

Catholic Review Column: Survey on Family Life a Valuable Exercise

More than 4,000 people provided more than 60,000 comments and responses to the nearly 40 questions contained in the document issued by the Vatican in preparation for the Extraordinary Synod on the Family, called for by Pope Francis to be held this October.

The pope called for the synod, whose theme is “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” because, he said, “it is evident that the social and spiritual crisis of today’s world has an impact on family life and creates a situation of genuine pastoral urgency.”

Each diocese was given a preparatory document “to help the church respond as effectively as possible to the impact which the social and spiritual crisis of today’s world has on family life” so that the church can “grow in our understanding of Christ and what he teaches through his church – and how best to communicate it to our brothers and sisters in the world today.”

Our archdiocese created a survey that included the precise questions asked in the preparatory document and posted it on our website so that Catholics in our local church could participate in this important discussion. The survey was not a referendum on church teaching on marriage and family life. Rather, the church clearly recognizes the need for increased and improved catechesis on what the church teaches and believes in relation to marriage and the family. In short, the church thinks being married and raising a family remains a good thing, a very good thing. It is not a problem to be solved, as some in the cultural mainstream might suggest, rather it is a vocation to be lived. It is hoped that this document can help the church better communicate this important message so that more people will see the church’s teaching as a response to Christ’s love and not a burden.

Due to the complexity of the questions and format of the survey, as well as the sheer volume of submissions, our office is still working to process all the responses we’ve received. It is worth noting that there were no multiple choice answers and many of

the questions had several parts. We also felt it important not to put any restraints on respondents (people could answer whatever questions they liked and there were no limits on word count). We also did not require people to identify themselves, though we asked certain questions, such as gender, marital status, age cohort and whether they belong to a parish and consider themselves to be a practicing Catholic. We asked these questions to try and understand the background of the respondent to better help us contextualize their responses.

Though we continue to read and chart every response, we've been able to identify some trends and themes and can already tell the responses will be helpful to our efforts to better communicate the beauty of the church's teaching on marriage and family, as well as those future efforts of ours to carry out the work of the New Evangelization.

For example, the majority of those who responded to a question about formation on the church's teaching on family life said that they would be open to receiving more teaching on many family life issues. To a question which asked about the acceptance and practice of church teaching on family life, the majority of Catholics who responded said they strive to practice their faith, but acknowledged the struggles and confusion they face in doing so.

There is much to be gleaned from the thoughts and experiences of those who participated in the survey. I am most grateful to all who responded, as well as to the priests of the archdiocese for encouraging their parishioners to participate. Please join me in praying for the institutions of marriage and the family - that God will continue to strengthen and bless them for the good of his children, his church and for the civilization of love we seek to build together.