



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

“The Joy of Love” Pope Francis between the ideal and the real

**Media release
8 April 2016**

“In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, ‘The Joy of Love: On Love in the Family’, Pope Francis has spoken as a true pastor who really knows the human heart and is well aware of the pressures now facing marriage and the family”, said Archbishop Mark Coleridge on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference today.

“The Pope moves between the ideal and the real, offering the Church’s vision of marriage and the family but also dealing with the facts on the ground that can be messy,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

In the document, which was launched at 8pm AEST in Rome, the Holy Father sees marriage and the family in dynamic terms, writing of them as a journey. ‘The Synod process’, he notes, ‘allowed for an examination of the situation of families in today’s world’, opening up ‘a broader vision’ and a renewed awareness of the importance of marriage and the family, which is counter cultural in today’s society.

Francis does not shy away from complex and controversial issues including divorce, abortion, domestic violence, euthanasia, same-sex marriage and gender ideology. He stresses the need to care for the most vulnerable in society, especially the elderly, people with disabilities and migrants.

In reference to the sexual abuse of children, Francis said, ‘the sexual abuse of children is all the more scandalous when it occurs in places where they ought to be made safe’ (45).

‘On unions between homosexual persons, the Pope writes, ‘We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration’ (250).

‘Only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life’ (52).

“The Pope’s words are both high-visioned and home-spun, at times soaring but often down-to-earth. They summon the Church to accompany people on their journey, listen to them and help them discern the truth of their situation, and discover where God is in the mess,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

Dr Maria Harries, Chair of Catholic Social Services Australia, said, “The Holy Father identifies the appalling impacts on families of a huge variety of evils such as war, violence, addictions, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, gross materialism and greed that lead to isolation, despair, loneliness, fragmentation of families and peoples everywhere”.

“He invites us to not lose hope but to walk with and embrace families who suffer, married couples who are in trouble and those who feel alienated.”

Shawn and Branka van der Linden, a married couple with four young children, who represent the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council, said, “To have a Church document that speaks in a realistic way about the practicalities of family life is a great encouragement and relevant to our lived experience”.

The text of *Amoris Laetitia* is available to download from the ACBC website:
<https://www.catholic.org.au/synod-2015/blog>

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Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Dr Maria Harries and Shawn and Branka van der Linden are available for interview upon request.**