



Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference

The Family in Zimbabwe In the light of Amoris Laetitia, The Joy of Love



**A Pastoral Letter of ZCBC
To All Families
Mission Sunday 23 October 2016**

Introduction:

As Bishops of Zimbabwe we wish to promote and protect, support and strengthen the Family in every way, especially at a time when families feel the pressure of political tension, economic collapse and other forces.

The Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Sao Tome e Principe, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe) looked at the situation of the Family at their IMBISA Plenary Assembly in November 2013, held in Gaborone/Botswana, consulting married people and making use of their experience, as they had done in 1998 in Windhoek/Namibia.

In 2014 at a special Bishops' Synod and in 2015 at a General Synod, Bishops of the whole world debated marriage and family. In 2016 Pope Francis, as Bishop of Rome and universal pastor, making use of the wisdom and pastoral experience of the whole Church, wrote and published the Apostolic Exhortation THE JOY OF LOVE (Amoris Laetitia) for all pastors, for the guidance of all married people, for all preparing to get married and for all whose marriages have met with difficulties.

As the title of the 166-page document suggests, **Love** is at the centre of marriage and family which gives great **Joy**. This is indeed **Good News**.

The 17th Plenary Assembly of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar met in July 2016 in Luanda (Angola) on the theme: “The African Family, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow in the Light of the Gospel” and addressed a message of hope and solidarity to the Families in Africa as well as a set of very practical recommendations for the pastoral ministry of the family in Africa.

The message which we as Bishops of Zimbabwe wish to convey is meant to cheer and encourage, fill with hope, to give praise, understanding and support to all married couples and families.

Our God and Creator has made Man and Woman for Love which is to give Joy. If this joy seems to have been eroded by doubt and distrust then we want to recover it.

“We need a healthy dose of self-criticism,” Pope Francis recommends (The Joy of Love, No.36). The recommendation is directed at the pastors of the Church, catechists who give marriage instructions, parents, family elders, and teachers of the faith.

“There is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor is it helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority.” (No 35).

“We have long thought that simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace, we were providing sufficient support to families, strengthening the marriage bond and giving meaning to marital life” (No 37). *“We have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness.....Jesus...never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery”* (No 38).

Pope Francis stresses “openness to GRACE” and the “COMPASSION OF JESUS”. Our Holy Father urges us that we correct the imbalance in our catechesis where *“we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God's word”* (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No. 38). He urges us to act as Jesus did and always *“show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery”* (Joy of Love, No.38).

This means of course that we ourselves as pastors and teachers must likewise be 'close to individuals', i.e. close to married couples, must walk with them, share their joy, but also their anxieties and worries and “carry their burdens”. We must open for them an understanding of grace, i.e. the gift Christ gives us of love and mercy, compassion and the strength 'to take up our cross' together. What a dramatic challenge to pastors and shepherds who thought that “getting people married” was merely an administrative act!

The Holy Father asks pastors everywhere to be kindhearted and sensitive to the people in their care rather than judgmental and formal. This is after all no more than we learn from the Good Shepherd.

Sexuality integrated into Humanity

“Male and female he created them” (Genesis 1: 27). Sexuality is an integral part of every human person. A person is either entirely male or entirely female. Man and woman are equal in their human dignity and yet different. Their difference is physical, psychological, mental, spiritual.

In western culture there is a tendency to play down the difference and deny the 'unity in diversity' between the sexes. Young people are no longer helped to accept their identities as men and women.

But God created man for woman and woman for man. “Same-sex-unions” are not part of the Creator's design. There is no free option. Men and women should be happy about their complementarity, helping each other with their various gifts.

Sexuality is not merely an uncontrollable drive or instinct. Men tend to think that they have no control over their bodies and expect the woman to “take care of herself” if she falls pregnant. Accepting responsibility for the other, and not leaving the woman all alone, makes their mutual LOVE REAL, and gives it depth. This is the “Joy of Love”. The pregnant wife is sure that her husband will not leave her alone, and the husband accepts the child as his and his wife's, the fruit of their love.

We are responsible for how we make use of this gift. That is why there is need to educate young people about how to relate to their own bodies and behave towards persons of the other sex. Our sexuality has its place in marriage as a lifelong and fruitful relationship. For us as free persons the intimate sexual relationship gives expression to our mutual love and faithfulness.

When the married partners are giving themselves to each other in sexual intimacy they are responsible for each other.

“I care about you, and you care about me.”

“Your burden is mine, and my burden is yours.”

“Your joy is mine, and my joy is yours”.

“Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2: 24). “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.....Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1. Cor. 12: 26 - 27) Man and woman, becoming “one flesh” or “one body”, have everything in common. What is “mine”, is not just mine, what is “yours”, is not just yours, it is always “ours”.

Created for Love

“God is love”, and man and woman have been created for love, and this love is to be fruitful in all aspects of their being.

Physical love and love of the heart for the beloved person, guided by the Spirit, are not two separate entities. The one gives expression to the other.

This is why there is a spiritual side to marriage. The Holy Spirit dwelling in married people enables them to be united in prayer. Their oneness and their intimacy need not alienate them from their faith, but deepen their faith and love, their compassion and forbearance.

This is why it is preferable for married people to share their faith, so they can pray together in the same church community, love each other as God's children and brothers and sisters of Christ, and “carry each other's burden” (Gal 6: 2).

Spouses who are both baptized, even though they belong to different Churches, have much in common (faith in Christ, Baptism, the Word of God in Scripture, members of the Body of Christ, though imperfect) . We must help them to be united in Christ despite differences.

A Catholic spouse married to a non-baptized person has no part in the

Sacrament. But their union is to be kept: *“If any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, he should not divorce her.... Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife”* (1 Corinthians 7: 12 – 13, 16).

The marriage can be blessed in the Church with the disparity of cult dispensation.

A marriage between baptized persons is a sacrament. Husband and wife in their loving union are a visible sign of the love between Christ and his Bride the Church. Christ's Spirit of Love dwells in their hearts as baptized members of the body of Christ and especially through the marital bond.

Faith and Marriage

At many weddings we read the gospel of the Wedding Feast of Cana in Galilee (John 2: 1 – 11). We invite Jesus to come also to today's wedding feasts and to be present always in the life of the newly married.

To some young bridegrooms or brides this may not mean much. Some are not Christians, do not know the Catholic faith or, though baptized, are not active members of the Church. They seem to be “baptized pagans”.

It is not enough that they can present valid baptism certificates. As pastors or marriage instructors we must try and revive their faith. They should be invited to meet and encounter Jesus personally as their Lord as St Paul, the apostles and first Christians did.

Perhaps as friend and brother of the bridegroom I can share my faith, my closeness with Jesus, my walking in his footsteps - a very demanding task, more than just expounding the legal requirements, rules and regulations.

The bridegroom should encounter Jesus and come to know his infinite love manifested in giving himself in his suffering and death; should see how much Jesus values and cherishes all children of his Father; and what his Spirit can do

for the man and his new wife, and the family they hope to have. This is the Good News we have for him and for her.

The bride can do much to share her faith with her future husband. She can introduce him to the Church as a loving community. A group of 'Young Adults' or 'Young Couples' or 'Engaged Couples' can open the eyes of such a newcomer.

A new relationship, meant to grow into a lasting union, needs testing. “We marry for love”. But what is love? Not an easy question. That is why a lengthy process of marriage preparation is necessary.

“Love in its full sense wishes to give more than receive, is concerned about life and health of the beloved more than about one's own life and health. It is self-giving, not using the partner for one's own advantage....

Christian marriage is based on the completely unselfish, self-giving love of Christ. Without His Spirit Christian Marriage will not be possible, since it is an act of faith in the power of Christ's love. This makes 'mixed marriages' between believer and non- believer difficult. ..” (From : IMBISA Documentation, Plenary Assembly, Gaborone/Botswana 2013, Love or Convenience?, p. 6).

Preparation for Holy Matrimony needs a complete re-awakening of the faith or even a first truly personal encounter with Christ in the context of the Christian community and in the celebration of the other Sacraments, especially of Reconciliation (Confession) and the Eucharist which maybe are virtually dead in the life of one or both of the spouses.

Marriage preparation which seems a mere formality has to be transformed. The couple is to celebrate their “*conjugal pact...that has its origin in God himself*” (Joy of Love, 213). Therefore “*the couple should be encouraged to make the liturgical celebration a profound personal experience and to appreciate the meaning of each of its signs. In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent and the bodily union that consummates the marriage can only be seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church*”

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*/Joy of Love, No. 213).

This is an initiation into a new life and an encounter with our God who is love and life. The couple do not invite family and friends merely for a great social occasion, but for a profound spiritual experience which they want to share on this great day and the rest of their life.

The wedding ceremony is not an end, but a beginning. *“The Kenyan Bishops have observed that ‘many [young people] concentrate on their wedding day and forget the lifelong commitment they are about to enter into’. They need to be encouraged to see the sacrament not as a single moment....., but rather as a reality that permanently influences the whole of married life”* (Joy of Love, No 215).

The pastor, the catechists and marriage instructors and the entire Christian community should have such a wide vision, since getting married is a decision *“for one’s whole life”*.

It must be a mature decision, based on a deep knowledge of the partner. The engaged couple should be *“encouraged to discuss what each expects from marriage, ...what each expects from the other...The decision to marry should never be encouraged unless the couple have discerned deeper reasons that will ensure a genuine and stable commitment”* (Joy of Love, No 209).

Marriage – “Work in Progress”

Husband and wife grow and develop, also in their relationship. Their marriage is not done and finished after the “honeymoon”. It is a “building site”, “work in progress”. For a marriage to grow it needs patience, readiness to forgive, to adapt, to learn, and to unlearn perfectionism. (Read Colossians 3: 12-17). In love the two learn to “bear one another’s burden”. *“It is a lifelong project....neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect”*.

Constant criticism and self-justification, issuing ultimatums, making accusations and counter - accusations - this is something that “needs to be realistically presented to newly married couples from the outset” (Joy of Love, 109) as unhelpful. Our shortcomings as spouses is not something to be

disappointed about. No, it contains “good news”, namely that Love based on Prayer in the Spirit of Christ is strong, enduring, persevering, “*as strong as death*” (Song of Songs 8: 6).

With Christ the spouses in such a marriage will “overcome” weakness and live in hope. From the beginning their “project” will proceed steadily and reach its destination. They will not give up and think of separation or divorce at the first obstacle.

If a husband very soon seeks “true love” with another partner, he will not find it. It is most likely that, his first love having failed, he will fail again. But a faithful partner will discover a new and deeper love in the “*wife of his youth*” (Proverbs 5: 18).

“Too many marriages go stale because husband and wife have long stopped talking and listening to each other, if they ever did in the first place.” Traditionally men and women kept socially apart. “The Christian Community can help and create a new culture where men and women listen and talk to each other; in Small Christian Communities, in parish councils etc.” (Family in Africa, Communication, p. 21).

Love is fruitful - Love of each other, love of children

As young couples start their families, communication between the spouses is crucial. *“Having a family is no longer something that just happens. It needs foresight and planning. It needs great openness between husband and wife, equal in human dignity but differing in the tasks Nature (indeed the Creator) gave them. It needs a new kind of marriage where husband and wife are not just intimate with each other, but can even communicate about intimacy. Responsible Parenthood, using 'natural family planning', can only become real if parents learn their body language and can communicate to each other what they observe. That is a new way of life, of respect and loving attention to each other” (Family in Africa, 21).*

“Sexuality is not a drug for selfish pleasure. It is meant to be an expression of interpersonal love. It is the source of human life.” (“The Family is the Basic Unit of Society”, 1994, In: ZCBC Pastoral Letters Volume 2, p. 56 ff.) Love is

meant to be fruitful. The love of spouses makes them grow as persons and fills their relationship with warmth, and sympathy, and creates a lifelong partnership. The intimate sexual encounter gives them children, makes them God's co-creators. "Love gives life, selfishness kills." The mother recognizes in the child the father; the father loves the child in whom he sees his beloved wife. The child is the visible expression of the mutual love of the parents.

This is extremely "good news". Our industrial culture should not discourage spouses from becoming parents. Women should be free to opt for motherhood. Society should make it possible for them to combine family and a career, children and service for the wider community.

The older generation should support the young couple in starting a family and not interfere in the name of traditional culture. The young are the "owners" of their marriage, and they decide about children and family, even if they encounter obstacles.

Parents receive their children as a gift. It is indeed "*good news*". Many children are called Joy, Happy, Rufaro, Farai. It is the fulfillment of a great hope. Even if the upbringing can be a burden, parents receive the child with joy. Both parents are expected to regard the child as their own. The Creator has given fathers as much responsibility for their children as mothers. Mothers accept their responsibility naturally, fathers need more help and guidance from the Christian community to accept their role.

Children may take mothers for granted, but they are very proud of their fathers. They need the gentle loving care of their mothers and the clear guidance and direction in life given them by their fathers.

Children need to be clear about the different roles of men and women. They need both father and mother as role models. "*Only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centredness and self-absorption. Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension 'to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it'*" (Joy of Love, no. 285).

For parents to be able to educate and form their children according to their vision, they have to make a very conscious effort. Education does not happen automatically.

Parents have many rivals as educators. Children are exposed to many influences the parents are not aware of. The media, including the social media, Internet, smart phones and TV, teach children lessons vastly different from what their parents have in mind for them. The Christian community should offer opportunities for debate and advice.

Child Protection

Children are a gift of God in the family. According to Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI in *Africae Munus* “....**children** are a gift of God to humanity, and they must be the subject of particular concern on the part of their families, the Church, society and governments for they are a source of hope and renewed hope,” and the Church, like a loving Mother....”cannot abandon any of her little ones.” (*Africae Munus* no. 65). This means parents as educators, are responsible, by their affection and example, for instilling in their children trust and loving respect. The family helps children to feel secure and cared for. Child Protection is of paramount importance for the proper development of the children. Protection is whereby children are free to associate with anyone without being exposed to any harm. Families should provide an environment that fosters good physical, social, emotional and spiritual growth and values the human development and sexuality. The family should be an initial school for the formation of children, teaching them self-respect, respect for others and various responsibilities. The family has to equip children with life-skills so that they can grow -up to be independent self-sustaining individuals.

Equal human dignity, and yet different

Women want to be treated with respect and consideration. This is our 'good news': Jesus did exactly that. He led by example. Honouring women and giving them the respect that is their due is our Christian way of overcoming domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, human trafficking, discrimination and

the “war of the sexes” which the Creator and Father of us all has never wanted.

Insofar as the women's movement (expressing itself in the “gender ideology”) is all about giving women the chance to be leaders, use their talents and gifts, recognize their human dignity, we are on common ground.

But if “gender” means denying any difference between men and women, turning women into men and men into women, contempt for mothers and fathers, for marriage and family, then that is no longer “good news”. Our answer to the “crisis of masculinity” is to reconcile men and women and to celebrate their shared responsibility in the upbringing of children and their distinct contributions to civil society and indeed the Church.

While we have respect for single mothers and widows, and wish our Catholic parish communities to make them feel welcome and wanted, we cannot do without men. Fathers and mothers joined together in mutual respect, love and responsibility in building up their families, continue to be a great asset for the Church. Fatherhood is a great gift, we do not dismiss it contemptuously as “patriarchy” (as gender ideologues tend to do).

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude....” wrote St Paul (1 Cor. 13: 4 -7). Surely that is the medicine to heal many of our marriages.

As couples reach middle age and the excitement of youth has faded away, they must still remain friends. Ask a husband, “Who is your best friend?” Wonderful if the answer is *“My wife!”* Then there is no need for a “small house”. *“Once a couple no longer knows how to spend time together, one or both of them will end up taking refuge in gadgets, finding other commitments, seeking the embrace of another, or simply looking for ways to flee what has become an uncomfortable closeness”* (Joy of Love, 225). The pastoral experience of “the faithful house” taking place in many gatherings of couples and communities is to be encouraged.

The parish community can do much for the more mature couples. Lack of communication can be healed by sessions of “Marriage Encounter”. More mature couples can help engaged and younger couples.

The parish community should celebrate their silvery hair, their perseverance, their patience and forbearance, can help them to be “one in the Spirit” through retreats and days of recollection. Wives going to such days of renewal should not go as “widows”, leaving their husbands behind. Both of you need renewal. There is great beauty in an old couple who are visibly still in love.

Family at a Time of Social and Political Tension

We want to share with you “Good News”. We are delighted with the Holy Father's letter “The Joy of Love”. He insists we have a wonderful message. But we are also in need of a “healthy dose of self-criticism”.

Too often we have “tried to impose rules by sheer authority” and “failed to inspire trust in God's grace”. Marriage was often presented to our people as a “lifelong burden”. We, as pastors, “have often been on the defensive , wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness” (Joy of Love, 35 -38).

The Church is determined to bring “true happiness” to marriage and family. Married Love of man and woman can and should be a joy.

This we will not forget even as we meet some obstacles in today's world.

Individualism

Getting married is regarded by some as being tied down and shackled. It is seen as a loss of freedom. For women there is a conflict between traditional culture and their yearning for independence. Men find it hard to marry a woman “without reservation” and to commit themselves “once and for all”. Utilitarianism puts a limit to relationships. *“We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, good-bye ”* (Joy of Love, No. 39).

There was a time when handing over “roora/brideprice” was meant to tie the two families together and deepen their friendship. Now it may become a commercial transaction. The “father-in-law” hopes that his son-in-law will save him out of his poverty. Since the son-in-law is poor himself (unemployed or underpaid), the couple decide to live in an informal union, without any social sanction, let alone a church marriage. This union is highly unstable. It may easily break up. The woman ends up as a single mother, the children grow up without a father.

For young and old the question seems to be: “What can I gain out of this relationship? What can I get out of this man, this woman?”

But the question should be, “What can I give? Do I have love? Can I give myself, enjoy working for and with the loved one?”

Remember, our Good News is the Joy of Love!

Society to celebrate Mothers

The Church at least does not consider mothers out of date. The Church is a mother herself and always welcomes children. The love of God is compared to that of a mother. *“As a mother comforts her child/so I will comfort you”* (Isaiah 66: 13). The Church always welcomes children, just as Jesus did.

In the western world women are discouraged from having more than one or two children, if any at all. The birthrate goes down, it is below replacement level. Gender activists want career women, not mothers. Asian and African migrants and their large number of children are to make up for the loss.

Our African family culture wants offspring. This is a treasure. Let us not lose it. But in our country, too, young couples calculate the costs. Shall we chide them as selfish? If you want to build a house or have a family, you must know if you have the means to do it. We talk about “responsible parenthood” (rather than family planning).

Which method is best for the health of the family, especially the mother?

Natural methods do not interfere with the mother's organism and have no harmful side effects. They require communication and dialogue between the spouses, they do not burden just the wife.

This is another “good news” about Christian marriage: it always involves both husband and wife. It never leaves the wife alone. Her health is the husband's concern. How many children you want and when is your joint responsibility.

No husband can just say to the wife: 'I do not want any more children. Not another pregnancy. How? That is your business as a woman. Don't bother me.' Or 'I want five children. Three boys, two girls. Your health is not strong? So what? Go and see the doctor. Don't bother me with women's business.' A husband who cooperates the natural way is involved as much as she is.

That means using your intelligence and reason, knowing about each other and their bodies. Christian couples should help each other making the right decision as loving and caring parents.

Economic failure and poverty

For many young couples there is no space where they can start a family. Starting life as lodgers does not give them the intimacy and protected environment that they need. Renting a room is beyond their means, especially if they are unemployed.

Overcrowding leads to sexual abuse and a morally unhealthy environment (Diana Auret, *Urban Housing: A National Crisis? Overcrowding and Inadequate Housing and the Social and Economic Effects*, Mambo Press, CCJP, 1999). As a result girls drop out of school and are forced into child marriages. “Families [are] in need of Appropriate Environment to Flourish” (in: *The Family in Africa*, p. 32).

Unemployment forces married couples to live apart. Husbands, even wives, leave the country to look for work elsewhere. This leads to infidelity, resulting in infections with HIV/AIDS and other diseases and divorce.

Labour migration in colonial times did great harm to family life. Even today migration is a threat to the integrity of the family. It is caused by

unemployment, poverty and political oppression. Good governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights and an economy that aims at serving the Common Good can revive the economy and provide adequate housing, thus slowing down migration and giving families a safe environment.

“It is desirable that every family should be able to acquire a home of its own, because home ownership contributes to the stability and welfare of the family which the State has a duty to foster and protect” (ZCBC, 1989). Young families often have no chance to access good housing, so they end up in slum dwellings.

“If the Church wants to preserve and further develop Africa's family culture she must help that good traditional customs prevail. The traditional village consisted of separate quarters for boys, for girls, and for the parents. Overcrowded urban slum conditions no longer offer privacy which is essential for marriage and family life. Families vegetating in such conditions cannot be expected to listen to the Church's Gospel of Life.

The Church can support housing cooperatives....Suitable land is scarce. The temptation to gain access to this resource by bribing is great.The Church must use all its moral authority and work against such abuse.”(Families in Need of Appropriate Environment, The Family in Africa, pp. 35 -36).

Family Health

Spiritual devotion is a good support for physical health. Spouses who are grateful for each other, accept the partner as a gift of the Lord and Creator, pray for each other and are committed to the family as a gift from the Lord, will also be very concerned about the health of the family.

Loving concern for each other and gentleness is a better medicine than tranquilizers. Tenderness, shared free time and easy communication will enable the couple to avoid tension, bad temper and outbursts of violence. This will bring about a cultural transformation: men will no longer claim the right to “discipline” the wife physically and regard “domestic violence” as a “right” (rather than an offence against human rights: “each person has the right to respect for his/her dignity.

No form of ...torture, inhuman or degrading treatment ...is allowed. Article 5. The African Charter on human and peoples' rights").

Health is a political issue. All parents must be involved in it. The Gospel of Life challenges not just medical professionals, but all of us. We cannot abstain from “politics” if our life and the health of our families are involved. The health of our children is our responsibility. The health of our mothers is our business, not the business of NGOs or pharmaceutical companies.

Contraception and the protection of unborn life is a matter of conscience. We commend the work of volunteers who teach the youth and young parents about this. But to a large extent the Church on the ground (parishes) do little. We abandon the young and leave them to their own devices. To be able to protect life in the womb and welcome the child at birth is a great joy, not an unbearable burden. The Christian community must welcome the newly born.

Corruption is theft. It deprives us of the means to set up an effective health service.

Do we really need so many guns, tanks, landmines, fighter jets and missiles? Must we spend so much money on weapons, murder and bloodshed? Is war and violence needed to protect the life of our loved ones?

We need to be able to pay the salaries of nurses and doctors, give free treatment to the poor, reduce maternal deaths and save children.

Medically we can do it. Childhood infectious diseases are curable. Why don't we do it?

As parents concerned with family life we must fight to save the lives of mothers. We must no longer accept young mothers dying in child birth as if that was inevitable. Giving life should never be a death sentence. It is not. That is another “good news” we must take seriously and act on.

Countless families lose their fathers and sons in road accidents. That too is intolerable. Life is precious, it is our duty to protect it. We can run campaigns in our parishes about road safety and our responsibility for it.

That is a concrete form of proclaiming the Gospel of Life. Our children must learn about the responsibility of road users before they get car keys into their hands. Responsible parents must accept this responsibility and act on it.

The Constitution stresses human dignity. In a country full of conflict and strife, political tension and economic failure, human dignity and human life are often treated with contempt. But we respect them. The integrity of the human person is a treasure. The life of our loved ones is precious in our eyes.

As citizens and parents we must not allow our young people to be misled and abused by the political class. Don't say, "Leave politics to the politicians". As citizens we must be concerned with all public matters. The future of our families, of our children and children's children depends on this.

The future of our families depend on a sound and healthy environment, without contamination by drugs, a poisonous atmosphere, and water pollution. We must go public for the sake of the health, including mental and spiritual health, of our children.

Of all gifts from the Creator, water is one of the greatest. Water is Life. Culturally girls and women are obliged to go and fetch water. Will they find clean and pure water? And is it not time that boys and men, sons and fathers help their sisters and mothers and wives going to the well to fetch this precious liquid? Or to stand up in public and demand a reliable supply of clean water that does not carry water-borne germs and diseases?

Human Trafficking

“... forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying migrants, the Church needs a specific pastoral programme addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those family members who remain behind” (The Joy of Love no. 46). The family as a unit should help build structures that protect members from any harm against the modern day slavery where people are belittled through trafficking in persons for monetary gain. Families should be able to form the character of their children so that they can grow with respect for their own life and that of

the other person. Human trafficking should be stopped by extended families working together for the common good. Families living together support every member to have a sense of belonging. In the family, members experience love and support. “Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like” (*Pope Francis the Joy of Love 2016: 51*). Pope Francis clearly explains the position of love when he referred to it as a relationship that is built on trust, that has no control of the other person instead it frees the other by not possessing and oppressing him/her in any way. The evil of human trafficking and exploiting people can be eradicated by properly formed conscience that takes responsibility for the other through prayer, love, care, financial support, creation of employment and provision of descent accommodation.

“Lord, be praised, through Sister Water, she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.” (St Francis of Assisi, 13th century)

Let us pray:

*“Holy Family of Nazareth,
May families never again experience
Violence, rejection and division;
May all who have been hurt or scandalized
Find ready comfort and healing.
Holy Family of Nazareth
Make us once more mindful
Of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
And its beauty in God's plan.
Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
Graciously hear our prayer, Amen.*
(From: Pope Francis, *The Joy of Love*, Prayer to the Holy Family)

+Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo (ZCBC President)
+Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare ZCBC Vice President)
+Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo (ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)
+Angel Floro, Bishop of Gokwe
+Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange
+Xavier J. Munyongani, Bishop of Gweru
+Paul Horan, Bishop of Mutare
+Patrick M. Mutume, Auxiliary Bishop of Mutare

ZCBC Pastoral Letters on Marriage and Family

The Bishops of Zimbabwe have addressed Catholics in this country many times on Marriage and Family, Sexuality and the Sanctity of Life.

These letters are available on the Internet (www.afcast.org.) as well as in printed form.

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