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Pope Leo XIV embraces a newly married couple at the conclusion of his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2025. Leo announced March 19, 2026, that he is asking the presidents of all bishops' conferences around the world to convene in Rome in October to renew and deepen the Church's discussion on marriage and family in light of Amoris Laetitia. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Pope Leo XIV has called the presidents of the world's bishops' conferences to Rome for an October 2026 summit aimed at assessing how the Catholic Church engages with families in a rapidly changing world.

Announcing the gathering in a March 19 message marking the 10th anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* ("The Joy of Love"), Leo said the meeting would seek "a synodal discernment on the steps to be taken in order to proclaim the Gospel to families

today, in light of Amoris Laetitia and taking into account what is currently being done in the local Churches."

Amoris Laetitia emerged from two synods on the family in 2014 and 2015; it drew controversy for seemingly opening the door for Catholics in "irregular" situations, such as people who have divorced and civilly remarried, to receive Communion.

The 2016 document articulated the possibility 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" (AL, 305). A footnote for that section of the document stated that, "In certain cases, this can include the help of the sacraments."

Some took the document to mean that, in a shift in church teaching, Catholics in irregular unions could be admitted to Communion and receive absolution in confession so long as "they desire to change their situation but cannot carry out their desire."

In response, four cardinals wrote a letter openly questioning the pope on whether "absolute moral norms" that prohibit evil acts still existed after the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Francis publicly wrote to a group of Argentine bishops that their guidance on the document, which said that *Amoris Laetitia* "opens the possibility of access to the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist" for some cases of people in irregular unions, "explains precisely the meaning" of the document's chapter on accompanying people in such situations.

In his message, Leo issued his stamp of approval on the divisive document, writing that *Amoris Laetitia* "offers valuable teachings that we must continue to examine today" for strengthening family love and affirmed the need for "new pastoral methods" to accompany families.

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"Our era is marked by rapid changes which make it necessary, even more than ten years ago, to give particular pastoral attention to families, to whom the Lord

entrusts the task of participating in the Church’s mission of proclaiming and witnessing to the Gospel," Leo wrote.

"There are, in fact, places and circumstances in which the Church 'can become the salt of the earth' only through the lay faithful and, in particular, through families," he continued. "For this reason, the Church's commitment in this area must be renewed and deepened, so that those whom the Lord calls to marriage and family life can, in Christ, fully live out their conjugal love, and that young people may feel attracted, within the Church, to the beauty of the vocation to marriage."

The pope said that to convey the value of the family to young people, "we must learn to evoke the beauty of the vocation to marriage precisely in the recognition of fragility."

"We must also support families, especially those suffering from the many forms of poverty and violence present in contemporary society," he wrote.

Leo's decision to call the heads of the world's bishops' conferences to Rome falls in line with the collaborative style the pope has charted so far in his pontificate. In January, he called for regular meetings of cardinals in Rome to discuss the priorities of the church.

The pope has not yet called for a Synod of Bishops but has repeatedly called for the church to advance in synodality — the catch-all term promoted by Francis for creating a more participatory church.

Francis' first synod focused on family life, and took place more than a year and a half into his pontificate in October 2014.

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.