

THE PEOPLE SPEAK

A Jubilee Year Research Initiative

As a tribute to Pope Francis’s call for a Jubilee Year of Mercy, we began a collaborative project with two reform communities, Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) and the American Catholic Council (ACC), addressing the same thematic questions targeted by the *Lineamenta* questionnaire but offered in more lay-friendly language. Respondents self-identified as Active Catholics (78%), Former Catholics (9%), Other Christians (1%), Other Faiths (9%) and unidentified (3%). Involving over 5000 participants, our focus was to provide real responses from lived experiences drafted by a global Catholic population, noting the comparisons and contrasts across the regions of the world.

Respondents were asked to rate the *effectiveness of the pastoral care of the Church* on 14 issues providing additional comments or recommended solutions, if desired. In our most recent survey, responses, expressed in English, came from 44 countries globally. The greatest concerns with the Church’s pastoral care are:

- Divorced/Remarriage--81% ineffective
- Left the Church --77% ineffective
- LGBT--76% ineffective
- Contraception--76% ineffective
- Role of Women--72% ineffective
- Cohabitation--71% ineffective
- Clerical Sex Abuse--70% ineffective

Topic	Favorable Effectiveness	Poor or Ineffective
Cohabitation	9%	71%
Inter-faith Marriage	35%	38%
LGBT	6%	76%
Contraception	12%	76%
Single Parent Families	30%	40%
Mixed Family	20%	29%
Divorced/Remarried	13%	81%
Left the Church	15%	77%
Role of Women	19%	72%
Troubles in Families	23%	64%
Children in Difficult Situations	31%	37%
Clerical Sex Abuse	11%	70%
Violence: Women/Children	20%	47%
Marriage Preparation	46%	26%

A constant theme emerging from the responses of our research is **woundedness**. Deeply hurt by painful experiences in our Church, many are unable to participate in their faith life to the fullest. The “field hospital” imagery described by Pope Francis offers hope that mercy and healing are actually possible.

In the comments offered, there were many passionate pleas asking for compassion congruent with Jesus’ core message of love. Our research was both not surprising and surprising. Not surprising because it reiterated the discontentedness we already knew and conversely surprising in the raw honesty that was shared. The honest responses gathered were, no doubt, prompted by Pope Francis’s never-before invitation to hear from the people directly. People are now clearly empowered to their give voice to their stories. The survey data reveals the pain of those stories.

As the Pope models Christ’s values of being more *welcoming, inviting and nurturing*, our survey responses also express these values and consistently call for institutional reform:

- ***Welcome the Divorced and Remarried to the Sacraments:*** The People of God commend Pope Francis for offering a “life-giving” solution to the issue of divorced people receiving the Eucharist, and we encourage the Bishops to embrace a pastoral vision in which the strict requirements of law are informed, tempered and governed by mercy and compassion.

- ***Make every effort to embrace Catholics who have left:*** Respondents consistently implore the Church to adopt a more pastoral Christ-like presence. We urge Church leaders to clearly demonstrate a welcoming, forgiving, and nurturing, compassionate face in making contact with those who have become alienated.
- ***Leave decisions regarding artificial contraception to personal conscience:*** By far, the majority of Catholics have followed their conscience and have chosen not to accept the Church's teaching on artificial contraception. This teaching causes unnecessary suffering. To help families, the Church needs to compassionately recognize and support responsible parenthood as a value among families today.
- ***Treat the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community with respect*** and acceptance: There is great concern with labelling these people of God as living in a "disordered state." Families with LGBT children find the Church's treatment of them destructive. Radical, humane changes in church behavior and pronouncements need to reflect scientific discoveries and new understandings in human sexuality.
- ***Recognize the equality of women in the Church:*** As baptized Catholics made fully in the image and likeness of God, women must be included and welcomed at all levels of ministry and leadership.

The survey report reveals that the People of God believe change is imperative in order for the Church to reflect Jesus' values of love, inclusion, and compassion. In keeping with Pope Francis's directive to have the Bishops gather the concerns of the people, we call upon them to prayerfully consider the outpouring expressed by these caring Catholics. Let us work together to build a Church that ever more fully reveals the eternal love of God our Creator, as revealed by Jesus, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit.

The full survey report, called *The People Speak*, can be found at www.CatholicChurchReformIntl.org.