

July 13, 2016

To Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia and the staff of the Pontifical Council for the Family

Since 2004, we have been living a beautiful experience of the Church as members of the Pontifical Council for the Family. At the time, it was therefore a big surprise for us when it was proposed to Pope John Paul II that we become members of this Dicastery.

In 1986, the Council was the fruit of the first Synod on the family. 35 years later, the most recent Synod on the family has led to a new way of working. We are not turning a page of a book, but we are really changing the book, since the Council will be merged with those of Life and the Laity. We therefore wish to express our appreciation of this experience and the fruits that we see around us.

In the Council, what has always struck us is this closeness to couples and families. From one Plenary Assembly to the next, the themes invited us to become their neighbors, to share their sufferings and their joys, to pay attention to their needs and their growth. Too often the spirituality and religious expression, in all its forms, take up a great deal of space, and there is little time for human growth. Sometimes, we forget that spirituality and faith live within a person, and that, for a Christian, it is not enough to go to church and listen to the catechesis. Pope Francis continues to remind us of the importance of accompanying people in the reality of their lives and help them to better meet Christ.

This adventure has thus led us to form our thinking, to guide our pastoral actions and our speech in the promotion of couples and the family in our professional engagements.

We will always remember that meeting with Pope John Paul II, six months before his death. He allowed us to experience a moment of the tenderness of a father who welcomes his family, in spite of his illness. He made his vulnerability into a testament of strength and courage in order to live his departure with the entire world, with his family.

Often, when we talk about the "family," we think of those who have small children. The Council has never forgotten the grandparents, adolescents and young people. Family pastoral is a ministry that touches all ages of life, since we are all sons and daughters of a father and a mother.

Meeting and listening to the different cultures from the five continents has allowed us to shape the way we see the universal Church, which includes all nations and all cultures. With the members of the Council we have been able to dialog and discover how the expression of the family wants to be an asset for society.

The Pontifical Council for the Family has enabled us to strengthen our mission in the service of families. We sought inspiration in its guidelines to better evangelize and support couples, families and people who are suffering. We are already seeing the fruits of this when we notice that more of the families in our parish enroll their children in catechism. The children invite their friends and their parents invite their neighbors or their friends! This is a nice change in a society where the faith in Jesus wants to be increasingly discreet.

The lack of accompaniment for people who are suffering, including psychologically, or who have interpersonal difficulties, is still and always a cry from the heart to which we cannot fully respond.

We always hope that the family pastoral ministry will be at the heart of the mission of our diocesan Churches to respond to those who suffer, who thirst to know God, and for the growth of couples and families. We always pray that people will let the Holy Spirit work in the world, and for that, he needs our hands, our feet, our intelligence and our hearts, in order to fully accomplish Christ's mission.

We want to sincerely thank Msgr. Paglia and all his predecessors, as well as the office staff. Your support, your dedication, and your professionalism will always impress us.

Thank you to all those who have served the Pontifical Council for the Family. You are inspiring witness of Christ. Your friendship has warmed our hearts. Your love for your mission has always fascinated and inspired us.

Thank you for your collaboration. You are part of our lives.

United in prayer.

Guyline Morin and André Belzile

Members of the Pontifical Council for the Family

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