

# Archdiocese of Baltimore compiles report on Vatican survey

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More than 4,140 people in the Archdiocese of Baltimore completed a Vatican survey on marriage and family life, the results of which will be used by Pope Francis and bishops from around the world during the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in October in Rome.

The archdiocese compiled the results of the 39-question survey in late December and early January, approximately one month after the survey was posted on the archdiocesan website. It sent a report to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops earlier this year.

The conference was to compile results from participating dioceses across the country and send them to the Holy See, which is receiving similar reports from across the globe at the request of Pope Francis.

All bishops around the world were asked to complete the questionnaire, and to solicit input from their diocese. Some, as in Baltimore, made the survey available to their people exactly as presented by Rome. Others rewrote the survey or took other approaches to gather input.

Among the topics covered in the survey include prayer, spirituality, divorce, remarriage, reception of the sacraments, parenthood and church teachings on contraception and same-sex marriage.

"I thought there was great value in asking people to share their comments, observations and concerns," Archbishop William E. Lori said. "There was great value in asking and great value in listening."

The archbishop said the survey revealed that "there's a fair number" of people who do not agree with church teachings on marriage and family life.

He acknowledged that many people found the survey difficult to understand. Some questions referenced Vatican documents or concepts such as natural law. The survey's difficulty may be a prime reason an additional 7,336 surveys were started in the Baltimore archdiocese, but never completed.

"It was the first time (for a survey of this kind)," Archbishop Lori said. "It was a good, honest start."

Archbishop Lori said the project is an example of Pope Francis' pastoral instincts.

"We should see the survey as an example of the pope's interest in us and his love for us," Archbishop Lori said.

Mary Ellen Fise, a consultant for the archdiocese who led a nine-member team in compiling local survey results, said a tight deadline in getting a report to the U.S. bishops necessitated taking only the first 2,000 responses as a subset to be analyzed for the Baltimore report. The analysis included a review of 61,532 items.

"I want to underscore that this survey was an opt-in survey," she said, "so anyone could go to the website and complete it. There was no random sample. Because of that, there's no way to assure that this is a statistical representation of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Baltimore."

The survey was open-ended, inviting respondents to write comments as opposed to yes-or-no or multiple-choice questions.

"One of the things we found out is that there's really a need for education on a lot of these topics," Fise said.

Fise noted that some participants who were divorced but not remarried mistakenly thought they were no longer permitted to receive holy Communion.

"On the annulment process, some people didn't understand what it entailed," Fise said. "They were concerned about what it meant for their children."

Archbishop Lori said many people expressed a desire for more preaching and formation on marriage and family life.

"There was especially a desire to know how the Sunday Gospels relate to their everyday lives as spouses and as mothers and fathers," he said. "The witness of happily married couples was very important."

According to a summary of the report presented to members of Archbishop Lori's presbyteral council, some survey respondents who are divorced and remarried said they felt cut off from the church. Some have stopped coming to church and feel marginalized, unwelcome or looked down upon by others in church.

Some respondents to a question about how to give pastoral attention to people in same-sex civil unions said mercy and reconciliation should be offered. Others said people in same-sex unions should be educated on church teachings and referred to the catechism. Still others said pastoral attention should be offered without recognizing the union.

"In sending out the survey, we tried to make it clear that Catholic teaching doesn't proceed via the polls," Archbishop Lori said. "I don't think anyone who reflects on it carefully would want it to be that way."

Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of media relations for the USCCB, declined to be interviewed by the Catholic Review. She noted that the Holy See has directed bishops' conferences to "maintain the confidentiality of the consultations, to send the results directly to them, and not to further publicize the information since it

belongs to the Synod of Bishops.”

An informal study conducted by National Catholic Reporter and summarized in recent NCR articles and blog posts showed at least 78 U.S. dioceses offered easily accessible information about what the survey was and how Catholics could participate, either through online surveys, direct consultations or parish input.

“Some dioceses did focus groups, some went to their various consultative bodies like parish councils and diocesan pastoral councils and still others did more samplings around the diocese,” Archbishop Lori told the Catholic Review. “I was happy to be among those who sent it out generally.”

Sean Caine, communications director for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, noted that archdiocesan leaders had discussed amending the survey questions when it became clear that people were struggling to understand some of them. They ultimately decided to keep the original wording, but create a companion document for people who wanted help. That document was posted on the website with the survey.

Of the 2,000 reviewed responses in Baltimore, 1,317 represented married persons. More than 230 were single, 14 were engaged, 102 widowed and 114 divorced. More than 70 percent were between age 46-75 and 95 percent identified themselves as white. More than 90 percent said they were practicing Catholics.

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