

Archdiocese solicits input for Synod on the Family

By George P. Matysek Jr.

gmatysek@CatholicReview.org

Twitter: @ReviewMatysek

The hierarchy throughout the church needs to do a better job listening to the people in the pews.

That was a major theme that surfaced among the responses to a questionnaire distributed at St. Ignatius in Baltimore as part of the preparation for the October General Synod of Bishops, which will focus on issues related to the family.

“People want the hierarchy to listen to ordinary people and show they have value – and then do something about their concerns,” said Deacon Paul Weber, who coordinated the collection of input at his parish through a series of meetings after Mass and through the distribution of an online questionnaire.

At the end of January, Archbishop William E. Lori asked all parishes to address a list of 46 questions prepared by Vatican officials that will help guide discussions at this year’s synod. Pope Francis asked all dioceses in the world to seek input and send their findings to episcopal conferences, which would then forward summaries to Rome.

The questions encourage parishes to discuss topics including the indissolubility of marriage, pastoral care of people with same-sex attraction, pastoral care of divorced people and the role of family in evangelization.

In the Baltimore archdiocese, Archbishop Lori suggested that input could be solicited through pastoral councils, town-hall style meetings or web-based forums. In addition to providing parishes with a web link to all the questions developed by the Vatican, the archbishop asked Lauri Przybysz, archdiocesan coordinator of marriage and family life, to make a summary of the questions for parish use.

The archdiocese will prepare a report based on input it receives from parishes, which will be sent to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops by March 20.

The effort is similar to one that preceded last year’s Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which was also focused on the family. A questionnaire in that effort yielded more than 4,140 responses from the Baltimore archdiocese that were compiled in a report sent to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Among the responses received at St. Ignatius in the most recent questionnaire included a call for the church to show more support to single parents in divorced

families. Suggestions were made to have older married couples mentor younger ones.

There was also a call for more “witness testimonies,” Deacon Weber said, by which people in various life situations can help others understand their lives. Still others called for more emphasis on the traditional definition of marriage, he said.

Jesuit Father Joseph Lacey, pastor of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez in Woodstock, solicited the input of his parishioners through discussions with the pastoral council and the Knights of Columbus.

“It really has engaged the people,” Father Lacey said.

The discussion is not so much about finding answers, the pastor said, as it is about raising questions.

“It’s being able to say, ‘What are the things that really matter to our parish?’ ” he said. “How are we going to respond?”

Among the responses received at St. Alphonsus included one from a man calling for better ways of attracting and keeping young people in the church.

“For many years, from my late teens until my mid-50s, I was pretty much a robotic Catholic who went to Mass and little else,” the man said. “My faith was not alive, just a box to be checked off. ...My hope is to find a way to help prevent this from happening to others.”

Parish responses were due to the archbishop by March 1.

Also see:

Pope Francis plans to canonize St. Therese’s parents during family synod

Maryland March for Life is March 9 in Annapolis