



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 5 August 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

The family - 21. Wounded families (II)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

With this catechesis we return to our reflection on the family. After speaking the last time about families wounded due to misunderstandings between spouses, today I would like to focus our attention on another reality: how to take care of those who, after an irreversible failure of their matrimonial bond, have entered into a new union.

The Church is fully aware that such a situation is contrary to the Christian Sacrament. However, her gaze as a teacher always draws from a mother's heart; a heart which, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, always seeks the good and the salvation of the people. This is why she feels obliged, "for the sake of truth", to "exercise careful discernment of situations". This is how [St John Paul II](#) expressed it in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (n. 84), giving as an example the difference between one subjected to separation compared to one who has caused it. This discernment has to be made.

If we then also look at these new bonds through the eyes of the young sons and daughters — and the little ones watch — through the eyes of the children, we are aware of a greater urgency to foster a true welcome for these families in our communities. For this reason it is important that the style of the community, its language, its attitudes, always be attentive to people, starting with the little ones. They are the ones who suffer the most in these situations. After all, how can we encourage these parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and exercised faith, if we keep them at arm's length from the life of the community, as if they are excommunicated? We must act in a way so as not to add even more to the burdens which the children in these situations already feel they have to bear! Unfortunately, the number of these children and youth is really large. It is important for them to feel the Church as loving mother to all, always ready to listen and to meet.

In these decades, in truth, the Church has been neither insensitive nor lazy. Thanks to the in-depth analysis performed by Pastors, led and guided by my Predecessors, the awareness has

truly grown that it is necessary to have a fraternal and attentive welcome, in love and in truth, of the baptized who have established a new relationship of cohabitation after the failure of the marital sacrament; in fact, these persons are by no means excommunicated — they are not excommunicated! — and they should absolutely not be treated as such: they are still a part of the Church.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this question, calling for careful discernment and wise pastoral accompaniment, knowing that there are no “simple solutions” (*Speech at the Seventh World Meeting of Families*, Milan, 2 June 2012, answer n. 5). Here the repeated call to Pastors to openly and consistently demonstrate the community’s willingness to welcome them and encourage them, so they may increasingly live and develop their membership in Christ and in the Church through prayer, by listening to the Word of God, by attending the liturgy, through the Christian education of their children, through charity and service to the poor, through the commitment to justice and peace.

The biblical icon of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-18) summarizes the mission that Jesus received from the Father: that of giving his life for the sheep. This attitude is also a model for the Church, which embraces her children as a mother who gives her life for them. “The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open”.... No closed doors! No closed doors! “Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community”.... The Church “is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 47).

In the same way all Christians are called to imitate the Good Shepherd. Especially Christian families can cooperate with Him by taking care of wounded families, accompanying them in the life of faith of the community. Each one must do his part in taking on the attitude of the Good Shepherd, who knows each one of his sheep and excludes no one from his infinite love!

Special greetings:

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today’s Audience, including those from England, South Africa, China and the United States. May your stay in the Eternal City confirm you in love for our Lord, and may he make you his witnesses, especially for families who feel separated from the Church. May God bless you all! I address a special thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we celebrate the Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major, where the icon of *Salus Populi Romani* is venerated. Invoke the Mother of God, dear *young people*, to feel the sweetness of her love; pray to her in moments of the cross and of suffering, dear *sick people*, especially you, Angels of Liberty of Syracuse; look to her, dear *newlyweds*, as the model of your marital journey of devotion and fidelity.

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