

## **Fortunate Families Foundational Statement**

As family members, friends and allies of LGBTQ+ persons, we strive to be faithful Catholics:

+ We love the Church and take seriously the Church's call that the family is, indeed, the Domestic Church. *(1)*

+ We deeply value Church doctrine, the Gospel of social justice, the liturgical life and the Eucharist, and our active membership in ecclesial communities.

+ As parents we take seriously our call to be the first educators and evangelizers in the faith to our children – the mandate given us at baptism. *(2)*

+ Our LGBTQ+ daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, are great blessings to our families and it is our hope that the Church, upon fully accepting them, will be deeply enriched by their gifts and contributions to our communal life in the Spirit. *(3)*

+ We support the fullness of Catholic teaching and recognize that it comprises a wide range of themes and issues.

+ We acknowledge our call to live in relationship with Jesus Christ and we embrace our responsibility to call our LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers to deepen their relationship with God through Christ. *(4)*

+ As Catholic parents, families, friends and allies, we are also called to listen to the experiences, struggles and stories of our children. We encourage our children to live chaste sexual lives, and to take responsibility for their sexuality. *(5)*

+ We recognize that LGBTQ+ persons have a unique experience of their sexual orientation and/or understanding of gender as nonbinary that can place them in conflict with the articulated teaching of the Church. *(6)*

+ We learn from our LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers that they knew they were “different” from an early age, that they experienced attraction to the same gender or other internal sense of gender nonconformity from an early age. *(7)*

+ Some members of our ecclesial communities have a gender experience that does not match the gender into which they were born.

+As Catholic family, friends and allies of LGBTQ+ persons we are called to accept and love them unconditionally.

+We also acknowledge, together with the Church, that the fullness of sexual expression is best framed in a loving committed relationship. We believe, along with mainstream science, that the homosexual orientation and experience of gender is deeply seated and cannot be reversed by prayer and/or therapy. Many of our LGBTQ+ children and brothers and sisters are in loving, committed relationships with persons of the same sex or persons with other gender nonconforming expressions and ask us, as parents, to embrace, accept and love them for who

they are. We do embrace our children, knowing that our decision to love our children and all LGBTQ+ persons – at times - places us in tension with Church teaching. (8)

+ We do not come lightly to these conclusions; we have prayed about it, talked to other parents, family members, friends, medical experts and Church officials about it, cried about it and finally come to an acceptance about it that resides on the level of conscience. We recognize that sometimes the conscience of the individual places him/her in conflict with articulated Catholic teaching. The resolution of this conflict often includes the proper use of conscience as articulated by the Magisterium. Many of us have sought the counsel of Catholic priests who have supported us in loving our children and every LGBTQ+ sister and brother. (9)

+ We realize that church teaching and the articulation of doctrine has developed through the years. (10)

+ We earnestly pray for a development of Church teaching on the topic of homosexuality and gender. We also earnestly pray that Church officials listen to our experiences and the experiences of LGBTQ+ persons.

+ As family, friends and allies, we recognize that parts of official Church teaching on this topic, while sincerely articulated by the Church, is perceived as hurtful and disrespectful by many LGBTQ+ Catholics, who seek to be welcomed by the Church. (11)

+ We need to acknowledge that many of our children, family members friends – fellow LGBTQ+ Catholics - are in committed loving same gendered relationships. While same gendered relationships might not be procreative in the strict sense, they often are very generative, contribute to the common good, and can be examples of a loving, committed relationships. We ask the Church to acknowledge the truth of this. (12)

+ We ask the Church to acknowledge this is primarily a pastoral issue which needs (i) compassion and that mercy which is justice, not judgment; and (ii) a recognition that any sexual expression comes to its fullest expression in a loving, committed relationship. (13)

+ We ask that the Church engage with us, our children and experts in the fields of psychology, science and sociology, in a fruitful dialog. (14)

+ We yearn for the day when our LGBTQ+ sisters and brothers are fully and completely accepted by the Church even as we know they are by God. (15)

- (1) *Familiaris Consortio*, 21 “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*” (2204)
- (2) The parental duty to educate children comes tied to a right. Parents are the "original and primary" educators of their children, and their duties as well as their rights are "irreplaceable and inalienable." (*Compendium*, no. 239) The duty is non-delegable.
- (3) *Amoria Laetitia*, 250: “The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception. During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. 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, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.” (2017)
- (4) “Father,... this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (*Jn 17:3*)
- (5) "Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2337  
  
"All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has 'put on Christ,' the model for all chastity."  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2348
- (6) "An even more generous, intelligent and prudent pastoral commitment, modeled on the Good Shepherd, is called for in cases of families which, often independently of their own wishes and through pressures of various other kinds, find themselves faced by situations which are objectively difficult." *John Paul II, On the Family*, 1981, no. 77
- (7) All in all, it is essential to recall one basic truth. God loves every person as a unique individual. Sexual identity helps to define the unique persons we are, and one component of our sexual identity is sexual orientation. Thus, our total personhood is more encompassing than sexual orientation. Human beings see the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart (cf. 1 Sm 16:7). *Always Our Children*, USCCB, 1997
- (8) The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them (cf. *The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, no. 10)

- (9) “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1782*

*Amoria Laetitia, 303*, [E]very effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor, and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace. Yet conscience can do more than recognize that a given situation does not correspond objectively to the overall demands of the Gospel. It can also recognize with sincerity and honesty what for now is the most generous response which can be given to God, and come to see with a certain moral security that it is what God himself is asking amid the concrete complexity of one’s limits, while yet not fully the objective ideal. In any event, let us recall that this discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized.”

- (10) “The church, in its doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that it itself is, all that it believes” (Second Vatican Council, dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, 8). The council fathers could find no summary formulation more appropriate to express the nature and mission of the church. Not only in “doctrine,” but also in “life” and in “worship” is the possibility given to the faithful to be the people of God. In a series of words, the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* expresses the dynamic development of this process: “The tradition that comes from the apostles makes *progress*... there is *growth*... always *advancing* toward the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in it” (ibid).

Tradition is a living reality, and only a limited viewpoint can imagine the “deposit of faith” as something static. One cannot put the Word of God in mothballs, as if it were an old blanket one had to preserve from vermin. No! The Word of God is a dynamic reality, always living, and it develops and grows, for it is ordered toward a fulfillment which humans cannot stop. St. Vincent of Lérin well formulated this law of progress as follows: “*annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*» (*Commonitorium*, 23.9: *PL* 50). ...

One cannot preserve doctrine without cultivating its development. One also cannot tie it to a narrow and immutable interpretation, without constricting the Holy Spirit and its action. *Pope Francis address for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which was sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization.*

- (11) *Amoria Laetitia, no. 36*, “We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic. We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic. We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism. Then too, we often present marriage in such a way that its unitive meaning, its call to grow in love and its ideal of mutual assistance are overshadowed by an almost exclusive insistence on the duty of procreation. Nor have we always provided solid guidance to young married couples, understanding their timetables, their way of thinking and their concrete concerns. At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.”

- (12) “You can and you must respect the decision of creating a union with the person of the same sex, to seek the instruments in the civil law to protect their coexistence and their situation with laws that assure this protection. But, if we are asked, if you demand that the Church says this is a marriage, well we must say: non possumus (we cannot). It is not a discrimination of people: distinction does not mean to discriminate. This does not absolutely prevent having a great respect, a friendship, or a collaboration with couples who live this type of union, and, above all, to not despise them. No one is obligated to accept this doctrine, but you cannot expect that the Church does not teach it.

I know [a] homosexual person who has lived a series of experiences for years, not with the person in particular or in a coexistence, but frequent experiences with different people. Now he has found a stable relationship. It is an improvement, if only on a human level, no longer passing from one relationship to another, but he is stabilized in a relationship that is not based only on sexuality. He shares his life, they share joys and suffering, there is help for each other. We must recognize that this person has made an important step, for their own good and the good of others, even if, certainly, it is not a situation that the Church can consider as regular. Judgment on these sexual acts as such is necessary, but the Church must not look first into the bedroom, but into the dining room! It is necessary to accompany.” *Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, chosen by Pope Francis to present his apostolic exhortation, Amoris Laetitia.*

*Amoris Laetitia, no.305:* “... a pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in “irregular” situations, as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives. This would bespeak the closed heart of one used to hiding behind the Church’s teachings, “sitting on the chair of Moses and judging at times with superiority and superficiality difficult case and wounded families”. Along these same lines, the International Theological Commission has noted that “natural law could not be presented as an already established set of rules that impose themselves a priori on the moral subject; rather, it is a source of objective inspiration for the deeply personal process of making decisions”. Because of forms of conditioning and mitigating factors, it is possible that in an objective situation of sin –which may not be subjectively culpable, or fully such – a person can be living in God’s grace, can love and can also grow in the life of grace and charity, while receiving the Church’s help to this end. □ Discernment must help to find possible ways of responding to God and growing in the midst of limits. By thinking that everything is black and white, we sometimes close off the way of grace and of growth, and discourage paths of sanctification which give glory to God.

- (13) *Amoris Laetitia, no.301.* For an adequate understanding of the possibility and need of special discernment in certain “irregular” situations, one thing must always be taken into account, lest anyone think that the demands of the Gospel are in any way being compromised. The Church possesses a solid body of reflection concerning mitigating factors and situations. Hence it is can no longer simply be said that all those in any “irregular” situation are living in a state of mortal sin and are deprived of sanctifying grace. More is involved here than mere ignorance of the rule. A subject may know full well the rule, yet have great difficulty in understanding “its inherent values”,<sup>339</sup> or be in a concrete situation which does not allow him or her to act differently and decide other-wise without further sin. As the Synod Fathers put it, “factors may exist which limit the ability to make a decision”.<sup>340</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas himself recognized that someone may possess grace and charity, yet not be able to exercise any one of the virtues well;<sup>341</sup> in other words, although someone may possess all the infused moral virtues, he does not clearly manifest the existence of one of them, because the outward practice of that virtue is rendered difficult: “Certain saints are said not to possess certain virtues, in so far as they experience difficulty in the acts of those virtues, even though they have the habits of all the virtues”.<sup>342</sup>

302. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly mentions these factors: “imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors”.<sup>343</sup> In another paragraph, the Catechism refers once again to circumstances which mitigate moral responsibility, and mentions at length “affective immaturity, force of acquired habit, conditions of anxiety or other psychological or social factors that lessen or even extenuate moral culpability”.<sup>344</sup> For this reason, a negative judgment about an objective situation does not imply a judgment about the imputability or culpability of the person involved.<sup>345</sup> On the basis of these convictions, I consider very fitting what many Synod Fathers wanted to affirm: “Under certain circumstances people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases. Pastoral discernment, while taking into account a person’s properly formed conscience, must take responsibility for these situations. Even the consequences of actions taken are not necessarily the same in all cases”.<sup>346</sup>

339. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 33: AAS 74 (1982), 121.

340. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 51.

341. Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 65, art. 3 ad 2; *De Malo*, q. 2, art. 2.

342. *Ibid.*, ad 3.

343. No. 1735.

344. *Ibid.*, 2352; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on Euthanasia *Iura et Bona* (5 May 1980), II: AAS 72 (1980), 546; John Paul II, in his critique of the category of “fundamental option”, recognized that “doubtless there can occur situations which are very complex and obscure from a psychological viewpoint, and which have an influence on the sinner’s subjective culpability” (Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* [2 December 1984], 17: AAS 77 [1985], 223).

345. Cf. Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Declaration Concerning the Admission to Holy Communion of Faithful Who are Divorced and Remarried (24 June 2000), 2.

346. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 85.

“Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church “has an endless desire to show mercy”. Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, §10)

“these [justice and mercy] are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, §20)

(14) *Amoria Laetitia*, no 308: “At the same time, from our awareness of the weight of mitigating circumstances – psychological, historical and even biological – it follows that “without detracting from the evangelical ideal, there is a need to accompany with mercy and patience the eventual stages of personal growth as these progressively appear”, making room for “the Lord’s mercy, which spurs us on to do our best”. I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit

sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, “always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”. The Church’s pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church’s teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. The Gospel itself tells us not to judge or condemn (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37). Jesus “expects us to stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead to enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated.”

- (15) "We Christians believe in the God of Jesus Christ, and our desire is to grow in the living experience of the mystery of love. We commit ourselves, therefore, to not place any obstacle in the way of the action of the merciful Father, but we ask the gift of a great faith to become ourselves signs and instruments of mercy."  
*Pope Francis, September 7, 2017, General Audience Catechesis*

*Amoria Laetitia, no.138:* “Develop the habit of giving real importance to the other person. This means appreciating them and recognizing their right to exist, to think as they do and to be happy. Never downplay what they say or think, even if you need to express your own point of view. Everyone has something to contribute, because they have their life experiences, they look at things from a different standpoint and they have their own concerns, abilities and insights. We ought to be able to acknowledge the other person’s truth, the value of his or her deepest concerns, and what it is that they are trying to communicate, however aggressively. We have to put ourselves in their shoes and try to peer into their hearts, to perceive their deepest concerns and to take them as a point of departure for further dialogue.”

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*Confirmed by Board*