statement: “In the Catholic Church, every care should be taken to hold fast always to what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” (Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* 2); nor does time allow me to speaking about Newman’s Development of Doctrine. What I want to emphasize is that there is a “deposit of faith”, which includes the perennial doctrine regarding marriage and family life.

The handing on of the faith is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly when the culture and its views on marriage and family life are changing so drastically. In 2007, at Aparecida, the Bishops of Latin America recognized this.

What they wrote then is just as pertinent for the Church in the United States now:

Our cultural traditions are no longer handed on from one generation to the next with the same ease as in the past. This even affects that deepest core of each culture, constituted by religious experience, which is now likewise difficult to hand on through education and the beauty of cultural expressions. It even reaches into the family itself, which, as a place of dialogue and intergenerational solidarity, had been one of the most important vehicles for handing on the faith. (V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, *Documento conclusivo*, CELAM, Aparecida 2007, n. 39.)

Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why the Vatican has proposed Catechumenal Pathways for Matrimonial Life, following the model of the OCIA, which would involve accompaniment, mentoring, catechetical formation, deeper conversion to Christ, insertion into a community, and finally, ongoing formation and mystagogy.

The three most recent Popes have all recognized the threats to both the family and, therefore, to the handing on of the faith. Each has contributed something to the Church's tradition on marriage and family life. Before I explore these, I wanted to offer this short homage to the Pope of my early childhood: Pope Saint Paul VI. My memories of him are few. He was the Pope. He wore white. He was old, and he died. I recall that we rejoiced when the Pope died, because we were still in school in August due to the terrible blizzard. The sisters let us stay home from school for the papal funeral.

Many years later, when I was in the seminary, I recall sitting next to Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln. He was telling me about Pope Paul VI, and the last time he celebrated the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. Bishop Bruskewitz, who must have been a young priest at the time, was in Rome, and he recalled Paul VI recounting the great events of his Pontificate – the Second Vatican Council, the letters *Ecclesiam Suam* and *Populorum progressio*. Finally, Pope Paul VI came to *Humanae vitae* and said (and repeated): “We did not betray the truth.”

The writings of Pope John Paul II are too vast to explore in depth, but his “Theology of the Body” is a unique attempt to help contemporary men and women appreciate the gift of human sexuality, the body, and the personalist dimensions of marriage. Pope Benedict XVI, in continuity with his predecessor, explored the theme of love in *Deus Caritas Est* and developed the theme of “human ecology” and the defense of human life as a sign of authentic development in *Caritas in Veritate*. Pope Francis highlights the importance of the family for the transmission of the faith; the need to be more welcoming – of life, of migrants, of those in difficult situations; and finally, he asks the Church to accompany families, conveying the closeness of the Merciful God to them. Each of these Popes exhort us to be grateful for the gift of human sexuality and family life and to be tireless in our defense of the gifts of God.

### ***Pope John Paul II: The Theology of the Body***

We begin with the so-called “Theology of the Body” of Saint John Paul II. The Theology of the Body refers to his catechesis on the body, the human person, and marriage, given during Wednesday audiences between September 1979 and November 1984.

In his catechesis, John Paul II has given rise not only to a renewed vision of human sexuality and marriage but also to a renewed vision of man and woman, made in the image of God, and, by implication, a renewed vision of the complete Catholic doctrine. Through the prism of marriage and conjugal love, the Pope helps us rediscover who God is, who Christ is, who the Church is, and who we ourselves are. The richness contained in the theology of the body has the potential to renew marriage, the family, and the entire life of the Church and the world.

The beginning of this important effort began with the publication of Karol Wojtyla’s *Love and Responsibility* and with his theatrical work *The Jeweler’s Shop* (1960). The fundamental preoccupation in both was to show that love cannot be reduced to emotions; rather, it should find its foundation in the human ability to grasp the religious, moral and ontological truth of the encounter and of the self-surrender of man in Christian marriage, expressed in a dynamism in which God is a participant, author, creator and redeemer. Sexuality, beyond nature and culture, is a participation in Divine Love.

The historical-cultural context of the “Theology of the Body” (or “Love in the Divine Plan”) is the crisis of modernity in which the sexual revolution sharpened the questions that created great controversies around the definition of “freedom” in the developed world. Pope Paul VI attempted to respond to the *signs of the times* with his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*; however, not too many listened. Right from the beginning of his Pontificate, John Paul II took up the task of showing the truth of human situations and institutions in light of the Gospel through the catechesis, which was given at the traditional Wednesday Audiences in Saint Peter’s Square.

He began with the great framework of the experience of the human being as being in relationship – a being ontologically-connected with the Other (God), with others (human beings), and with the other (creation). John Paul II developed his teachings, expounding widely on the mystery of human love, including the participation of man and woman in procreation with all its causes and effects. He spoke of being male and female, of the dignity and complementarity of the sexes, of their sharing in their gift of self with the plan of the Creator, of the natural and personal dimensions of marriage, of the personal identity of the sexual being, of the family, etc.

The “Theology of the Body” as a systematic reflection rises from the preoccupation of John Paul II to point out to man that his body, which is part of his person, is an instrument that actualizes the person for love; it is the space or place in which the divine value of the human person shines forth and also represents a framework for a truly Christian anthropology.

For John Paul II, the dualist vision that separates the body from the soul and that condemns the first and exalts the second is totally false and harmful. It is certain that the spiritual holds priority over the material; however, it is also certain that “Man, being at the same time spiritual and corporal, expresses and perceives spiritual realities through material signs and symbols” (CCC, 1146). Through them, Christ instituted the sacraments that are “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church through which the divine life is given to us” (ibid, 1131). Specifically, the Eternal Son of God became incarnate, and assumed a human nature; that is, He is a unity of body and soul to give us knowledge of the Father and, at the same time, to save us from sin and

death (cfr. Jn 1,14; Phil 2,5-8; Heb 10,5-7; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 461-462).

The positive vision of the material world of John Paul II is that which we encounter on the first page of the Bible, in which we see that God revealed to his People Israel, by means of beautiful symbols, laden with profound religious and moral truths, the goodness of Creation, both material and spiritual, of which God is the author: *“And God saw that it was good ... very good.”* (Gen 1,4, 10, 12, 14, 18, 21, 31)

Contemporary culture has fallen into an erroneous vision of human sexuality and the body. However, this obsession with sexuality and the body does not come from an excessive valuing of these dimensions of the human person. On the contrary, the hyper-sexualization of our modern society comes from an undervaluing of human sexuality. The current obsession with sex comes from the vacuum of love that suffers from having abandoned God. People have replaced the search for true love (human and divine) with the ephemeral pleasure that sexual relations provide. This gives rise to a greater emptiness, that at times, leads to falling into the same frustration time and again, or, includes falling into excesses, evermore abominable and absurd. All of this shows that the error of contemporary culture is not the exaggerated valuing of the body and sexuality; rather, on the contrary, as John Paul II says, it is in, “not sufficiently appreciating the value” (Catechesis, 22.X.1980) of them; of not sufficiently appreciating the value that God himself has given to human sexuality, to marriage and to conjugal love. People go about seeking pleasure for itself, disconnected from true love, true joy, of life and of family.

The task that we as Christians have before us is not to regress into a useless rigorism that does not lead us anywhere, nor is it to descend into the current hedonism as pretext for a presumed and false updating. No, the Church and the Gospel cannot simply conform to the world of today. It is the world of today that must be conformed to Christ. But, to achieve this, there has to be a rediscovering of the Gospel of God with respect to conjugal love, human sexuality, the life that arises from marriage, that is to say, the family, and all of this in total fidelity to the faith of the Church.

In reflecting on the theology of the body, we discover some key ideas that help us to glimpse the importance and beauty of the teaching – ideas about man and woman, understanding their splendor and value, and how they might live the gift of sexuality. These include:

- That the body is not simply a “container”; rather, it is the means by which the invisible is made visible, that the human participates in the divine. The body reveals the essential core of being a person: the call to give oneself in love to another and to receive, in turn, the gift of self of the other.
- That the fulfillment of the person depends on the surrendering and giving of oneself, not in affirming oneself, not in being self-referential and self-sufficient. Thus, the “original sin” can only be understood as an infringement of the law of the gift of self that we carry within us, turning the other into a simple object. The personalist norm of the theology of the body states that a person is to be treated as a person, not an object – as an end in himself or herself, not as a means to an end.
- That marriage is the human experience that begins to make God understandable for the person, introducing us to the experience of total, personal, and gratuitous communion.
- That in the sacrament of marriage, the spouses are the ministers of the grace of God and the “language of the body” in marital love is the manner by which the partners carry out the “conjugal dialogue” proper to marriage as a vocation.
- That God created man: male and female; corporeal beings, endowed with sexuality and destined to live in complementarity, sharing in the greatest love.
- That far from banning eros, the ethic of the Church frees it for a full and mature spontaneity, where the perennial attraction between the sexes finds its fulfillment in the mutual surrender and affirmation of the dignity of each member of the partnership.
- Celibacy must be fruitful and takes on a spiritual paternity or maternity, just as marriage does through procreation and education of children.

As you can appreciate, the depth and relevance of these fundamental ideas about the body, its expression and meaning, are a precious mosaic that,

with the Grace of God, can undoubtedly help a lot today and in the future in presenting the truth and beauty of the human person in relationship, in giving, in sharing in the capacity of love that God himself pours out on us so that we may live in Him.

It is so important for us then as missionary disciples of Jesus, that we take up in our hands once more the texts of this catechesis of John Paul II, that we meditate upon them, that we study and integrate them, and that we live them and make them known.

### ***Benedict XVI: Love, Social Responsibility and Human Ecology***

The Theology of the Body strongly influenced the expression of the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Code of Canon Law, the *Letter to Families*, the *Letter to Women*, and the Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.

Through much of the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger served as the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. As an outstanding theologian and man of the Church, he was aware of the cultural and anthropological changes occurring in society. After the death of Pope John Paul II, he warned of the "dictatorship of relativism." When he was elected Pope in April 2005, taking the name of Benedict XVI, there was a great continuity with the thought of John Paul II with respect to the understanding of the person, marriage and family life.

However, many were surprised when Pope Benedict chose the theme of love for his first encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est*. The encyclical begins with the words of the *First Letter of Saint John*: "God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him." (1 John 4:16)

The theology of the body explains love as involving self-giving and surrendering to bring about a communion of persons. The first part of the encyclical letter offers a theological and philosophical reflection on love in its different manifestations, concretely as *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. The word love is one of the most used and abused in the world today. Amid the multiplicity of meanings of 'love', one in particular emerges: "love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an

apparently irresistible promise of happiness.” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 2)

This was called *eros* by the ancient Greeks. In the Bible and especially in the New Testament, the concept of love was deepened – seemingly to push the word *eros* to the margins in favor of the term *agape* to express oblation love. As I was just saying, far from banning *eros*, the ethic of the Church frees it and purifies it. The contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, often reduced to pure “sex”, has become a commodity, a mere thing to be bought and sold, or rather, man has himself become a commodity. (cf. DCE, 5).

The body-soul dualism causes man to consider his body as an instrument – to be used and exploited. Pope Benedict, consistent with the theology of the body, affirms that the “Christian faith has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True *eros* tends to rise “in ecstasy” toward the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason, it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.” (DCE, 5)

If at first love is still “insecure, indeterminate, and searching”, the biblical idea of love expresses the experience of a love which involves a “real discovery of the other.” Love is best described as a “journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self toward its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed discovery of God.” (cf. DCE, 6)

Thus, *eros* and *agape* – ascending and descending love – can never be completely separated. Benedict states, “The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized.” (DCE, 7) The two manifestations of the one reality of love show a pattern of giving and receiving.

While the theology of the body expressed this, at times, the emphasis was often on self-giving. Benedict XVI notes that “man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow. Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ.” (DCE, 7)

In *Amoris Laetitia* (70), Pope Francis summarizes: “Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, returned to the topic of the truth of the love of man and woman, which is fully illuminated only in the love of the crucified Christ (cf. DCE, 2). He stressed that ‘marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes an icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the human measure of love’ (cf. DCE, 11).”

The exclusive and definitive love is experienced in the new and Eternal Covenant – in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus’ act of self-oblation. The implications of this are social: “Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or will become his own. ... Love of God and love of neighbor are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. ... Worship itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn.” (DCE, 14)

This idea of social dimension to love (and the commandment to love our neighbor) is important for the defense of the family and of human life. In his third encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of love as a principle of life in society (Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, 44), a place where we can experience the common good. He laments the reduction of sex to pleasure or entertainment, materialistic ideas and policies to limit family size, and the rapid decline in births which threaten economic development. Authentic love is open to life. He contends that *morally responsible openness to life represents a rich social and economic resource*.

As such, he reminds States that they are “called to *enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family*, founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs.” (CiV, 44)

The Church has a responsibility toward the family and toward creation. He states that “the deterioration of nature is in fact closely connected to the culture that shapes human coexistence: *when human ecology is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits*.” (CiV, 51) Pope Francis reinforces and explores this in *Laudato Si*, but Benedict XVI makes a significant contribution in reminding the world that the “*decisive issue is the overall moral tenor of society*.”

Authentic development of society involves the protection of human life and all of creation. Here I wish to quote him at length, because this is significant for those engaged in the defense of life and of the family:

“If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. ... The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society.” (CiV, 52)

Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body provides us with a proper theological and philosophical anthropology for understanding man and woman, human sexuality and marriage. Benedict XVI builds upon this, clarifying the meanings of the word love and pointing us to our social responsibility toward the entire human family and creation.

### ***Pope Francis: The Family: Reality and Dreams***

Pope Francis’ pastoral focus on the family is rooted in practical realities rather than abstract ideas. He writes in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

“There also exists a constant tension between ideas and realities. Realities simply are, whereas ideas are worked out. There has to be continuous dialogue between the two, lest ideas become detached from realities. It is dangerous to dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric ... Realities are greater than ideas.” (Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 231)

In this Exhortation, he looks at the actual situation of families, noting that “the family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society.” (cf. *EG*, 66)

Francis recognizes the cultural challenges to the family and sees them as a direct threat to the transmission of the faith. The first setting in which faith “enlightens the human city is the family.” Faith helps us grasp “in all its depth and richness the begetting of children, as a sign of the love of the Creator, who entrusts us with the mystery of a new person.” (cf. Francis, Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2013, 52)

In perfect continuity with Benedict, Francis believes that “absorbed and deepened in the family, faith becomes a light capable of illuminating all relationships in society”, helping us to recognize that “every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God’s face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters.” (*LF*, 54)

It is faith that helps us understand the unique dignity of each person, including the unborn. In his exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, Pope John Paul II eloquently said that from the standpoint of faith, “every violation of the personal dignity of the human being cries out in vengeance to God and is an offense against the creator of the individual.” (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 30 December 1980, 37)

Francis, echoing the anthropology of the theology of the body, writes in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the “defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right. It involves the conviction that a human being is always sacred and inviolable in any situation and at every stage of development. Human beings are ends in themselves and never a means of resolving problems.” (*EG*, 213) It is not “progressive” to try to resolve problems by eliminating human life!

Francis has a broad concern for the welfare of the weak and vulnerable “at every stage of human development.” In his exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, following two synods on the family, he noted that the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church (cf. Francis, Apostolic

Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016, 31). As I was saying earlier, Francis is a Pope rooted in reality. He knows the “reality of the family with all its complexity, with its lights and shadows” and recognizes the threats posed by anthropological and cultural changes, extreme individualism, the cultural of the ephemeral, and the problem of migration.

On this last threat to the family, he comments:

“Forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty, and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes that often put life at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying families, the Church needs a specific pastoral program addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those families who remain behind.” (AL, 46)

Without being political, I wish to say that the issue of migration is a pro-life, pro-family issue! Pope Francis is a Pope who challenges us. He challenges the whole Church to present a positive vision of the family. The Holy Father does not descend into a fatalism; rather, he sees crises as opportunities. He notes that “the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle, and mature the wine of their union.” (AL, 232)

Still, it is the task of the Church to help these couples – these families! He says that experienced and trained couples should be open to offering guidance, so that couples will not be unnerved by these crises or tempted to hasty decisions. For family life to be successful, real effort is necessary.

In his meeting with families in Victor Manuel Reyna Stadium in Tuxtla Gutiérrez during his Apostolic Journey to Mexico, the Holy Father offered some reasons why so much effort is necessary:

“Today we see how on different fronts the family is weakened and questioned. It is regarded as a model which has done its time, but which has no place in our societies; these, claiming to be modern, increasingly favor a model based on isolation. Societies become increasingly inoculated – they refer to themselves as societies which

are free, democratic, sovereign – but they are inoculated by ideological colonizations which destroy; and we end up being ideological colonies that then have a destructive effect on families, the family cell, which is the basis of every healthy society.” (Meeting with Families, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, 15 February 2016)

As an antidote to these inoculations, the Holy Father suggests repeated efforts, acknowledging that “living in a family is not always easy... but I prefer a wounded family that makes daily efforts to put love into play, to a family and a society that is sick from isolationism or a habitual fear of love. I prefer a family that makes repeated efforts to begin again ...” (Ibid.).

Rooted in reality, Pope Francis recognizes that there are no quick solutions to the threats posed to the family, but rather than simply surrender, he believes in hard work and repeated effort. The Holy Father also has dreams about what family life can be like.

In preparation for the World Meeting of Families which was held in Dublin, Ireland, some years ago, writing to Cardinal Kevin Farrell, he articulated these dreams:

“How much better family life would be if every day we lived according to the words, “please”, “thank you” and “I’m sorry”. Every day we have the experience of fragility and weakness, and therefore we all, families, and pastors are in need of renewed humility ... I dream of an outbound Church, not a self-referential one, a Church that does not pass by far from man’s wounds, a merciful Church that proclaims the heart of revelation of God as Love, which is Mercy. It is this very mercy that makes us new in love; and we know how much Christian families are a place of mercy and witnesses of mercy.” (Letter to His Eminence Kevin Card. Farrell, 25 March 2017)

You are part of the Pope’s dreams for the Church and our world – by being close to families, by welcoming families into your *casita sagrada* – as the Holy Father said in the Cathedral of Mexico City. A *casita* is familiar and at the same time holy, *sagrada*, for it is filled with the presence of God. He wonders whether “we have lost the sense of the humble ways of the divine and are tired of

offering our own men and women the *casita* in which they feel close to God” (cf. Address of the Holy Father to the Bishops of Mexico, 13 February 2016). The Holy Father dreams that you will open your *casita sagrada* to other families, just as Saint John Paul encouraged you to “open wide the doors to Christ!”

We are living in the age of great Popes who have been tireless in their defense of the family. I remember when I attended the Course of Formation for New Bishops, the so-called Baby Bishops’ School, Cardinal Farrell told us that we should never apologize for the Church’s teaching on the family, because he said that it is truly Good News for all of humanity.

### ***The Deposit of Faith, Evangelization and the Family in the Diocese of Columbus***

So, where does that leave us in the Diocese of Columbus? Well, the recent Popes, building on the Tradition, have left us a patrimony to defend but also to proclaim to the whole world. Today, I see us engaging in this proclamation in some fundamental ways:

1. Through ***evangelizing catechesis***: In the past, we viewed catechesis as being directed from teacher to student to impart some knowledge of the content of the faith. Today, we realize that it is not only the student who is the subject of catechesis, but also that the student’s parents need catechesis and formation. Often too, the catechist himself or herself did not receive adequate formation, and, therefore, the catechist also needs deeper evangelization and formation; and finally, the secularized world needs to know the good news about human sexuality, marriage, and family life. Finally, we need to move beyond the idea that catechesis is only the content that is found in the *catechism* or on the written page; evangelizing catechesis is transformative of lives. It impacts us and transforms us through the living Word whom we encounter and who penetrates our hearts.
2. Through ***family-based catechesis***: Time and again, we say that parents are the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith. Many parents are ill-equipped to form their children in the faith, due to a lack of knowledge and practice of the faith. Some, because of their own weaknesses in the faith, delegate the task to Catholic school teachers or PSR teachers. Family-based catechesis seeks to form parent and child

together. Some weeks, they are together for family catechesis, but other weeks the parents must instruct the child at home, and this demands that the parent actually engage the material. More is demanded of the parents, but this seems appropriate when the stakes are so high.

The family is rightly called the domestic church. In family-based catechesis, parents can become protagonists in the evangelization of their children, while at the same time being evangelized, not only by catechists, and catechetical content, but, at times, even by their own children.

The family as a locus of catechesis has a unique privilege: to transmit the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. Rooted in the family experience, the child's Christian initiation consists in: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father.

It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods. In this family catechesis, the role of grandparents is of growing importance. Their wisdom and sense of the religious is often decisive in creating a true Christian climate. (*General Directory for Catechesis*, 255)

3. Through ***Catechumenal Itineraries for Married Life***: Pope Francis has said that we live not so much in an epoch of change as in a change of epoch. We are experiencing epochal change which is greatly impacting marriage and family life. To respond to these changes a Catechumenal model for marriage preparation is being proposed to prepare the faithful for marriage (remote preparation); to assist couples in discerning and preparing for the sacrament of matrimony so that it can be celebrated not only validly but also fruitfully; and, to accompany them in the early years of marriage.

There is a pre-catechumenal phase, which corresponds to the remote preparation during the time of childhood and adolescence. There is an intermediate phase, when the couple first approaches the Church for marriage, which corresponds to a "rite of entrance". There is the catechumenal phase itself, whose first stage (proximate preparation)

lasts around a year, in which the couple is actively being formed by the Church (clergy and lay, mentor couples), culminating in a “Rite of Betrothal”, which corresponds to the Rite of Election for catechumens.

The second stage of the catechumenal phase is what we might call the immediate preparation for marriage, which involves a retreat-like experience, and which culminates in the celebration of the sacrament, like a parallel for the sacraments of initiation.

Finally, there is a third stage, which corresponds to the period of mystagogy, which might last two or three years. During this period, the newly married couple continues to be accompanied by a mentor couple and/or the clergy. They are inserted into the life of a community – into the life of the parish, which can serve as a network of support amid the challenges of this new yet beautiful vocation.

Some question the wisdom of this longer process, but this process is necessary due to the lack of knowledge of the Church’s understanding of marriage, due to the brokenness of families and the need for healing and accompaniment, and due to the toxic culture, which never ceases to pose new threats to stable marriages.

As the family goes, so goes the Church and so goes the world. If we want to have a strong Church, we need to have strong families. Rushing through marriage preparation is not a service to the couple or to the long-term health of the family. It is better to be patient and get things right than to have a beautiful wedding and a terrible marriage.

Finally, the mentor couples who accompany the new couple in the preparatory period and beyond also exercise co-responsibility for the mission of evangelization. The laity are not merely subjects of evangelization, but they become protagonists in the mission of evangelization.

I conclude with the words the Holy Father addressed to the Mexican Bishops but which he says to all of us: “I ask you to witness together that the Church is the custodian of a unifying vision of humanity.”